



Julia Brightly

A Day Trip To Beijing

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Prelude

For the first time I saw the signpost clearly.

One way said repeating pattern.

The other said NOW!

So I built a huge catapult in my mind and twanged myself into life.

Chapter 1

I am a woman working in sound.

There are other women here but they are as scarce as a vegan meal at an airport.

Most days I come up against barely concealed sexism.

Let me enlighten you....

Frankfurt, at a club, mid afternoon, chatting at the soundboard with Phil, Mogwai's lighting director, when a tall thirty-something dour man in leather trousers approached.

He plopped himself directly between us, his back to me.

"You must be the sound engineer."

Phil, slight, therefore with some difficulty, pointed around him.

"No, that'll be Julia."

Leather man turned as if in slow motion and looked me up and down with utter contempt.

"You're running sound?" he quizzed.

I walked away.

"Good luck" he said to Phil as I left.

"Must be a nightmare touring with a woman."

Brussels.

I was pointed out the house sound tech person so went over and introduced myself, my best smile on.

"Hi, I'm Julia, front of house engineer."

He didn't even look up.

"I was wondering if there's a db limit here?"

"102", he mumbled, still not looking.

"Is the PA limited?"

This time he stared right at me, glaring.

"Yes. If you go over 102 I will turn you down."

"I see. Well if you do I'll punch you in the face. What do you think of that?"

It just came out.

I left him turning purple.

It's not always this polite.

Austin.

During the first song the house tech grabbed the mouse and opened a page on the (digital mixing board) screen, which meant I could not access many of the things I needed till he'd finished.

After the third time I'd had enough.

"OK, can you please leave me to do my show?"

"No. I need to keep checking my shit."

"No. You don't."

Now, many men absolutely cannot stand to be spoken to like this by a woman, you know, like we are their equal.

"Fuck you, bitch, I'll do what I fucking like. You have no fucking clue what you're doing"

Phil, at his board behind me, radioed for help.

Meantime he continued unabated, bellowing in my ear.

"I'm gonna fuck you up bitch, I'm gonna fuck up your show."

Simon, our tour manager, duly arrived, they had a confab, and in a break between songs came over to me.

"He says that he had a quick check at top of the show, then left you alone. Said he told you that you were doing a great job."

Of course he did.

Misogyny is so hard to understand, that pure hatred.

It didn't always used to be like this.

I used to be a man.

As a child this was very confusing.

I would pray every night that I'd wake up a girl, and cry every morning.

As an adult it got worse.

Realizing I somehow had to try and fit into the male world I invented a persona that I hoped would work.

It didn't.

Everything was wrong.

In 2009, turning 50, I could take it no more.

Since then I've been transitioning, laser facial hair remover, voice training, had my trachea shaved, and watched in amazement as hormones did and continue to do their stuff.

I now 'pass'.

I'm lucky.

Some people, never fully do and have to deal with unimaginable prejudice, stark violence, get fired from their jobs, evicted from their homes, and in depression take their own lives.

There was an incident recently in a McDonalds in New Jersey where a transgender woman was dragged out of the ladies by two women and beaten half to death.

The male staff instead of stopping it goaded them on.

One of them filmed it and posted it on YouTube.

I was challenged once early on in the ladies, in a club in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan Province, Canada.

The club had yet to open.

"Excuse me, are you meant to be in here? Is that a wig you're wearing? You're a man!"

She was fuming.

I was mortified.

"I... used to be."

"Have you had surgery?"

Now this is quite a bold and unacceptable thing to ask.

What to do?

I decided to lie.

"Uh-huh" I said, trembling.

"Hmm, recently I think." she said, simmering slightly.

"Yes. I'm...."

"Yes?" she snapped.

"I'm doing the best I can."

Suddenly she calmed down.

"I'm sorry if I've upset you."

My mouth was bone dry.

"You really scared me actually" I croaked.

"I'm sorry" she said "Well, good luck" and with that wandered off.

I've no idea who she was but I suspect that someone close to her had upset her awfully, and recently.

Probably caught her husband trying on her clothes.

Chapter 2

London, April 12th 1959, 4am, I was dragged out of my poor mother's gaping stomach by forceps and biceps, an alien cast into a saturnine soap opera.

My father was an alcoholic, angry and abusive when sober, mean and vicious when not.

He beat us continually, my mother and me.

It didn't matter what we did.

When I was 12 she left with another man, another mean drunk it transpired.

The cycle of violence.

The night she was due to leave he fell into my room, straightened himself best he could and told me I had to choose between him and her.

He'd continually humiliate and belittle me, his favorite pastime.

As he propped himself up in the doorway that night, he looked so sad, so alone.

So I stayed.

He promised me he would not get into a fight with her man when they came to leave.

I sat on the stairs while they spilled outside, he in a blind rage, chasing them down the street and into the night.

I'd sat there many times before while she called out to me for help as he punched her into silence.

She escaped and for a brief time my life changed in oh so many ways.

I hardly ever saw him, that's why.

He was either out on the razzle or passed out at the foot of the stairs, up and gone when I came home from school, not back when I went to bed.

One day there he was, all puffed up, and announced he'd met a woman who had four very young daughters and they were all to move in with us.

I to this day have no idea why he did it seeing as how he absolutely loathed women and children.

Overnight he became that foul tempered, violent tyrant of old.

I will never forget the look of horror on those poor girls faces.

Desperately needing space he sold up and and announced a big move to Canvey Island, just off the Essex coast.

"But not you" he snarled in my direction.

I say he's my father.

My aunt told me that she and my mother were both sexually abused by their father, and that for my mother it continued into her marriage.

So, my father is probably not my father at all, my grandfather is, and my aunt is my sister.

It made sense.

I always felt like a cuckoo.

He threw me out of the nest, frankly not to my dismay, and the whole miserable lot of them absquatulated to the East End by the sea.

Unfortunately he moved me in with his grumpy parents, their thirty something year old creepy son and their bloated asthmatic beagle.

Their house, like my maternal grandparents', was a tiny rented two-up-two-down in London's East End, with a tin bath and outside loo. There was hot water on Sunday from a tank heated by a coal-fueled boiler. The tin bath would get dragged in and we'd take turns. The jakes, hellish in all weathers, was particularly difficult after my grandfather had been in, the place stinking of shit and cigarette smoke, the pan splattered with blood from his un-seen-to piles.

The toilet paper, when it wasn't cut up newspaper, was 'lzal', a brand more like tracing paper.

Completely non-absorbent, it just moved everything around.

It was around this time that my aunt, my mother's sister, also victim to her father, left her husband for, gasp, a woman.

Her name was henceforth mud.

What pain she must have been going through to do such a thing.

How brave.

I was absolutely thrilled and I told her so.

She'd been the one saving grace in my life.

She was my friend, my confidante.

She had a beautiful blond Hofner acoustic guitar she let me strum and introduced me to the long-haired Beatles, playing me 'Revolution', insisting I listen to the stereo mix, heady stuff for an 8 year old previously full of the fluffy mop-tops.

Now there she was, an out lesbian, who'd run off with an 'erotic dancer' named Jet, and set up home in Amsterdam.

I soooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo wished I was there.

Chapter 3

1970, while the world burst into color I had to take the Eleven Plus, the examination by which my future would be determined, Grammar School or Secondary Modern, success or failure.

It was that black and white - 11 years old, up a rung or on the scrapheap.

No slouch, I passed with ease, getting my first choice, Stratford Grammar, a school I chose for all the right reasons.

It was the only school I could pick where short trousers were not compulsory in the first year.

It was mixed; there was no way was I going to an all boys school, to have my humiliating shorts pulled up over my head and have the whole lot flushed down the pan.

Mostly though it was because Theresa Steer asked me to.

She'd been my friend since we were five and I'd do anything for anyone who showed anything resembling affection.

She and Carlton Leach became the campus couple

Carlton was the champion playground fighter, the one who picked the football team, the best looking and the best dressed, in button down Ben Sherman shirt, two-tone mohair trousers, black loafers, and a dark blue Crombie coat, the red silk top pocket lining pulled out, a Suedehead in fact, and gorgeous with it.

We bonded through our love of T.Rex, both of us having our bedrooms plastered with pictures of Marc Bolan.

He protected me.

I was untouchable.

Oh he could be pretty cruel, but never when we were alone.

One cold autumn day he asked me to go to a football match with him, West Ham United away, up to Aston Villa, near Birmingham, a couple of hours train ride from London.

I had and have no interest in football whatsoever.

I said yes, eager to please.

We met up with a bunch of hard knocks, some of whom I recognized as ex-Stratford pupils.

The train was packed, a lot of beer and testosterone flying about.

Soon as we got to the ground I thought I should've stayed at home.

The minute the match started I knew.

The louts, including a terrifying Carlton, chanted the most disgustingly abusive stuff to the opposing team's black players and, even more worryingly, taunted the supporters on the opposite terrace - "You're gunna get your fuckin' 'eads kicked in"

Aggro!

Suddenly, I felt a grip on the scruff of my neck.

A policeman threw me against a wall.

"Out."

He pointed thither.

"But..."

"Out!"

"I haven't done anything."

"I said out. NOW!"

He determined that this was not going to be me and saved me that day.

That was the last I saw of Carlton.

A few years back, at an airport browsing books, I was completely taken aback to see 'Muscle', by.... Carlton Leach!

It's a memoir about his escapades as, first, a member of the ICF, the notorious Inter-City Firm, the gang of thugs that terrorized the terraces, some of whom were at that Aston Villa game, then as a bouncer in shady nightclubs, ending up a full-on East End gangster involved in heroin smuggling and a number of fatal shootings.

The cover reads "I'm the deadliest bastard you'll ever meet.

If you cross me I'll track you to the ends of the earth and destroy you."

Funny, but throughout the book there is no mention of me or Marc Bolan.

Theresa fell pregnant at 14, truly scandalous back then.

She had the baby and gave it up for adoption.

He wanted her to keep it and said they could all live at his parent's house.

Can you imagine?

The other day I happened to notice that a film had been made of his book, called 'The Rise Of The Footsoldier'.

Funny, Marc and I aren't in that either.

By the time of the Aston Villa trip I had completely given up on school.

I loathed it.

I thought all the teachers were stupid and there was nothing more they could teach me.

I was right.

I started to not bother going.

The day after Aston Villa a bunch of us sagged off school at my house.

We broke into the drinks cabinet.

I made a noxious concoction of vodka, gin, whisky, rum, and banana brandy, and we drank the bottles dry.

'Black Sabbath Volume 4' was on full blast when the doorbell rang.

It was our year head.

The next-door neighbor had called her.

I thought they'd be at work.

She piled us into her car and drove us back to school.

On the way one of the boys puked all over the back seat.

This didn't go down very well.

We were all put into separate rooms except the boy who'd been sick.

He went straight to hospital, so overly dramatic I thought.

I was marched into the headmaster's office and confronted by him, the deputy headmistress, and the year head, the unholy triumvirate.

The year head spoke up first.

"What drugs have you been taking?"

This threw me for a second.

"Drugs?"

"Don't mess me around boy!"

"None."

"None what?!"

"None, sir."

Then the deputy headmistress.

"Right now that lad is having his stomach pumped, then we'll know, mark my words. His mother is in tears. What on earth do you have to say for yourself?"

"We just had a drink, miss, that's all."

"All, boy? All?!"

This did not look good.

Finally the headmaster piped up with the punch line.

