
TAW U3A CREATIVE WRITING GROUP



FEBRUARY 2021

INTRODUCTION

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Well, here we are 11 months on from hearing all those strange words such as ‘Covid-19’, ‘Pandemic’ and ‘Lockdown’ which filled our hearts with dread and for many, cut us off from our friends and family for long periods of time.

For me, personally, daily walks with friends kept my physical fitness intact, but Nature, Human Contact (albeit socially distanced and wearing a mask) and my love of the Written Word have achieved the same result for my mental well-being.

Now there is a light at the end of the tunnel with the Vaccination Programme and we can begin to move towards some kind of normality again.

Here in the Creative Writing Group we have managed to meet mentally each month through our stories and thanks to Bob for producing these booklets so that you too can escape into the world of fantasy with us.

Hopefully we’ll meet again very soon at a Coffee Morning and in the meantime enjoy our February stories about ‘The Old Man and the Parrot’

Sue Boyd
Group Leader
Creative Writing.

The Old Man and his Parrot

By Janet Winchester

Jim was pleased that he was able to grant his friend his one last wish – that he, Jim, would care for the parrot after Harry passed away.

Jim was very fond of Harry's parrot, and because the parrot was quite tame, the three of them had gone for many happy walks around the countryside together. Well, the parrot didn't actually walk – he just sat on Harry's shoulder and stared at the surroundings as Harry and Jim ambled along the muddy path through the woods. As they passed the Big House, Harry would pick up an apple that had fallen over the garden wall and offer it to the parrot who would peck at it greedily.

Jim and Harry chatted as they walked, and the parrot would regularly chip in with, well, the sort of things that parrots say. Things like, "*Lovely day! Lovely day!*" "*Give us a kiss! Give us a kiss!*" or, "*Going to the pub! Going to the pub!*" which, depending on who they met, could be a bit embarrassing. The parrot also became a bit of a conversation-killer with his frequent interruptions, but Jim and Harry put up with it because they knew the old bird liked to talk.

The parrot had a name – Polly – of course – but Harry was never sure whether the brightly coloured creature was male or female, so he just called him Polly – Polly the Parrot.

Harry had always said that, when he died, he would leave Polly to Jim in his will. Jim thought he had been joking, but no – when Harry sadly passed away and the will was read, there it was: "I leave my parrot to my dear friend, Jim." Signed, Harry.

Polly had been living with Jim and his wife Madge for several weeks now and appeared to be quite happy, but the funny thing was that although Jim regularly took Polly out for walks, which the parrot seemed to enjoy, he never said a word the whole time. It was as if the bird had only spoken when *both* Jim and Harry were there, so that he could purposefully interrupt and take over the conversation. Jim tried to get Polly to mimic his voice, saying "Time for tea!" and, "Bedtime now!" Over and over again, but the bird just stared mutely at him. Even Madge tried to get

the parrot to speak, without success. Oh well, Jim sadly thought to himself, it he doesn't want to speak we can't force him to, so they continued to live in parrot silence.

One day, Madge had an idea, "why don't I come with you on the walks – we could pop in and see my friend Edna." she suggested, "It may be that Polly likes to join in the conversation, but because you aren't talking to anyone, he has no-one to interrupt." Jim thought about it and then agreed. "Well, we'll give it a try – at least I don't go through the muddy woods nowadays – I just go along the pavements – so that would be easier for you."

So the following day Jim and Madge set out along the pavement, Polly happily perching on Jim's shoulder. Jim's wife didn't want Polly on *her* shoulder – she was afraid of unfortunate consequences; she was also a bit concerned to see Polly eyeing up the feather in her hat. However, Madge enjoyed the walk and it was good to have a leisurely chat with Jim, but the bird never said a word. Soon they came to Edna's house. Edna was out in the garden when they passed and she invited them in for a cup of tea. "Take a seat there, under the tree," she said pointing to some garden chairs under the old apple tree. "I'll go and put the kettle on." Jim and Madge took a seat in the shade of the tree, and Jim put Polly down on the lawn, knowing that the parrot would never run off. Moments later, Edna appeared with a tray bearing three mugs of tea and some delicious looking cake.

"So, how is Polly getting on – has he started speaking again yet?" she asked as she handed round the cake.

"No," Madge replied, "We've tried everything, but he just won't speak for us. I'm not sure if he's pining for Harry, or sulking because of something we do, or don't do, or if he's teasing us. It's strange because he seems quite contented, and he was happy enough to come to live with us."

"Well, it doesn't seem as if you can do anything else," Edna mused "– apart from taking him to a parrot psychologist!"

They sat there in the shade, idly chatting, and enjoying the quiet in the garden, Polly strutting around pecking at the grubs and insects in the grass. Jim leaned back in his chair and felt himself starting to nod off. All of a sudden, his dreamy state was

broken by a muffled thud on the grass. Looking down, he noticed that a large red apple had dropped onto the ground beside him. He wasn't the only one who had noticed it though – Polly, over at the edge of the lawn, had seen it fall, and hurriedly strutted over and pounced on the apple, pecking madly at it for all he was worth. Suddenly, the parrot looked up at Jim, and, with a beakful of apple, screeched out, *“Pecking the Apple! Pecking the Apple!”*

Jim gaped, “He spoke! Polly actually spoke!” Madge and Edna stared at the parrot in amazement.

“Now I understand!” Jim beamed, “That’s why he stopped speaking – because he wasn’t getting his apples! When I changed the walks from the muddy woods, to the dry pavements, we didn’t go past the Big House again, so I couldn’t give him the apples. It wasn’t because he had no one to interrupt; – he was trying to tell me that he was missing his daily apple!”

“Pecking the Apple! Pecking the Apple!” As if on cue, Polly cackled away as he attacked what was left of the large red apple.

“Well, that solves the mystery,” Madge said as they got up. “Thank you for the tea, Edna – we’ll let you know how Polly gets on.”

“Pecking the Apple! Pecking the Apple!” “Pecking the Apple! Pecking the Apple!” Polly’s raucous voice continued

Jim laughed as he and Madge ambled homewards, Polly in his usual perch on Jim’s shoulder.

“Oh – I’m so glad we found out what was troubling him! Maybe he’ll revert to his previous vocabulary as well – I must say I’ve missed his chatter.”

“Pecking the Apple! Pecking the Apple!” Polly cried in Jim’s ear, *“Lovely day! Lovely day!”*

“Pecking the Apple! Pecking the Apple!”

Jim smiled at Madge, as Polly puffed out his chest and continued, *“Pecking the Apple! Pecking the Apple! Give us a kiss! Give us a kiss!”*



THE OLD MAN AND THE PARROT

By Sylvia Wiseman

Tears filled the old man’s eyes as he stood over the wire cage. Polly, his old friend lay there, eyes looking emptily at his, legs in the air. The beautiful plumage still glistening in the sunlight. How different from the first time he had seen him.

He had known it couldn't be long, the bird had been ailing for a while and was almost as old as the man himself but they had been together for a long time and the man was saddened to have to say his last 'goodbye'. He had seen Polly in a tiny cage in an African street market a long way from the birds birth place in the tropical forests of New Zealand. Looking sad and dejected, his feathers in disarray from being pecked by the other occupants, the man was determined to release Polly from his torturous prison.

As a Swashbuckler the old man and bird had lived on the spoils of his raiding and plundering but he missed the thrill of the chase from the Excise men and going into hiding until the coast was clear. The trinkets he had amassed were nearly all spent and he could no longer provide for both of them in the easy way as before, the energy and inclination having been lost to age and ability. Age had caught up with them both.

As he lifted Polly onto his shoulder for the last time his thoughts were drawn to the adventures they had together sailing the high seas. Distant exotic shores all but a distant memory since giving up the daring exploits of his former life. But what fun they'd had with Polly quickly adapting to his master's shoulder pecking playfully at the old man's ear where he became quite adept at foreign languages!

But the sea was calling once more and with clouded eyes the old man looked to the distant horizon where a huge Barque stood waiting for the incoming tide to bring it safely to port. It lay heavily at anchor, its gunwales loaded. What treasures were stored below the decks from those silver beaches where the palm trees waived and golden maidens beckoned. His fingers itched but to no avail. With Polly on his shoulder he walked into the foaming water, the place where they both felt most at home.