"You are the most disruptive force in this school and are clearly the ring leader. We have no choice but to expel you forthwith."

I passed out.

My father had literally to beg them to take me back.

They decided I'd return at the end of term and take my GCE's, as they were then called, the final humiliation.

I spent the time off traveling with my father's brother, the creepy one.

He was a self-employed washing machine repairman visiting Laundromats in the Essex area.

I loathed the work but was happy to be out of that idiotic school, away from those dolts.

One humid afternoon on the way home he stopped at a sex shop and dumped a pile of top shelf magazines in my lap.

We drove off.

"What do you think of those?" he panted.

I froze.

I had to share a bedroom with him.

Every night I would make sure I was in my bed first and pretend to be asleep.

I could feel his eyes on me, hear the rustle of nylon sheets and the crackle of static as he pulled himself off.

I recently found out that he'd died and my father, clearing out his flat, came across his extensive gay hard-core porn collection.

Oh, to have been a fly on that wall.

Eventually I had to go back to school and sit the crappy exams.

As I had done no work whatsoever none of the teachers expected me to get any of them.

They weren't completely wrong.

I easily passed english and music, scraped through history but failed miserably at the rest.

For math I didn't have a compass, a set square, not even a ruler, so did all my geometry freehand.

Yes, I could not wait to get out of that place.

I got a job at Ron's, a musical instrument and record store in Ilford, Essex, and fiddled the till.

It was easy.

I hated doing it but was egged on by the delivery driver, Ian Griffiths, who took half of the money and none of the risk.

He was a bully who used to be in The Overlanders, a band who scored a hit in the sixties with a cover of The Beatles' 'Michelle', and had been on Top Of The Pops, so I was a bit in awe.

Again, anything resembling affection I was a sucker for.

One night at my grandparents' while eating a corned beef sandwich and watching 'The Sweeney' the police burst in with a search warrant and took me and all my belongings to 'Arbour Square Nick', or Bow Police Station as it's called in English.

I was questioned, bad cop.

"We've seen you in the pub selling the stuff you stole, so own up."

Then good cop.

"Just tell us who was involved and you can go."

Now, this was weird.

I'd stolen cash but never stuff so I kept schtum.

Transpired some other guys were stealing shit loads and I mean SHIT loads of stuff, had a real racket going on.

They were caught by the newest member of staff, an undercover policewoman.

The cops let me go.

Soon as I got outside I vomited in the gutter.

My grandparents threw me out.

That was the beginning and end of my criminal career.

Actually there was one other incident.

When she found out I was sleeping rough my mother talked her by then second husband John Shirley into offering me their spare room, in a pub in Stepney Green, and said I could tend bar.

I was just 17 and had been living in my car, so jumped at it.

I worked the public bar, a hovel separate from the saloon which had no carpet on the floor, no flock paper on the walls and was where the tough nuts hung out.

It was only a couple of years before that this would have been the 'colored bar'.

There was a strict unwritten code in those days and black and white did not mix.

Those signs in windows, 'No blacks, no Irish, no dogs', they were all too real.

One lunchtime one of the regular villains, a dwarf whose name escapes me, said he had a driving job for me and to meet him later that afternoon.

In those days pubs closed from 2:30 till 6:30pm.

It was only after he'd left that it dawned on me the job was a 'job', a burglary, and I was to be the getaway driver, in my own car!

I didn't show.

Days went by in abject terror.

It seemed obvious that some kind of awful East End punishment was going to be meted out.

Suddenly he burst through the bar door.

I was stunned, unable to flee, the sun blinding me.

The door banged shut, the room went dead.

I opened my eyes, he was on a stool and in my face.

“Good job you didn’t come on that job”, he said. “I got nicked.”

It seemed futile at that stage to point out that at three and a half feet tall he didn’t exactly blend into the crowd, and that maybe a life of crime was not for him.

John Shirley.

He was a bitterly jealous man, with a mean, vicious, controlling streak.

Wasn’t long before he threw me out.

Late one night I came back to find he’d dumped my stuff outside in a garbage bag, locked and bolted the door.

My mother appeared behind it crying.

He pushed her back, looked right at me through the glass and laughed.

I screamed and kicked at the door, wildly, frantically.

His laughter turned to fear, dread.

I’m so glad it didn’t give.

He was another alcoholic, the full extent to which wasn't known till after he died, when my mother discovered the empty whiskey bottles hidden about the place.

She was cooking breakfast one day, as she did every day, leaving him to read the paper, sitting on his favorite seat.

By the time she came in with his tray he'd turned blue.

She held a hand mirror to his mouth.

An ambulance took him away leaving her staring at his piss soaked chair.

"He's gone! You're free!" exclaimed my aunt and me.

We spent all our time with her, something he expressly forbade, coaxed her, encouraged her, and it really seemed to be working.

Then she calmly told us she'd met a man, a man a bit younger than me, who had three young kids.

"What?!"

She said they'd just got married and she was selling her flat and moving in.

"What?!"

We met.

He was the worst of the bunch, a truly fucking shit fuck of a motherfucker.

She never got out of that cycle of violence.

We didn't speak again until her deathbed.

Chapter 4

Dear Terry

A couple of friends have told me lately that I should try to contact you.

I said I didn't think so but they kept on.

So, here goes.

I used to be your son.

You disowned me.

Why?

I say used to be, are you actually my father?

Did you know my mother was sexually abused by her father as a child?

Did you you know it carried on into adulthood?

You dragged yourself through night school and gained qualifications so you can't have been completely dim though you sure acted like it..

I cannot understand why you persisted in such destructive behavior, destructive to you and all around you, and believe me I've tried.

Of course, I don't know you.

I haven't seen you since 1984 when I would have been twenty five, you forty six, six years younger than I am today.

You probably don't remember as you were so drunk, but maybe you remember pawing my girlfriend?

What in the world did I do to make you hate me so much?

You don't know me.

In fact you never did.

I have so many painful memories of you, really, so many, but I'm not going to go into them.

If you have an iota of conscience you know what you did, what hurt you inflicted, how absent you were, emotionally, spiritually, parentally.

No, the reason I'm writing this to you now is to try remind us both of some good things you did for me before one of us dies.

I've thought long and hard and come up with two.

Quite a sorry state of affairs but better than none.

They were drums and guitar.

I don't think you understand the impact those two gifts had on me.

I can still see the front room that Christmas morning, ten years old, the red glitter drum kit glistening in the half glow of the fire.

It was truly magical.

The attached lessons were invaluable.

Then there was the guitar, you bought me an electric guitar.

I fell in love with electric guitar that day, my thirteenth birthday.

I've often wondered if you wanted to be a drummer?

Is that why you bought me drums?

I certainly have no memory of ever asking for drums.

Is that why you were so angry when I took up the guitar in preference?

You bought me two things.

Life changing things certainly, and I am grateful.

Where was the love?

You never once told me you loved me.

That really hurts.

I wonder what you do with yourself these days, what you think about, how your health is, where and with whom you live.

You know my mother died a little while back?

Did you ever reconcile yourselves?

I hope so but I doubt it.

I was so angry at you for so many years.

What kind of a person treats a mother and child the way you did?

I said I was only going to remember the good, but it's not easy.

Maybe you got no love from your parents.

We know I didn't.

It's a reason but ultimately no excuse.

I say I used to be your son.

In July of 2009, at the age of 50, I finally acknowledged to myself and my friends who truly I am and, after a lifetime of denial, pain, and turmoil, came out as transgender.

I am now a woman and, at last, happy.

Despite all the terrible things you did to me I want to thank you for music.

Music has been my life, has saved me, has brought me so much joy, love, and happiness.

I have to recognize your part in that and I do.

I hope this finds you well and in a better frame of mind, body and soul than when I last saw you.

I doubt you will get back to me.

I want you to know that somewhere, sometime, if only for the briefest moment, you did something good.

Julia

It's important to remember the times my parents married, Britain in the 1950's, London, the East End and all that, the battered working classes, buried emotions.

They were war babies and just kids when they had me.

They didn't know themselves.

I wrote that letter to him a couple of years ago and never sent it.

I have no idea where he is or how to get in touch with him or even if he's alive, but it was good for me to think of him in some positive way.

Deep breath, deep breath.



I've two brothers, four and eight years my junior.

I've seen neither hide nor hair of them for almost as long.

The older was a petty thief, graduating to stealing from my Mother's purse as she lay dying.

The younger went to the funeral to get what he could then buggered off.

I called her a few days before she died.

It was crystal clear she'd rather I hadn't.

I guess I was too painful a reminder.

Recently, before I could be prescribed hormones, I had to have a session with a counselor.

At the end she asked me if there was anything I'd like to add.

I said no, but as I was leaving I stopped.

"You know, the pain from childhood, it never leaves."

For me that pain once manifested itself as blind fury.

A red and fuzzy mist would envelop me, I would be inconsolable and uncontrollable.

The chip on my shoulder was huge, weighing me down, down, down.

When I started Grammar School I thought I'd found my way out and was excited to study music seriously, hopefully join the school orchestra and, who knows, start up a band.

During the first lesson the teacher asked us to raise our hands if we played a musical instrument.

Most people said piano or recorder.

My turn came.

"Drums", I said, beaming.

She stared at me for what seemed like an eternity, drew in a breath through gritted teeth and hissed.

"Drums? What do you mean, drums? Clearly you have no idea what you're talking about. When you know what kind of drums they are, then you can put your hand up."

Of course I knew the name of every single drum, fitting, fixture, nut and bolt.

What on earth did she think she was doing, taking the privileged upstart down a peg or two?

I never put my hand up again.

Ever.

“I’ll show you”, I thought.

“Just you wait. I’ll fucking show you all.”

Chapter 5

1980, I was scouring the musicians wanted ads in the 'Melody Maker' and I happened on one from a singer looking for a guitarist and bassist to join him and his drummer.

That was where I first met David Rogers.

We auditioned at the same time.

We were great, no bones about it.

We left together, told we'd be told.

"Maybe I'll see you around?" I said.

"Oh you will" he said, quite provocatively and with more than a little insight, as you will see.

We both got the job.

1980, wow, it seemed so.... modern!

Jimmy Grierson was the singer, a tall, blonde, gay Liverpudlian who was to make a single, produced by Andy Mackay of 'Rock Follies' fame.

Oh yes, and Roxy Music.

Jimmy'd just been dropped from his label, Jet, therefore not having a record deal his publisher, Heath Levy, stumped up the cash figuring on making a killing.

It all seemed so implausible.

But.... Andy Mackay duly turned up and we made a record!

And.... nothing happened, it was never released.

The band fizzled out.

Jimmy's idea of renaming himself Toc Tumac and wanting us to wear wife-beaters with jewelry attached to our underarm hair... that didn't really help.

Jimmy later renamed himself James Wraith and, along with Andy MacKay and Phil Manzanera, became The Explorers, a Roxy Music tribute band.

David and I clicked and later that year found ourselves playing at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in a musical called 'Henry the Perfect Fourth'.

A dreadful concoction, it ran for two weeks to empty houses.

But....

Late at night, every night, a bunch of us would get together at the Fringe Club and perform all this stuff, stuff that Dave Suich and Steve Cochane wrote that very day in the tiny and super expensive flat we all shared for the duration, David and me, along with drummer Dave Wild, being the house band.

Now, I'd been in a fair few bands already, at school, in pubs and that, but this was the real deal.