THE OLD MAN AND THE PARROT

By

Sue Boyd

Ted shut the gate and set off down his quiet suburban street in the direction of town. Every morning at precisely 10.30 am he would walk the same route at a slowly measured pace down the High Street, looking in the same shop windows, buying his newspaper from the same newsagents, always stopping at the Co-op to buy the few meagre items on his shopping list and then making his way back home to arrive at precisely 12.15pm.

After unpacking the shopping and putting it away, Ted would make himself a cup of tea and a sandwich – one day two slices of thinly cut corned beef and the next two pieces of processed cheese from a packet containing ten slices, with a thin scrape of pickle between them. After lunch eaten at the kitchen table, while reading his newspaper, Ted would either potter around in the garden if the weather was nice or finish reading the paper, attempt the crossword, codeword and sudoku if it was inclement. His evening meal was taken out of the freezer compartment and then straight into the microwave or oven, as per the instructions on the packet. In the evening Ted would watch television and go to bed at precisely 10.30 pm after the News.

This had been his life ever since Edna died five years ago and he was bored to the back teeth with it. He felt as if he was in God's Waiting room, but he had no family to speak of, only a brother living in Australia who he hadn't heard from for years and Edna hadn't been able to have children. This hadn't bothered them particularly as they were so happy together, but now that Edna was gone there was a great void in Ted's life.

The next morning at precisely 10.30 Ted shut his front gate and walked towards town. As he approached the newsagents, he noticed a large delivery van parked outside the shop next door which had been empty for some time. People were scurrying backwards and forwards carry large boxes and crates into the shop, so after Ted had collected his paper, he casually sauntered past the shop and stopped in front of the window. This was empty except for an enormous bird cage with a brightly coloured bird perched inside. Ted stopped and stared at the bird and the parrot, for that's what it was, stared back at him with what you'd call a hangdog expression on his face (that's if he had been a dog!). Suddenly, however, the parrot

started flapping his wings and squawking loudly. Ted jumped back in alarm and nearly lost his balance, but a woman who was carrying a box into the shop, dropped it and grabbed hold of him.

“Don’t be alarmed” she said laughing, “that’s Cedric’s party piece. I’m Florence, but everyone calls me ‘Flo’. Pleased to meet you, but must get on as there’s so much to do if we’re to open tomorrow. Call in if you’re passing and I’ll introduce you to Cedric” and with that she was gone.

The next day and every time he walked into town, Ted called in to chat and have a cup of tea with Flo, but the real reason he went was to go and see Cedric and take him tasty titbits of sultanas, nuts and cheese because that was the parrot’s favourite treat. Flo had inherited Cedric from an eccentric aunt, who had evidently taught him to speak and according to her he had a very large vocabulary of swear words. However, since he came to live with Flo, Cedric hadn’t spoken a single word.

“I expect he’s pining for Great Aunt Ethel” she said. “I’ve tried everything, but he just looks at me dolefully, flaps his wings and squawks. However, he does seem to have taken to you Ted. Perhaps you can get him to speak.”

Ted tried everything from “Good morning Ted” to “Bother”, “Damn” and “Bloody” but all to no avail. Then one day just as he was entering the shop, Ted caught his foot on the doorstep and fell on the floor, dropping his eggs and breaking them.

“F.....g Hell” he shouted and then blushed scarlet and turned to apologise to Flo, but she was standing there and pointing to Cedric who was jumping up and down on his perch with the most colourful stream of expletives coming out of his mouth.

“Oh dear” said Flo when she’d stopped laughing, “we can’t have Cedric swearing like that at the customers”.

So, Cedric went to live with Ted and both of them are as happy as the day is long, swearing to each other. Flo drops in for a glass of wine and a meal most nights after work and Ted is no longer bored and has moved out of God’s Waiting Room.





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The Old Man and the Parrot

By June Liddy

I had recently moved into a maisonette situated in four separate blocks with a shared garden in between. On one side of my accommodation I could look down into the pretty garden of flowers and vegetables. On the other side I viewed the car park. I found it fascinating watching people in the course of their daily lives.