It was so exciting.

I sang for the first time on stage, when Steve Cochrane leapt off mid song to get changed for the next sketch.

Is Vic There?

Dave Suich founded 'The Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain', and plays with them to this day; Steve Cochrane, my dear friend, with whom I subsequently wrote many, many, many songs, just died from liver cancer, at 55.

Back we flew from Edinburgh, buzzing, buzzing, buzzing, but completely boracic, so scoured those Melody Maker ads again.

I auditioned alone for a band called Bim, and... got the job!

Bim, who remembers them?

Well, let me tell you.

They were a great little pop band that had a major deal with Warner

Brothers and I gladly signed the contract, put on a wage of £50 a week, not a fortune in those days but not bad.

Cameron McVey sang, Stephen Street played bass.

Cameron went on to produce Massive Attack while Stephen produced (urgh) Blur and (vomiting into purse) Morrissey.

Three memorable Bim events;

Filming at the Embassy Club, with Spandau Ballet, compèred by Steve Strange, for a French TV show.

A blistering BBC Radio One session for Peter Powell.

Opening for Mud at ULU.

Now, Peter Powell had the drive-time evening slot, hosted the TV show Top Of The Pops, had a huge audience.

He loved it so much he played it twice in a week, unheard of.

He also said, on air, that 'Factory', the song we did from our forthcoming LP 'Boobam's Out', should be our new single.

Never one to miss an opportunity, Tarquin Gotch, then our label boss, rush released it.

Peter Powell played it and played it and played it and... it was kind of embarrassing.

The first week of release it got to number 90 in the charts, not nothing in those days.

If it went up the next week we'd be on Top Of The Pops.

It went down.

No other DJ played it.

Hanging onto the record deal by a thread, we wrote and demoed some songs, and one was picked to be a single.

We recorded it at Wessex, a huge studio in north London, with Mick Jones producing.

I remember Tarquin in a meeting saying, "Mick Jones, now there's a proper producer!"

I blame cocaine.

Mick Jones was the guitar player in pub rock band The Clash.

The band's producer up to then had been Laurie Latham, who had produced 'New Boots and Panties' for Ian Dury and The Blockheads, a huge hit.

Go figure.

Anyway, the single was called 'The Blind Lead The Blind'.

Peter Powell played it once, calling it "experimental".

It's really not bad, if you care to listen.

But “experimental” was the kiss of death for a pop group, the end of the record deal, and the end of the band.

Tarquin Gotch went on to champion the musical career of.... Jimmy Nail.

The LP was never released.

So we re-adjusted our floppy fringes and moved on.

The Blind Lead The Blind





Chapter 6

By 1982 Margaret Thatcher had gotten grip and was busy frothing at the mouth over a craggy island in the middle of nowhere, while I was living in a grotty bed-sit in Ilford, Essex, having been dumped by my girlfriend.

She and I became vegetarian together in 1979 after reading some truly shocking literature on factory farming.

One day I caught her reading The Sun.

"I think they should do vivisection on prisoners."

I was momentarily dumbstruck, gobsmacked.

"I think I'm gay" I said.

She was gone in a week.

Out of the blue, David Rogers got in touch.

I hadn't a phone, so he sent me a postcard.

"Listen", it said. "The Passions need a guitar player. Call them on blah blah blah...."

Ah, The Passions.

I'm In Love With A German Film Star.

I used to sing along to that song whenever it came on the radio, which was about every five minutes, early '81.

A huge top ten hit, right?

Wrong.

The week it reached number 25 in the charts they appeared on Top Of The Pops.

Their record company, Polydor, having no faith in it upon release had pressed a nominal amount of copies so the week they were on there were no records in the shops.

Cock up or conspiracy?

An A&R man once said to me “I wouldn’t sign a band with a chick in it”

Barbara Gogan, the band’s singer and lead guitarist, was also a radical Irish feminist to boot.

So, boom, David’s postcard dropped through my door.

I thought... FUCK YES!

I called and met them at their place in Shepherd’s Bush, took away their three (yes, three) LPs, (Michael and Miranda, Thirty Thousand Feet Over China, Sanctuary), learned them, auditioned, and... got the job!

This was a pivotal time.

I came from a place of zero expectation.

I was withdrawn, and downright scared, but determined, like a kitten bounding off after taking its first tentative steps in the snow.

With The Passions, and particularly with Barbara, I was with people who had opinions that resonated with me.

They expressed ideas that I had been formulating.

They were a little older yet seemed so much wiser.

I was ready to learn.

I was incredibly naïve, widely but not well read but boy could I play guitar.

Margaret Thatcher's second election victory, her inexorable rise to power, and the subsequent destruction of society, along with her greed is good mantra, solidified my position way over there on the left, as it did for so many of my generation.

I read and read and read, took in all the broadsheets, and the red tops, watched the serious and frivolous news, began to ask questions, began voicing my opinions.

I moved out of the East End up and over to the North West, practically as far away as possible whilst still being in London.

Two books I read at that time were key.

One was 'Homage to Catalonia' by George Orwell, the other was 'The Painted Bird' by Jerzy Kosinsky.

Barbara and I were in a bookstore in Amsterdam, a day off on tour.

She picked out 'The Painted Bird', handed it to me and said, "Read this now!"

Fortunately it was in English.

It is one of the most disturbing and powerful books I have ever read.

It tells of a young boy's descent into a living hell, set against the backdrop of WWII.

I'd read '1984' and 'Animal Farm' of course, but Orwell's tome on his time in the Spanish Civil War fighting Franco and the fascists, and telling how the communists screwed up, was and is an education; go get it.

And then.... Holy crap, we went to America.



This was America in 1983, a whole other kettle of worms.

I'd just turned 24.

Driving in from JFK the promoter turned on the radio and there we were, the new single, 'Sanctuary', blasting away.

Really, I shit you not.

First stop New York City, to a crumbling rock and roll hotel called The Iroquois.

We were four to a room, cockroaches scattering when we flicked on the bare light.

That night we got taken to Studio 54, straight past the queue.

"A' list.

OK, maybe not, but certainly B+.

I heard for the first time a DJ remixing a song, 'Billie Jean' if memory serves, using two turntables and two copies of the record and creating endless loops.

Incredible.

I saw break-dancing before anyone at home had even heard of it.

Then we went to Washington DC, to the original 9:30 club, famous, of course, for its rats.

Loading out into the dingy side alley I could not believe the amount of them, scurrying about, big as cats.

A wag commented that it seemed fitting that 'Reagan's White House was in a rat infested shit hole'.

There was sex.

I cut the mustard and took every opportunity that came my way.

It was a freedom I had never dreamed existed.

It blew my mind wide open.

Finally, we played our sold out New York City show, at 'The Ritz', now 'Webster Hall'.

Earlier that day someone got stabbed right in front of me, at Times Square.

Halfway through the show a fight broke out between two Hell's Angels in the crowd.

During the last song I broke a string, and my guitar, a whammy-barred Stratocaster, went completely out of tune.

No guitar tech, and no spare guitar, I struggled to tune it, but the song finished with me still struggling.

Backstage after, David Agar, the thrusting bass player, tore me to shreds, and literally spat in my face.

OK, he had a point, I could've played something percussive, but the vehemence with which he attacked me was shocking.

He hated me.

I'd really liked him, but this eager to please thing, not good.

We came home and played a sold out show at the Marquee club in London.

It's no longer there.

That show was to be our last.

Ironically it was the epitome, the best show any incarnation of that band ever played, and that's really saying something.

I still have the cassette (yes, another cassette) from the DC show on which Barbara says;

“Well I must say, I do like America, much more than I thought.”

A few months later she upped stumps and moved to New York.

I did the best thing I thought I could do, drugs.



Chapter 7

Despite riots, protests, strikes, petitions, and alternative comedy, 1987 saw Margaret Thatcher win her third successive term in office as Britain's Prime Minister.

Nightmare.

I was living penniless in a council flat that wasn't in my name, with insurmountable rent arrears and threats to cut off all the utilities due to unpaid bills.

I was expecting the bailiff any day.

Now, I was born an East Ender, in working class London, a place of zero expectation.

At school, teachers continually told me I “wouldn’t amount to anything” because I had “ideas above my station”.

Paradoxically they thought that if I kept my head down and did the work it’d “all be all right”.

All right to work in a factory that is, or, if I was really lucky, to make it to middle management.

Even for a Grammar School kid being from the East End was hopeless.

The teachers all pretended that there was a level playing field but what they failed to understand was reality and that was because, as I’ve said before, they were all stupid, but at that point, sitting in that council flat waiting for the bailiff it seemed they might be right.

Suddenly there was a knock at the door.

Figuring the jig was up I opened it.

It was David Rogers.

He said he’d been offered a job we could share, driving deliveries for Mute Records, cash in hand, that he was moving to a new flat and I should squat his old one, and his van was parked right outside.

That boy, honestly.

As I started to throw my things together he asked if I'd been making any music.

I played a song I'd recently written and demoed called 'This Is The Age Of I'm Alright Jack', an angry kind of a rap, with big distorted guitar breaks.

He flipped.

I told him I'd seen a great band recently called Big Black.

He said all he'd been listening to lately was their 'Atomizer' LP.

We stared at each other, mouths open, light bulbs going off above our heads.

So, we borrowed a drum machine, went to a friend's rehearsal space, wrote an LPs worth of songs in a week and, on Good Friday that year, played our first show.

It was incredible.

Telepathic.

We needed a name and I knew exactly what it would be.

And so Mute Drivers was born.

After the Jimmy Grierson experience David had been in Fad Gadget, making records, touring Europe.

I actually auditioned for their 'Gag' record in 1984, but was passed over for Rowland S. Howard.

Fair enough.

I auditioned again a year later for 'Snakes and Ladders', when Fad became Frank Tovey.

Failed again, that hurt.

Frank and I got together many years later though, and started writing.

He'd decided to become Fad Gadget again, and was to tour, opening for Depeche Mode.

He had a backing band lined up, a group of young lads from Austria, and very good they were too.

I agreed to do live sound and tour manage.

That quickly proved to be an impossibility due to our clashing egos, so I pulled out in the early stages of pre-production.

He did the tour and it was a huge success.

We spoke upon his return and had just decided to get back together and continue writing, when he had a heart attack and died.

He was 45.

I really miss him.

Back to the light bulbs - In the two and a half years between those light bulbs going off in July 1987, to the end of January 1990, Mute Drivers recorded and released five LPs.

No idle boast.

It was the most artistically exciting and prolific time of my life up till then.

We toured incessantly, could not stop writing songs, had rave reviews everywhere, began to sell out all our shows, and were selling quite a few records.

What's more, we did it all ourselves.

We even kept the Mute driving job going, farming it out to other 'temporarily resting artistes'.

I made all our artwork, and booked all the tours, though how I did that in those days, with no email, no cell phone, not even a fax, baffles me to this day.

David took care of business and struck our deals.

If love blows in the wind, bring on a storm,

Bring on a hurricane.

It was so great.

I was even starting to make wear make-up onstage and had grown out my hair.

I felt fully engaged in the world, in my own beliefs and opinions and started writing songs about the important stuff, about what, as I saw it, was really going on in the world and in my life.

PWA

Take a little piece of you

Wrap it in some tissue paper,

Put it in an envelope

Mail it today,

Send it to the President

Ask him when he's going to spend

Money time and energy

On People With Aids,

By nineteen ninety-one

Five million Africans will be dead and gone

When will what can be done be done?

Done's the right word

Been stitched up real good,

They're letting us die like flies

'Cause "we're not you",

Now George Bush is President
I wonder if he still remembers
Talking about the 'giggle factor'
I'd like to know,
Mister Invisible what's so funny
About dying people spending their money
On drugs without chemicals?
I don't get the joke,

By nineteen ninety-one
Five million Africans will be dead and gone
When will what can be done be done?
Done's the right word
Been stitched up real good,
They're letting us die like flies
'Cause "we're not you",

We are your sons and we are your daughters,

All we bring is love

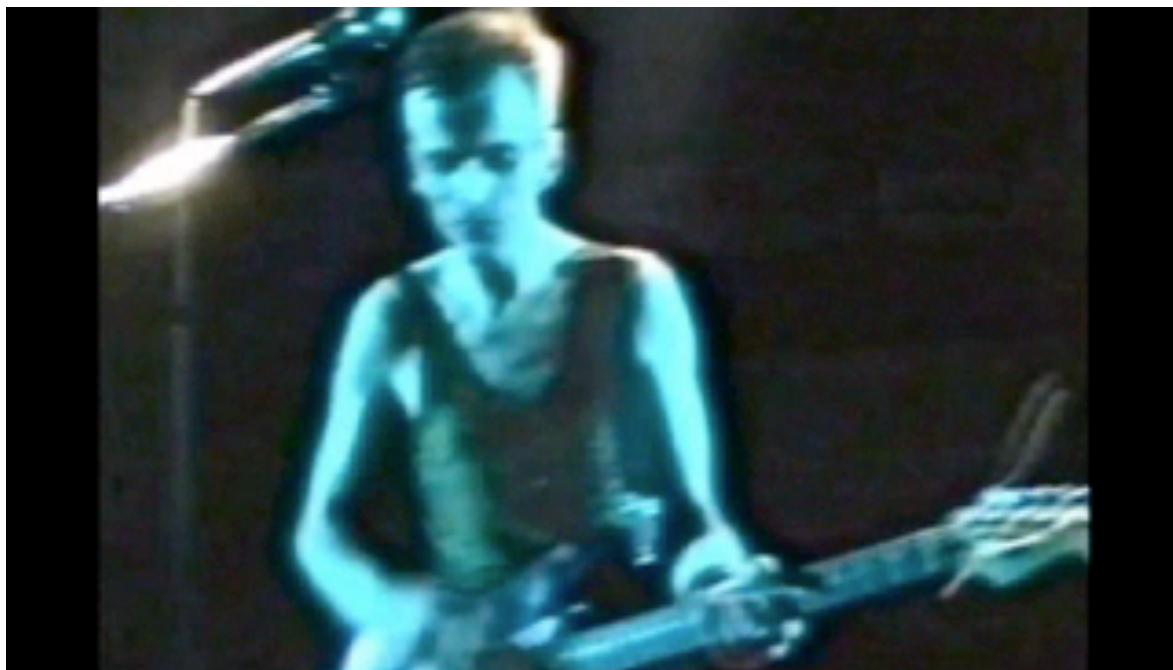
Don't turn your backs on us,

No black disease,

No gay plague,

It's just People With Aids,

We all need saving.



I was living in Crouch End, in David's old flat, the one I'd squatted, the short life Co-Op that administered it letting me stay, paying the astonishing rent of £11 a week.

Now, that was nothing in those days.

There were rats living in the basement that occasionally ventured north but at £11 a week I had no complaints.

One day the neighbor's phone rang for me.

Why did I still not have a phone?

"Hi, this is John Peel from wunnerful Radio One."

It most certainly was.

"I like the idea of Mute Drivers doing a session."

Yippee!

"Give my producer John Walters a call and set it up."

Now, we'd sent Peel every record.

With our fourth I included a Dear John letter, which had a number of hand-written pages containing the word "please" over and over and over, with, at the end, "can we do a session?"

Well, pop pickers, it did the trick.

At the same time as the session was broadcast the first of the two singles we made, 'Boomtown', was released, getting across the board rave reviews.

It coincided with the video we wrote and shot at The Mean Fiddler, with the invaluable help of Daveid Phillips, being broadcast on BBC TV show 'Snub TV'.

We were unstoppable.

And then David left me.



Neil Sedaka was absolutely right - breaking up is so very hard to do.

By the fall of '89 we had recorded and mixed what was to be our fifth LP.

A Belgian label called Antler wanted to sign us.

We were far from sure.

We'd played on a song for them, a cover of Brian Eno's 'Baby's On Fire' with Niki Mono, produced by Paul Kendall.

They liked us, but....

We just could not see ourselves on a label that called itself Antler.

The crunch came when they said they also wanted our publishing, and all for no cash up front.

For some reason David decided to send it to Liz Naylor at One Little Indian, the label that broke The Sugarcubes.

She played it to Derek Birkett, the boss.

He loved it, and signed us!

There was no cash, but we were ecstatic.

All our previous records were released on our own Irradiated label, through Rough Trade Distribution.

In those days if the warehouse people liked your record, their recommendation meant distribution was assured.

They loved our records.

But this time we wanted to take it further as we knew we'd surpassed ourselves.

I know without a shred of doubt that it would have been impossible to make even one LP without the help of Daniel Miller, head of Mute Records, so, Dan, thanks!

He gave us space in his offices, let us use all the facilities, turned his back in the early days while we snuck into the studio to record, and paid for all our pressings, on account.

He also signed us as writers to his publishing company Mute Song, nee Dying Art.

We were exhausted, having done everything on our own for so long.

We were also broke, having plowed every cent into making this new record, and so needed an injection of cash.

Soon as Derek Birkett took us up we went to Daniel Miller to negotiate a new publishing deal.

To the surprise of everyone involved including us he said yes, and advanced us £5000.

The LP, 'Everyone', came out in January 1990 and we were super excited, knowing we'd made a great record, that we had our base, and expected One Little Indian to take it all up a gear.

They managed to sell less copies than if we had released it ourselves.

We were dropped like a cold potato.

David took his £2500, with it bought a leaky boat, patched it up, and he and Claire, his new love, sailed away.

I didn't see him again for fifteen years.



Chapter 8

My whole world fell apart.

The telepathy stopped.

He was gone.

I started to think that my life thus far had been a hedonistic, ego fueled rush, and that this was some kind of karmic payback.

I was dreaming that my teeth had fallen out.

I started getting panic attacks.

Jo, my oldest and dearest friend, got in touch.

She knew something was up.

I told her what had happened.

She had an idea.

She knew of a drummer, Jean-Pierre, and a bass player, Christophe, both French, living together in London, and thought that the four of us should get together.

The idea of getting another band together was furthest from my mind, but I'd written my songs for the next Mute Drivers record, so decided to give it a shot.

I called Paul Kendall, who'd engineered and produced all the Mute Drivers' records with us, and we went to Mute to record what I thought might be an EP, four songs.

I sang and played guitar, Jo played keyboards and sang back up.

I gave the mixes to Daniel Miller and thought nothing more of it.

A few days later I was in the office and he beckoned me over.

"Did you get my message?"

I hadn't.

"That song you gave me, 'Melting In Ecstasy', I love it. I'd like to put it out as a single. What do you think? I love the band, reminds me of Free."

Daniel actually went to school with Paul Kossoff, and we both loved Free, the ultimate minimal rock group.

I mulled the idea over for a whole two seconds.

"OK, great!"

"One thing though, we'll have to drop the word 'ecstasy' from the title, because no-one will play it."

That was fine by me, though being banned by the BBC would've been a boon.

"So does that mean you're going to take up my publishing option?"

Bit cheeky.

He did, advancing me £5000.

"One other thing" he said. "We'll do it on your label, but I'll pay for everything and do the distribution. We'll do a radio edit, get a plugger. What do you think?"

I thought yes.

Emphatically.

7" and 12" vinyl versions were pressed up and the plugger went to work.

A few weeks later I got the first reports.



melting

It was clear straight away that the plugger had been given the sprawling 12" version, with its ambient three-minute intro, instead of the snappy radio friendly 7" edit.

No one played it.

A complete and utter waste of time.

I was devastated, not by the failure, but by the hope.

How many times I'd been sucked in by the hope that this time it might actually all work out, that this time it would not be complete bullshit.

This time though, my bullshit barrier had irrevocably collapsed.

I'd spent my advance paying for rehearsals, equipment, all that jazz, and was about to be evicted from my flat.

Again.

The boys had a spare room in their council flat in East Dulwich, and somewhat reluctantly I took it.

Times were really tough down there.

We had so little money we took to breaking into the electric meter, fishing out 50ps with a hook and magnet.

And then they turned.

First of all they wanted Jo out.

Like a fool I agreed.

They wanted to go into a more traditional rock direction, so I wrote songs in that vein, mistake number two.

Then they decided we should move to Amsterdam.

The hat trick.

I borrowed a van; we packed everything into it, and I drove us into the night, doing another runner.

We found a squat (you could just do that in those days) in the Pijp area, just south of the inner city, and moved in.

I drove the van back to London, dropped it off, and got a bus back.

By the time I returned the mood had changed completely and Jean-Pierre seemed to thoroughly detest me.

He had been thinking, he said.

I groaned inwardly.

He was annoyed at my “leader” role in the band.

Now, I raised all the cash, arranged all the shows, split the writing credits three ways; I even drove the bloody van!

What more could I do?

He died a few years later in a car crash so I never found out.

Christophe beetled back to London, so I opened another squat, on the west side, and left Jean-Pierre to stew.

This was a truly miserable time.

The squat was squalid.

I lived on bread and cheese that I stole from the local supermarket, having no money to buy food, and nothing to cook it on if I did.

I could not get work anywhere unless I knew Dutch, though everyone spoke English perfectly.

Eventually though I did get an interview and was given the job, cleaning floors and toilets in a ratty restaurant.

I cycled back to my squat, singing.

A neighbor who had a phone was waiting at my door.

In the time it took me to get back the restaurant owner had changed his mind and given the job to a cousin.

I cried into my half-inched Gouda.

I spent my nights listening to the BBC World Service on a tiny tinny transistor radio.

What the squat lacked in amenities it sure made up for in its mice population.

I would douse the light at night and within minutes they were out, scuttling about.

Next morning every surface would be covered in little black balls of shit.

One night there was a tremendous banging on the front door, with a lot of shouting.

I buried my head under the sheets.

The owners had sent the boys round to intimidate me.

It worked.

A few days after that I was reluctantly invited to a dinner party at Jean-Pierre's.

He was terrifically mean to me all night.

Eventually I got up.

"I'm off." I said to him.

No reply.

"No, I mean I'm off. I sold my guitar today and got just enough money for a bus back to London. I'm leaving in the morning."

I could not get out of there fast enough.

I turned up at Jo's with a bag of clothes, abandoning all else bar the tiny tinny radio.

I hadn't seen her since she'd been dropped unceremoniously from the band.

She hugged me and took me in.

I was thin as a rake, broke and broken, anxiety nightmares continual.

I stayed with her for a week or two, licking my wounds.

She saved my life, literally.

My sister.

My angel.

Melting





Chapter 9

Before I quit work to be a musician, or rather before I signed on the dole and used it as what I quite rightly called an arts grant, I had a few jobs.

The first was as a bought ledger clerk in the offices of Nichols & Clarke, a vast builder's merchant on Bishopsgate.

I had no idea what bought ledger was, and what's more I didn't care.

I spent a few weeks shuffling paper around before being told I might be better suited in the sanitary department.

An old codger named Cyril Wakeman, allegedly a relative of Rick, interviewed me.

He told me how he found aspects of sanitary ware fascinating.

Now, he was talking about avocado bathroom suites, S bends and P traps.

I kept looking for the hidden camera, expecting Jeremy Beadle to jump out.

I spent another few weeks shuffling bits of paper around before getting let go.

Ten weeks.

I can't believe we all stuck it so long.

While still at my grandparents, my grandfather, a dustman, got me a job I didn't want, working for the council, driving an electric truck, picking up waste paper from households for recycling.

This was 1975, recycling mostly unheard of then, so well done Newham Council.

I would go out on my rounds with my assigned partner, an idiot named Terry, starting at 7am, finishing at 4pm.

It was hard, grubby work.

The dustmen, the elite, breakfasted in the canteen at 7am, ambled off when they were ready, and were home by noon, having got lunch in beforehand.

The salvage crews, as we were called, all aspired to the dust.

One man I met there, Bryan, was a fully qualified electrical engineer, and I don't mean he used to wire houses, I mean he could make things with circuit boards and all that, very complicated things.

He'd had a 'nervous breakdown' from the pressure of his old job at Marconi Electronics, so the salvage was all he could stomach.

There were a lot of men there like that, men who could not fit into the grown-up world, or who had never wanted to leave school and acted like they hadn't.

My mother used to continually tell me that her schooldays were the best days of her life.

Not right.

Winter came around and totally finished me off.

That truck had no doors.

I still cannot believe that I stuck it there all summer.

More than done with manual labor, I spent a happy year at Lewis Barnet, a wholesale women's clothing 'showroom' in Aldgate, as a sales assistant; a gofer really.

The rag trade and all that, I loved it.

The manager, who reminded me of Howard Kirk in 'The History Man', used to pull faces at customers when they turned away, completely straight-faced when they turned back.

It was a bit cruel but hilarious nonetheless.

The company was owned by Lewis Barnet himself, by then a very old man, and run by his mean-ass son, Stuart.

Fortunately Stuart was mostly away, so we were left to our own devices.

We would always be alerted as to his arrival, and, when business was slack, would have to busy ourselves, pretending to work.

Pretending to work.

As Bill Hicks remarked, "Why don't you pretend we're working? Knock yourself out!"

I was paid £18 a week, absolutely nothing in those days.

Didn't matter; it was the closest thing to home I'd felt.

Then, oh joy, I lucked out.

A friend, Raine Shine, had a family friend who owned a second-hand musical instrument shop in Dalston, and was having built a small recording studio in the basement.

He had offered her a job as engineer, and asked if she knew anyone else, and she suggested me.

Neither of us had engineered before, but we just knew we could do it.

After the equipment was installed we were given one quick lesson on how it all worked, and the next day we opened for business.

While we were finding our feet, a deal was offered to local bands – come in for a day, record three songs, take away a demo, all for a tenner.

We were inundated.

We both got very good very quickly.

It was basic; a four-track Teac tape machine, with a 16-channel Allen & Heath mixer, and mixing down to cassette!

But, by some fluke, it was a great sounding room.

Yes, it was a truly magical time.

A band recording would be like this:

Drums on track one, bass on track two, guitars on track three.

These would then be 'bounced down' to the fourth track, leaving three tracks for vocals and other overdubs.

Everything had to be right going down to tape, no room for error.

For this we were paid £40 a week, cash in hand.

Now that was a lot of money in those days.

One of the local bands I recorded, Light Of The World, went on to have a few hits, and in fact were on the same Whistle Test TV show that I played with The Passions some years later.

Raine recorded The Edgar Broughton Band, brilliantly.

Raine also recorded a band I played guitar in at the time, called, wait for it.....

BAD NEWS.

The studio owner, Pete Younger, who also owned the adjacent news-agents, was 'managing' us and he named the band, so I can wash my hands of that one.

George Bertrand was the singer, he and I wrote the songs.

One day Pete got us to visit a friend of his, Michael Julien, to “get some tips from a professional songwriter.”

We caught the tube out to Gants Hill, Jewish suburbia, to his house.

“What songs have you written we might know?” we asked.

“Well,” he said, his chest swelling with pride, “You’ll probably know Boom-Bang-A-Bang,”

We tried so hard not to laugh.

Pete brought a journalist down to a session, to do a piece on us in the local paper.

He was convinced George was going to be a star.

George looked a bit like a swarthy Roger Daltrey, long curly hair and all that, and was definitely a looker.

About a week later I met Pete and Raine in the local café.

Pete looked thoroughly depressed.

“What’s up? Didn’t the piece go in?”

He pushed the paper toward me, in a huff.

It had gone in, but it didn't mention George at all.

It said "The one who really caught my eye was talented lead guitarist, 17..."

"It's a disaster," he said.

That was the end of the band, and the end of my job.

Can you believe it?

Raine went on to work with Vangelis on Bladerunner.

The bass player in the band, Lee Gorman, joined Adam and The Ants, and then Bow Wow Wow.

I've no idea what happened to George.

Raine and I spent a solid year working at that studio.

We'd do shifts, one band after the other, day and night.

It was just the two of us, recording, mixing, producing, occasionally vacuuming and dusting, with Pete handing over cash when pestered.

It's not there anymore, and that really is a shame.

Chapter 10

At the same time as I was working in the studio, in 1977, my aunt and Jet flew back from Amsterdam and rented a tiny bed-sit in East London.

The last time I'd seen them they were all hennaed hair, sparkly Lurex legwarmers, sunshine and laughter.

Now Jet was seriously ill.

She had what seemed like Parkinson's and could barely walk and, more worryingly, had started hearing voices.

One day when I was there she wanted to fill in tiny holes and cracks in the walls, from where she said the voices were coming.

After we helped her fill them all in, with bits of wet tissue, she fell into a fitful sleep.

My aunt and I were exhausted.

She put on the kettle and I put on the radio.

As if to make the whole day completely surreal, it was announced that Elvis Presley had died.

That was the last time I saw Jet, she died not long after.

It was so sad to see someone so vibrant, so full of life, so beautiful, be cut down so completely.

I don't know if she had a diagnosis or was on medication.

Drugs do work.

OK, let's not beat about the bush, I've taken drugs, but only Cocaine, LSD, MDMA, amphetamine sulphate, amyl nitrate, psychotropic mushrooms, marijuana, alcohol, tobacco, caffeine, and aspirin.

I got drunk for the first time aged 12, a school trip to France.

It was all John Fox's fault.

I was in the first year, he the fifth.

He later went on to become the singer in Ultravox....

No he didn't, that was John Foxx.

This one was just a thug.

We were in Paris, at dinner, and he slipped me a few beers.

I have no recollection of anything after the restaurant.

Apparently I had gotten up in the middle of the night, peed on a bed (that was fortunately empty - we were in a dormitory) and climbed into another boy's.

It took a very long time to live that down.

I remember one night some of the boys were drunk and rowdy and his way of calming them down was to punch them in the face in their beds, knocking them out cold.

Fortunately I was sober enough to pretend I was asleep.

I started smoking a year later.

My aunt was looking after us one night.

She offered me a cigarette.

I was shocked, told her I didn't smoke.

She didn't believe me.

Everyone smoked in those days it seemed.

Later that night I crept down and stole one from her pack while she dozed in front of the TV.

It was disgusting but I persevered.

I quit 24 years later.

Alcohol is not so easy.

I've had some fabulous times drinking; closing a few hotel bars with

Siouxsie Sioux, knocking back vodka gimlets; countless nights in

Spitalfields with Paul Smith, Susan Stenger, Bruce Gilbert, and Michael

Clark; Top Of The Stairs with Mogwai; the Twilight Sad beano bus....

I've also had some terrible times where I have been an absolute

nightmare.

As Homer Simpson succinctly put it "Alcohol, the cause of and the answer to all our problems."

Once, when I was about 14, steaming with friends, I smashed up a phone box.

I'm not proud of it.

Maybe that's why I so often didn't have a phone.

These days I cannot stomach the hangover.

It takes days to recover, and a lot of aspirin.

So, tobacco and alcohol, those are the two drugs that will absolutely kill you, that are completely addictive.

The taxable drugs.

The others are way more fun.

On a Mute Drivers European tour one time we stopped off in Amsterdam and bought 100 MDMA capsules (the good stuff, not cut with horse tranquillizer), took David's bass cabinet apart and hid them inside.

Going through customs at Dover we were searched, everything out the van.

I still can't believe we got away with it.

We split the Ecstasy between us and I fully expected to sell the majority of it.

I took the lot over the summer, one night taking nine.

That was a night that was.

I to this day do not know if any of the things that happened were real or imaginary.

Amphetamine Sulphate, speed.

Don't do it.

I rarely partook, fortunately.

Hours of teeth grinding and gibbering like an idiot.

The first time I took it though was fantastic, slimming pills.

It was at a disco, 1976, and I danced the night away.

Amyl Nitrate I had once, in a pub in Shepherd's Bush.

Someone had a bottle and passed it around.

I could literally hear my brain cells frying.

We were drinking Tennents Super at the time, or 'loony juice' as it was known colloquially.

A ludicrous combination, can make you throw a brick through someone's window just like that.

Amyl is more happily found in 'Poppers', which you can go get in gay sex stores, the idea being to pop one and sniff it just before climax.

It works.

Marijuana, for a while I smoked it from the moment I woke to the moment I passed out, haven't we all.

I would have to force myself to do anything through the fug.

In the end I got fed up having no, um, short or, ah, long-term, what's it called... memory.

I quit it same time as tobacco, along with sugar.

Believe me, you quit tobacco you will want to eat more cakes than when you were stoned.

Psychotropic mushrooms.

First two times I took them I sat in a fetal ball willing it to be over.

Third time was just the other day and it was great.

I had a wonderful cocaine year.

Sorry, but there it is.

A neighbor dealt the good stuff so supply was no problem and I had the demand, and somehow the cash.

Staying up all night, coming up with world shattering theories, ideas that no human has ever thought....

Never has so much shit been spoken by so few.

It will destroy your septum and clear out your bank account.

But it's great.

I gave up caffeine the same time as tobacco, the two going hand in glove.

I was hardline, drinking gallons of espresso daily.

I was also taking DoDo's, an over-the-counter caffeine pill.

Unsurprisingly it started to give me acute flu-like symptoms and bring me out in a rash.

It's amazing that I still have all my teeth.

I didn't take LSD until I was twenty-eight.

David Rogers and I were given four microdots from our friends Loop and split them between the two of us.

That night I took one and waited half an hour.

Nothing happened.

So I took the other one.

I was sitting on the floor of my flat, listening to music on a little boom box.

Suddenly the faint stains on the carpet turned into a sea of writhing monsters, and the boom box started walking towards me, speaker by speaker

I was terrified, in a cold, cold sweat.

I pulled myself together best I could and went across the busy street to the phone box.

I have no idea how I made it through the traffic.

I called David and begged him to come rescue me.

It actually seemed like forever till he arrived.

He looked like he'd just hacked his way through a jungle.

Fortunately he and Claire had both taken one too, so we were in a similar psychedelic boat.

Getting from my place to his, all of 200 yards, seemed to take aeons.

Somehow we arrived and I spent the next eight hours in their sitting room, on top of a huge hill.

Something by Pink Floyd was on repeat play.

At dawn I slid down the hill and they both walked me home.

That's true friendship.

TO
THE MUTES

WE LOVE

you

Love
Loops
X

Chapter 11

Having crawled back to London from Amsterdam, I spent 1992 taking care of Glen, my beautiful galumphing erudite friend.

He had epilepsy, brought on by a brain tumor.

We were at Jo's one night, he told us he was up for a job working for Disney as an animator and drew us a bunch of incredible cartoons.

Just before the interview the tumor struck putting paid to his fine motor functions.

No longer able to draw he attended a full time course on computer animation, so I signed on the dole, kept house, cooked the meals, looked after us.

It was what I needed.

I started to relax.

And then that something that had been with me my whole life, which I had tried so hard to, and, I thought, successfully bury, nagged at me.

I started buying women's clothes again.

I'd wear them for a bit, then feel embarrassed at myself and throw them all away, each time swearing I wouldn't do it again.

Then I did.

It's called purging, google it.

This went on and on and on.

When I was about eight years old my mother took in sewing, and one day had a pile of skirts to alter.

When she wasn't looking I stole one.

I was hiding right from the start.

There was no one I could talk to.

I already got punished for nothing.

One night while she was sitting, my aunt and I watched a 'World In Action' program on Quentin Crisp, filmed at his tiny bed-sit in London's Chelsea.

A powdery blue-rinsed creature, enveloped in chiffon, paraded before my eyes; I was intrigued and entranced.

I remember around the same time walking through a local market, and The Kinks' 'Lola' came on a radio.

My aunt asked my mother if she'd listened to the lyric.

What?

This was 1970, and, having a paper round/slave labor job, I'd saved up a little money, so bought it, my first record, 7" vinyl, eight shillings and sixpence.

I listened intently; the scales slowly started to fall away.

I thought I must be gay.

After all, my first sexual encounter had been with a boy, a neighbor.

I was 13, he a year older.

One night my parents were out and we were playing around in my room, drinking half-inched beer.

He took a porn magazine from his pocket, and asked if I'd ever masturbated.

I said I'd fumbled, so he unzipped himself and demonstrated.

He then suggested we look at the magazine and masturbate together.

After a while he asked me to masturbate him, which I did, and quite happily.

Then he asked if I could penetrate him, anally.

I was hesitant, but before I could answer he pulled up his trousers and ran out.

Next morning I called on him.

His brother answered and told me that he never wanted to see me again, slamming the door in my face.

Remember Jimmy Grierson?

Well, after the band fizzled out Jimmy and I had a bit of a fling, and behind his boyfriend's back - sorry, but there it is.

One day I asked him "Do you think it's possible for a man to become a woman, and be a lesbian?"

Amazing that I knew then what I was, but could not see it.

I threw the idea out hoping he'd understand.

He stopped answering my calls, and I never saw him again.

There were a couple of other men but really my heart wasn't in it.

So, I concluded I probably wasn't gay.

Seeing as I enjoyed sex with women this was hardly surprising.

So, I'm bi-sexual?

This made sense, but didn't feel right either.

All the time I was buying and purging women's clothes, and hating myself.

All that drinking and drug taking?

Self-medication.

Having at last gotten my own secure place, in Glen's Housing Co-op, I decided it was time to let these feelings run free.

I stopped purging.

In some respects because of my year caring for Glen, I applied for and got a volunteer post at MIND, the mental health charity for England and Wales, on their telephone information line....

Log, Monday, June 10th.

A man said his son had just killed himself, but wanted to thank us for all the help we had given him.

A man asked what I would do if someone called to say they had been sexually abusing their children.

I told him that first off I would say that the call was confidential, and that was sacrosanct.

Before I could go any further he screamed at me, saying I was despicable, "just like all the others", and hung up.

A woman called to say that she had taken an overdose and wanted to say goodbye.

We talked for over an hour.

She hung up before I could get her address.

MIND produced a leaflet on Gender Dysphoria.

I read it, it was me, absolutely crystal clear.

Big lightbulb went off above my head.

For the first time in my life

IT ALL MADE SENSE!

Chapter 12

1998, I was at the Mute offices and Paul Smith, boss at Blast First, happened in, saw me, seemed to have a brainwave, and sidled over.

"Suicide are reforming. How do you fancy doing sound?"

Now, this is not something that happens everyday.

Mute looms large in my legend.

Nick Cave, Sonic Youth, Big Black, Wire, Butthole Surfers, Diamanda Galas, The Swans, Einsturzende Neubauten, S Express, Renegade Soundwave, These Immortal Souls, Moby, Nitzer Ebb, World Domination

Enterprises, Bomb The Bass, Laibach, Fad Gadget, UT, AC Marias, Erasure, Anita Lane, Barry Adamson, Simon Fisher Turner, Depeche Mode....

So much joy came out of that place, 429 Harrow Road.

So many friends too.

It's not there anymore.

A real shame.

That Suicide reunion has gone down in history, of course.

Everyone was there.

Take a listen to their first record, it's incredible that it came out in 1977, along with disco and punk.

When I met them I asked Alan Vega what he wanted me to do with his voice.

"Whatever you like baby."

It was a lorra lorra lorra fun, fun, fun, fun, fun.....



February 22nd 2002 Suicide were to play a big show at Deitch's Gallery in New York and Paul had me fly over to do it.

In 2000 I'd toured with the reformed Wire who Paul was managing, the first show being Dublin.

I'd somehow managed to get hold of Barbara Gogan's email address and asked if she was around.

Wire's very first performance, back in the late seventies, had been as the opener for The Derelicts, a band in which Barbara was the guitar player, her sister Sue the singer.

Before The Derelicts played their first song, Sue said, over the mic, "You have just witnessed the death throes of cock rock", referring to Wire's debut.

Not true, it transpired, but a great line.



Incredibly, Barbara was in town.

She been clearing out her old place in Bray, so the morning after the show got The Dart into Dublin and we met for brunch.

We'd not seen each other since that last Passions show at The Marquee, 17 years before.

I'd sometimes wondered how it would've been if she'd stayed in London back then and we'd got together.

We'd had a fling, you see.

She came with her boyfriend, a nice, quiet, younger guy, and I felt no, the two of us, that would never have worked.

But it was absolutely lovely to see her.

So, if you can cast your mind back to the future, there I was in New York, Deitch Gallery, and emailed her to see if she was around and wanted to come to the Suicide show.

She was and did, would be on her own, her boyfriend gone.

Now, every once in a while everything conspires and magic happens, and that night, I swear, there was a purple sky full of shooting stars and the moon was smiling.

The queue for the show was around the block and off the charts.

She walked past them all and up to the doorman.

"I'm on the guest list," she said.

He looked her up and down.

"I don't think..... oh, you are!" he said with surprise and raised the rope with a smile.

She came up afterwards while I was chatting with Paul, so I introduced them.

She offered to go to the bar and get drinks and as she walked away Paul gave me a knowing look.

"What?"

"Oh nothing" he said, smiling enigmatically.

"What?"

Alan Vega had an art exhibition on in Deitch's adjacent space, so after the show we all went along.

I started introducing her to people, but she knew most of them, of course, and introduced a few folks to me.

"This is Jim Thirwell", she said.

I smiled and shook his hand, having no idea who he was.

"From Foetus", she quickly added, seeing my consternation.

"Ah, of course", I said, none the wiser.

I know, not the most auspicious or riveting encounter.

She then suggested we go to Tonic, a club on the Lower East Side, and see her friend, Robert, singing with his band Morricone Youth, which we did.

Tonic, it's not there anymore.

And so it goes.

It was a great show and we left happy, high as kites.

Being the wee small hours, I offered to drop her home, on the way to my hotel on Thirty Fourth Street.

We jumped in a cab and pulled up at her place on East Third.

Now, it would have been so easy for us to say goodbye.

We quite possibly would never have seen each other again.

But we leaned into each other and kissed.

KABOOM!

The twenty-second day of the second month, two thousand and two.

The angels were singing.

This was just five months after 9/11.

I went to ground zero.

It was enclosed in hastily raised plywood walls, all covered with thousands upon thousands of messages.

People leaving condolences, support, others looking for information on lost loved ones.

I was waiting for Barbara while she did a yoga class nearby.

She didn't want to see it; too painful.

We walked home.

It had been raining, the sun breaking through; early afternoon, arm in arm, smiling at people smiling at us.

It was a revelation, a feeling of belonging like no other I had ever felt in my entire life.

New York City - I felt I was home.

That night, just before midnight, I was drawing some cash from an ATM.

I became aware of a presence; someone seemed to be hiding in a darkened doorway.

I took my bills and as I started to walk away the figure emerged.

It was a man, mid 30's, he knocked into me, had something in his hand.

A knife? A gun?

I tensed.

"Excuse me", he said, apologetically. "You have a good night", and walked off, pocketing his cell phone.



Chapter 13

Life is like a day trip to Beijing.

It takes ages to get there and just when you start to figure it all out you have to leave.

For a little while we, as Kurt Vonnegut once said, get to look out through a peephole.....

.....1975, Ron's Music Shop, before the bust.

A busker, Don Crown, would come in every day and buy harmonicas.

He had a dog and budgie act.

He'd feign annoyance at a particular bird, one he'd trained to get everything wrong, and stomp on his harmonica in a mock fit.

It was quite a show and a couple of times I played drums for him at kids parties, doing a roll and cymbal crash when his dog jumped through a hoop.....

....Warsaw, 1989, stop-start traffic.

At a light, I glanced down to the sidewalk.

What looked like a bundle of rags covered in gray dust moved, a mother and baby appeared, begging....

.....School band, I can't remember what we were called.

A neighbor of the drummer had a reel-to-reel tape machine and recorded us, one mic in the room.

Barely able to play we thought we were the bee's knees.

We were 11.

This was 1970, the moon landing just a year before.

I played bass and sang, the songs, all originals, had a bit of a space theme.

We took it to The Beatles label, Apple, fully expecting to get signed up.

A week later they handed us back the tape with a standard letter issuing a resounding no, the first of many....

....2009, Twilight Sad tour.

We had a laundry drop off that was returned mixed up in one huge bag.

14 lads and me, on a bus, me not yet out to them.

I got in first and thought I'd retrieved everything.

Andy MacFarlane found a knee high, a pop sock.

"What's this?" he asked, dangling it in front of me.

"Must have been in the machine before, from someone else", I lied.

"I've got your back, buddy"

Later that night we were loading out of the venue, in Toronto, and I, seeing a crate of water in the dressing room, picked it up and headed for the bus.

A young whippersnapper, who had been employed as a bouncer for the end of the night, grabbed me.

"Drop it," he demanded.

"It's ours", I said "I'm taking it to our bus."

"I said drop it. Now!"

With that he knocked it out of my hands, toughed up, and was about to hit me.

Out of nowhere Andy MacFarlane and Martin Docherty flew into him, pushed him against a wall, elbows at his throat.

"No, you do not do that" they said, with a chilling calmness.

Lovely boys.....

.....1999, New York City, a day off on tour with The Creatures, Siouxsie and Budgie.

I was taken to a vampire bar by guitarist Rob Holliday.

There were a lot of fake vampire teeth.

A couple had implanted devil horns, a fair few women wore white wedding dresses, corpse brides.

At one end was a small stage upon which sat what looked like The Lost Boys Appreciation Society.

I'd never witnessed the phenomena of fans who travel to every show on a tour before and Siouxsie had quite a posse, most of them there that night, waiting to draw blood.....

.....1988, Spring, a Mute Drivers tour, getting to Austria after a week in Poland.

The iron curtain was still drawn tightly closed, cutting off Eastern Europe from the 'free world'.

To get to Poland from the west entailed driving through the East German 'corridor' to the Polish border.

The first indication that things were going to get very different was seeing the sign at the east-west Berlin border, 'You Are Now Leaving The American Sector'.

Literally as soon as the border was crossed, the trees, choc full of chlorophyll in the west, were bare.

The grass, what there was of it, was brown.

Looking in the rear view mirror a huge sign, the beacon of the west, shone brightly - 'Mercedes'.

Gasoline in Poland was heavily rationed, tickets needing to be purchased at the border in order to obtain it.

Most of the cars, surprisingly, were not Trabants, but tiny Fiats, the size of sixties matchbox bubble cars.

Housing was allocated rabbit hutches on muddy estates, the waiting list a minimum of five years.

Regular stores were barren, but there were 'Pewex' shops, which sold western foods and goods cheap to westerners only, for hard currency.

We went to one, came out laden with stuff and skulked past a queue of women at a bakery where there was no bread.

We had a week of this, just the two of us, because the promoter for the tour booked it for the wrong month, we found upon our arrival in Warsaw.

There wasn't even a fax machine in those days, just Telex.

Not having enough cash to go straight to Austria for a week off, we pootled around Poland, venturing south painfully slowly.

At the border David tried to call his girlfriend from the hotel.

He had to book the call, and was told it would take fifteen minutes to connect.

After half an hour he called down to reception.

No, not fifteen minutes; fifteen hours!

When the call finally got put through they were cut off almost immediately.

You get the picture.

When we eventually got to Austria, to Linz, we cried into our veggie soups, mopping up with freshly baked rolls....

....Caribou, 2009, in Bogotá, at a venue called Las Vegas, replete with a neon palm trees.

The dressing room was one of a number, the rest locked, all off a corridor.

It was painted a deep red, with nothing in it but a bed and a closet, all surfaces wipe-clean.

It was a brothel, the working girls given the night off.

One of the band's fans, a 16-year-old girl, managed to wangle her way in, and was very excited.

Just Dan and I were there.

She got his autograph, and asked me to take a photo of the two of them.

"Is she your mother?" she asked him, as I snapped away.....

.....1979, I sent a demo to Geoff Travis at Rough Trade.

He said he liked it and would distribute it if I could press it.

I couldn't raise the cash, damn it damn it damn it.....

....1985, I called Jeff Smith, formerly of The Passions, to ask how his show in Brighton the night before had gone, he having a new band.

Mike Horak, my friend, a beautiful man, a fantastic singer and songwriter, was changing a flat on the hard shoulder, stepped back and was hit by a truck, killing him instantly.

There was nothing recognizable left....

....2000, mixing Masonna, yes, Masonna, at The Garage.

Russell Haswell ran in, put one foot on the edge of the board, and was about to leap over it and into the crowd.

I grabbed him just before he took off, his momentum sending him flying backwards and out of the booth.

Wasn't long after that he threw himself out of a New York hotel window.....

.....1988, making by hand the cover for the first 500 of the first Mute Drivers LP, 'Lighten Up Volume One'.

We then made for a subsequent tour 200 posters for our West German promoter, based at a collective in West Berlin called KOB.

We spent days and days in my flat in decorators masks spraying car paint through homemade stencils.

We gave up a lot of brain cells to those fumes but managed to get the posters done and mailed off.

When we arrived at the venue I found them covered in dust under a staircase, unopened.....

.....1964, East Ham Granada with my father, the first band I ever saw live, Freddie and The Dreamers.

Freddie was the Jerry Lewis of pop.

Then the main band came on, The Rolling Stones.

At least I think they did, all I remember is the screaming, the relentless, impossibly high-pitched pubescent screaming....

....1994, Nottingham Playhouse, The Tempest world tour.

Each night John Lloyd Fillingham transformed his hotel room into an exclusive club for cast and crew and named it 'Chez Jean'.

On the night of my birthday he had an inflatable paddling pool in the

bathroom, decorations and balloons bestrew the place.

What a night, what a tour, I fell in love with Shakespeare.....

.....2004, I was away in LA for a day or two

Went to the MTV Movie Awards zoo

Saw Sharon Stone standing alone outside a Portaloo

Saw Paris Hilton wilting like she was made of paper and glue

Saw Adam Sandler and his handlers littler than life

Saw Quentin Tarantino at a bar with my soon to be wife

And all the while with circus smiles The Yeah Yeah Yeahs got hammered

As the company drones climbed over the unknown in their clamor for
glamour.



The Yeah Yeah Yeahs.

I met Karen O through Angus Andrew, singer with the band Liars, for whom I mixed sound.

He and Karen were the 'campus couple'.

We hit it off straight away.

After seeing and hearing me mix a Liars show Karen asked me to tour with The Yeah Yeah Yeahs.

This was 2002 and at that point they had yet to release an LP.

We became firm friends.

In 2006 we were in Leeds, they having performed the Leeds part of the Leeds/Reading festival, main stage, third from headline, no small thing.

Next day was a bank holiday Monday, a day off.

Having been working flat out the tour manager, our third that year, promised us, the crew, that we'd be somewhere decent in town, so we were not best pleased when our bus pulled up at a murder lodge on a ring road and there were no rooms booked.

I, buoyed by Maker's Mark, grabbed a phone on which someone had called him and screamed exactly what I thought of him, in no uncertain terms.

I'm not proud of it.

Next morning, he with a smug look, me with a hangover, breakfasted.

I took the high road.

I fell with an awful thud.

I'd been with the band five years.

I got fired.

It was time to wake up.

Chapter 14

I used to have a recurring dream.

I was trying to run away from my maternal Grandfather's house, but my legs wouldn't work.

I remember the pillar-box just up the street melting as I failed to reach it.

Then I would feel the monster in my bed, grabbing at my feet.

I'd pull my legs up and cover my head, thinking that if I made myself invisible it would go away.

It seemed so real to me..

Chapter 15

Barbara and I lived together for seven years.

I loved her so much, and I still do.

We made beautiful music together.

We got identical tattoos.

We were married in two thousand eight.

A year later it was through.

We had the worst fight of my life.

She locked herself in the bedroom.

I put the door in, fell into the room, and straightened myself up the best I could.

There I was, in my cups and off my head, acting like my father had all those years ago.

It was the end, of course.

I grabbed some clothes, stuffed them in a bag and left, screaming something primal and wrong.

I drove like a demon, cutting people up over the 59th Street Bridge, and on up I-87.

I hit the Harriman turn off to route 17, dazed, in pain.

I started to see flashing lights, a migraine, I thought.

Traffic cops behind me let off their siren and pulled me over.

"Have you been drinking?"

I decided to lie.

"No."

"No what?"

"No sir."

"Walk a straight line."

I did it.

"Follow my finger left and right."

I did it.

"You sure you ain't been drinking?"

"No."

"What?"

"I mean yes, sir.

"Ok, you can go, but watch yourself."

Not sure how on earth to do that I set off best I could.

I arrived at our Pennsylvania house as day broke.

Walking away from the car I heard a rumble.

I turned to see it falling fast, backwards down the driveway.

I'd not put it in park.

For a second I thought to try and jump in the driver's seat .

I'd be dead now.

I watched it veer off and crash into a tree, spilling gas and oil everywhere,
an eco disaster.

I sloped into the house and looked myself in the mirror.

Scratches on my neck, my T-shirt ripped.

And the cops let me go.

Nine lives over.

We had two cats.

They knew what was afoot.

Junior was an only cat till one day he brought back the love of his life.

They had identical coats.

We named him Beau, which he immediately understood.

He and I became great friends.

Just after I moved out Beau was run over by a car and killed.

It was a hybrid, practically silent.

The man who ran him down brought him up to Barbara in a box.

She buried him in the woods behind the house, where he used to frolic,
doing moonlit dances.

For the first time I saw the signpost clearly.

One way said repeating pattern.

The other said NOW.



Chapter 16

I was born in 1959.

England was in black and white.

The Second World War had ended only 14 years before.

The money was old; the ten bob note, the thrupenny bit, the half crown, the tanner, the ha'penny piece, pounds, shillings and pence; L.s.d.

Measurements were fathoms, furlongs, and chains, weights were bushels, pecks, and grains.

Rag and bone men rode the streets on horse and cart, crying "Any ol' rag 'a' lumber!"

Milk was delivered, daily.

So was pop, cream soda for summer floats.

There were barely two TV stations, BBC and the fledgling ITV.

The sets were valve, took their own sweet time to warm up, the picture appearing gradually, enticingly, rolling for a while before stopping on a tiny, blurred image.

Steam trains still puffed away.

Kids played on the street, rarely a car passing.

People really did leave their front doors open, the kettle always on.

'Side Saddle' by Russ Conway was top of the Hit Parade on the day of my birth.

An innocuous and rather tuneless instrumental piano ditty, it's title somehow pointed the way to the future.

I didn't see an avocado till I was 17.

We would eat the same things on the same day of the week, every week: chops on Monday, chicken on Tuesday, mince on Wednesday, liver on Thursday, fish on Friday, mixed grill Saturday, beef, lamb, or pork for Sunday lunch.

Was it because rationing was in force till 1956 that we ate so much goddam meat?

Sunday night would be left-over cold cuts, with lettuce, tomato, and cucumber, smothered in salad cream.

Our local grocery store was called 'Huckle's', ostensibly run by Mrs. Huckle, a wizened old woman, and her forty something baby son, Norman.

She'd castigate him while slicing ham thinner than imagination.

Oh, and lest we forget, there was unbridled, institutionalized racism.

A family from India lived opposite us.

They were referred to as Pakis.

Grasp of geography anyone?

Dog shit through their letterbox was a daily occurrence.

The Tories were in government for their third consecutive term, with

Harold Macmillan Prime Minister.

It was like 1945, Clement Atlee, the Welfare State and all that had never happened.

We've never had it so good?

Curlers, hairnets, cut-throat razors,

Eiderdown spreads in mothballs,

Crocheted doll toilet roll covers,

Brasses and draughts in the hall,

Chocolate dropped golden retrievers,

Old Holborn, holed socks, hardened hearts,

Bathing in tin tubs in winter,

Summer in raincoats and scarves,

Arteries clogged with blood pudding,

Varicose veined, clocking in

To work in an asbestos factory,

Holidays in Bognor Regis,

War torn and worn thin with nothing,

Kids beat on kids beat on kids,

Shell shocked and silenced by violence,

This is no way to live.

Chapter 17

Dear Barbara

I knew you were the one when when I first met you in '82, and I fell in love with you that night, when you came to my room, slid into my bed.

When you left for a new life in the New World I was happy that you'd find a real way to live but so sad as your hand slipped out of mine, on the Central Line, late '83.

I had to wait nineteen years till we held hands again but we did and for seven astonishing years.

So much music, so much joy, so many tears, so much misunderstanding, so much truth, such hurt inside, so many wrongs, yet oh so right.

Now we are three thousand miles and a million light years apart.

Will our orbits will cross again?

At twenty-four nineteen years is a lifetime, at fifty-four an impossible dream.

We got it, we really did, and we lost it so spectacularly.

I loved you then, I love you still.

I always did, I always will.

I have to let you go.

xo

Julia

Chapter 18

Since I've been here on this spinning ball I've learned a few things.

There's pain, for sure.

Disappointment, undoubtedly.

Bad choices, indeed.

Life is not linear, it's messy.

There is no such thing as reality, everything is in flux.

What there is, I know, in abundance is love, pure sweet love.

I've traveled the world over and seen how selfless loving help is universal and really is the true human condition.

Nobody wants to feel bad, nobody.

There is no inherent evil, just people who need love and guidance.

It's easy to demonize, be it through bigotry, racism, fear, but it's not who we are or how we're meant to be.

And here's the good news, it's not who we are going to become.

One thing that would help right now is for us to stop rewarding people who have only their own self-interest at heart.

In America we just saw that signpost very clearly indeed and voted them out .

Steven Pinker says that we are living in the most peaceful time of our existence and are not condemned to endless war.

Don't thank God for that.

He doesn't exist.

Let him be gone the way of Zeus, Thor, and Santa Claus.

We haven't much time, you know.

As we get older it goes by faster.

Not fair, but there it is.

If there's something, anything, that you are not doing because you are scared, do it now.

If you're hurting someone, stop it.

If you're screwing things up for the rest of us, quit it.

If you smile at a stranger, stop and talk even, leave them feeling better than they did, that spreads.

Do it, it'll make you feel better too.

There is no excuse for ignorance and hate.

It is time for us all to wake from our infant state.

It's nearly too late.

Have compassion, understanding, beauty, joy, see connectedness with all living things, the universe flowing within without, be caring, sharing, open, spread happiness, peace, and love, and find the inner light.

That is the point.

Coda

There's no need to be afraid

Mister Hyde has gone

IF MUTE Drivers were a trio, and they were all named John, then they'd have every right to go ahead and call themselves The Three Johns.

But they're a duo, called Steve and David, and they drive vans for Mute Records.

So, despite bearing a passing resemblance to the Leeds agit-pop gurus, both musically and politically, they call themselves Mute Drivers instead. Strange but true.

You're a 'real' band then, Steve. I was beginning to have my doubts.

"Funnily enough, when we released our first LP, someone phoned up and said, Is it Depeche Mode under an alias?"

I suspected it was a one-off – a way of letting off steam.

"The first record was a way of letting off steam, a way for us to say how pissed off we were – with our own personal lives and with the world generally. But it sold, so we decided to carry on."

That debut album was 'Lighten Up Volume One', a rampage of jagged glass guitar and spat-out vocals – half-sung, half-spoken – all pushed forward in the mix and propelled by a furiously pumping drum machine.

Its release in November 1987 was greeted by enthusiastic, but mystified reviews. The album's best line appeared in the anti-vivisection song, 'Try Saying Murder' – "Try saying murder without saying mmmm...". A taste of fun to come.

As they got into their stride, Mute Drivers found that by bashing out records in the space of a few days, they were able to capture the spontaneous thrill of live performance, and build up a back catalogue of which your average five-year-old band would be proud.

By December 1988, the creatively overflowing duo had a limited edition cassette, two albums, two singles and a mini-LP under their belts, with a double album set for release this April.

THE CURRENT single (on their own Irradiated label) is 'Boomtown' – a shuffling, snarling indictment of Thatcher's



MUTE DRIVERS (L-R) Steve, David

NO U-TURNS

When they're not driving truckloads of records for Mute, Mute Drivers are blasting out their own brand of agit-pop. Mr Spencer climbs aboard to hear their new single, 'Boomtown', on the car stereo. Greg Freeman snaps the roadhogs

greed-riddled Britain.

David: "I don't think you can ever over-emphasise politics."

Steve: "Someone somewhere is bound to say, It's really trendy to be left-wing. Or they'll say, Music and politics don't mix. But we're doing what we're doing, and saying what we're saying, because it's relevant to the times we live in – it's just what's happening, and it's got nothing to do with trends or fads."

Do you see any light at the end of the tunnel?

"I think the potential for self-annihilation is bigger now than it's ever been. But yes, I'd say there is hope for the future. You see, things have got to get worse and worse... it has to affect people directly."

Could the Poll Tax be the turning-point?

"I don't know if the Poll Tax'll do it. It might just tip the balance – or maybe they've got to do something totally outrageous, like nuke Libya, so people will go, Aye oop, we've just slaughtered thousands of innocent people 'ere."

"It could get to that stage, or an irreversible hole in the ozone layer, that kind of thing."

Besides spreading their often darkly ironic political messages via copious amounts of vinyl, Mute Drivers also tour incessantly.

More often than not, you'll find Mute Drivers hurtling up and down the motorways of Europe, where they've already earned themselves a loyal following.

David: "We thought, in the past, that maybe all we should be doing is playing at American air bases, giving out lyric sheets to the GIs, really laying into them, and then talking about it. But then we decided we probably wouldn't come out alive."

YOU CAN respond to Mute Drivers' exhilarating blasts of vitriol in a number of ways. You can dance to the runaway beat; you can sing along to the catchy choruses. You can even smile.

Steve: "We have had patches where it's been totally humourless, where we've depressed ourselves. So, it is important for us to keep track of our sense of humour, just to keep sane."

"You have to laugh, but we don't trivialise issues."

If these boys haven't achieved folk hero status by 1992, I'll swallow my football identity card.

WHEN Cameron McVey rushed in to our office to tell us all about BIM's new album, we were all knocked out by the fantastic clothes he was wearing.

Cameron explained that BIM had just returned from a tour of the Far East where he bought the clothes.

"They are all Japanese workmen's clothes, big, baggy and easy to move around in, so we thought they'd make great stage gear for the band," explained Cameron.

But, this good-looking, lead singer is not just a pretty face!

Cameron bought one outfit, brought it back home and re-designed an entire wardrobe for the band.

It seemed only fair to let you have a peek, too, so we pointed Cameron in the direction of our fashion photographer's camera and we hope you like our results. The grey outfit you see him pictured in is the *actual* one he'll be wearing on stage!

If you like our Eastern look, there are lots of designs around for turning Japanese. The ones we've chosen are from selections by Johnson's and Fiorucci — a little expensive but well-worth saving up for. If your budget really won't stretch to their prices, search the High Street shops like Chelsea Girl and the chain stores for Eastern-look tops with high collars and T-shirts with Japanese prints — just about everyone's turning Japanese!

West looks East for stunning styles
with a true touch of Oriental Spirit!

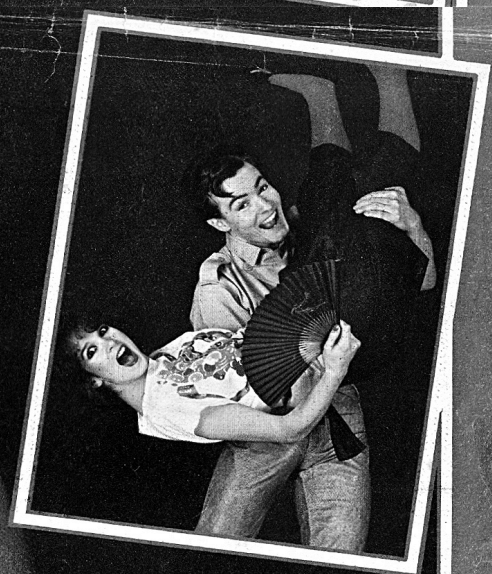
FASHION &
POP SPECIAL!

BRING OUT THE EAST IN YOU... TURN JAPANESE!

Left: Cameron: Man's white vest, £1.85 from Marks & Spencer. Japanese workman's trousers (model's own). Japanese leather jacket and cap both from Johnson's, 406 King's Road, London, SW6 and Kensington Market, London, W8.

Kim: Japanese print dress with side split also from Johnson's. Red tights 99p by Mary Quant. Black pumps, £6.99 by Ravel from all branches.

Oriental hair decoration from a selection available from The Roger Hart Salon. Prices start from around £2.50. For mail order enquiries, write to: Roger Hart, 2 Milroy Walk, London, SE1.



TWENTY ALBUMS
FREE!

If you'd like a copy of BIM's new album, which is due for release later this month, write your name and address on a postcard and send it to PHOTO-LOVE/BIM ALBUM FREEBIE, King's Reach Tower, Stamford Street, London SE1 9LS. If your card is one of the first twenty pulled out of our postbag, we'll send you an album FREE!



Top picture: Cameron: Photographed here in his Japanese workman's outfit bought while on tour.

Kim: Mini skirt and matching top with rising-sun print. Headband wrapped around as belt and one tied in the hair. All from Johnson's Japanese collection (as before).

Above: Cameron: Japanese work shirt and leather trousers by Johnson's. Woolly cap is his own.

Kim: Japanese mask print T-shirt and cotton baggy Jap work trousers both from a selection at Fiorucci, Sloane Street, London, SW3 and Brighton.

Hair by Kamel at The Roger Hart Salon, 2 Milroy Walk, London SE1.

Photos

Front cover - Over the North Pole, en route to Beijing

Page 37 - Trying to escape, 1963

Page 48 - Bim, a test Polaroid from a photo shoot, taken by Jamie Morgan, London, 1981

Page 54 - The Passions, atop the Empire State Building, taken by me, New York, 1983

Page 70 - David Rogers, Zurich, 1988

Page 77 - My sketch of 'Melting' start to finish 1990

Page 84 - Jo, London, 1984

Page 103 - The wrap the microdots came in, 1988

Page 113 - Liz Lamere and husband Alan Vega, 2012

Page 115 - Urban terrorist Paul Smith, New York, 2002

Page 122 - Our tattoos, on Barbara's birthday 2003

Page 133 - Karen O and Christian Joy, with Barbara's nephew Dash, the green room at Central Park Summer Stage, taken by Spike Jonze, 2004

Page 141 - That boy, 1961

Page 153 - Mute Drivers, Sounds, 1989

Page 154 - Bim, Photo Love, 1981

Back cover - Coming in to land

Music and video

Page 47 - Bim 'The Blind Lead The Blind', 12 inch version 1981

Recorded at Wessex, London, produced by Mick Jones

Page 58 - The Passion 'Hunted', Old Grey Whistle Test, Manchester 1983

Filmed during European tour

Page 67 - Mute Drivers 'PWA', from the LP 'Everyone' 1990

Video collage from shots taken at Szene Wien show 1989

Page 73 - Mute Drivers 'Boomtown', Snub TV 1988, our storyboard

Filmed by Brenda Kelly and Pinko at The Mean Fiddler, London

Page 83 - Core 'Melting', 7 inch version 1991

Recorded at Worldwide, London, produced by Paul Kendall

Page 158 - Goldfish 'Sunset Over Manhattan' 2005

Recorded at De La Masure, Equinunk PA, written and performed by

Barbara Gogan and myself, filmed by Barbara



About the Author

Julia Brightly is a writer, musician, painter, illustrator, broadcaster, producer of radio and records, and a transgender lesbian.

She was the guitar player in the groups Bim, The Passions, and Mute Drivers, the latter being also lead singer.

She has had over fifty songs published.

She has mixed sound for numerous bands such as Mogwai, Caribou, Yeah Yeah Yeahs, Slint, The Creatures, Wire, and on and on.

She currently tours with M83.

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