Especially intriguing was at number 14 when shortly after his wife left for work, the husband opened the door to a lady who had just arrived and parked in his wife's space. As I was opposite I couldn't help but notice them embracing enthusiastically through their net curtains!

In the flat to my right on the ground floor, number 19, I witnessed the escapades of the resident drunkard. It was tragic but amusing when he rolled out into the garden, after returning late from the pub, to serenade his wife hoping to persuade her to open the door! Much shouting and hullabaloo endured between the couple but luckily it was usually over in fifteen minutes when other residents began shouting their annoyances and the wife relented.

But what I found particularly interesting was the old man in number 17, opposite me on the ground floor. He was always visible in the window whatever time of day, talking and petting his beautiful colourful parrot in a cage. The bird was very large and bright red, green and yellow. Sometimes it fluttered about in the cage and sometimes he pulled it out and sat it on his arm stroking it gently. His devotion was enchanting. I discovered his name was Jack and his wife had recently died. He was an old sailor who had travelled to every part of the world. I wondered if the parrot was one he had brought home from some exotic place.

As time went on I bumped into Jack several times and we had many conversations. He was quite a character and although lonely since his wife died, pretty much kept himself to himself. On any mention of the parrot he always answered with a twinkle in his eye. 'You like Betty madam?' he politely asked. 'She is my life, indeed' he stated.

Well, several years passed and I grew to know most of the residents in the block. My next door neighbour at number 6 suddenly one day banged on the door with great urgency. When I opened it she told me that poor Jack had been run down by a car while he was going to the shop. I enquired about him at the hospital but alas he had died of his injuries. My first thought was his parrot. I managed to meet his next of kin

and I volunteered to look after the parrot until a new home could be found. His sister looked at me strangely when I offered but invited me in to take a look at the parrot.

We walked over to the window and there was the bright parrot sitting on her perch her beady eyes glistening. I was speechless because the parrot was not as I imagined. Stationary and stiff it was made of felt! I couldn't believe this is what I had been looking at for many months. 'But . . .' I could only mutter. Then Jack's sister Daisy opened the cage and began to turn a lever on the parrot's back. Fully wound the parrot fluttered its wings and chirped! 'But, he was so devoted to Betty', I said to Daisy. 'And so he should have been', replied Daisy, 'after all it was his wife, albeit in ashes inside!'

A tear ran down my cheek to think how devoted Jack was to his wife and how he managed by creating a tangible object to keep his devotion alive. No wonder he had a twinkle in his eye knowing he fooled me! I agreed with Daisy that the best thing to do was to bury Betty along with Jack so they would be together forever.



THE OLD MAN and THE PARROT

By

Robert Beattie

“Dad, I’ve been looking through some of your old school magazines I found in the attic when I was looking for something else. Is this you in this photo?”

“Good Lord! So it is and that’s Alan Bowen and that’s Peter Tockett. I haven’t seen them for years”

“And who’s this old chap sitting in the middle of the bottom row? Is he a master of some sort?”

“Yes. He was our form master Major Polly. He took us for maths and RI.”

“What’s RI?”

“Religious Instruction. He was a pious sort of chap.”

“Is there something wrong with him? He’s sitting in a very uncomfortable way.”

“Yes. He had only one leg. The other was shot off in the war and he had an artificial leg. They weren’t as good, then, as they are now and he used to clunk a bit when he walked. We used to joke that he should have had a parrot on the opposite shoulder to balance up his limp and, perhaps to fly over to the other side to hold him up if his false leg gave way. He used to play cricket for the masters, despite his leg and, for a laugh sometimes, he’d come out with no pad on his false leg if the other side weren’t aware of his problem. And, when he fielded, he’d stop the ball with the shin on that leg which used to amaze the batters.”

“That’s interesting, what you say about the parrot. He didn’t have one in real life, then?”

“Well, he did, actually, in a way. The Headmaster at my school was a retired lieutenant colonel who seemed to spend a lot of time going to race meetings abroad. His favourite course was in Malta. Anyway, a few years after I left school there was a bit of a scandal there. The headmaster was prosecuted for drug dealing. Apparently, all his trips abroad involved buying drugs and then smuggling them into UK. He had a whole ring of people who he supplied the drugs to and he made a fortune”

“How did he get caught?”

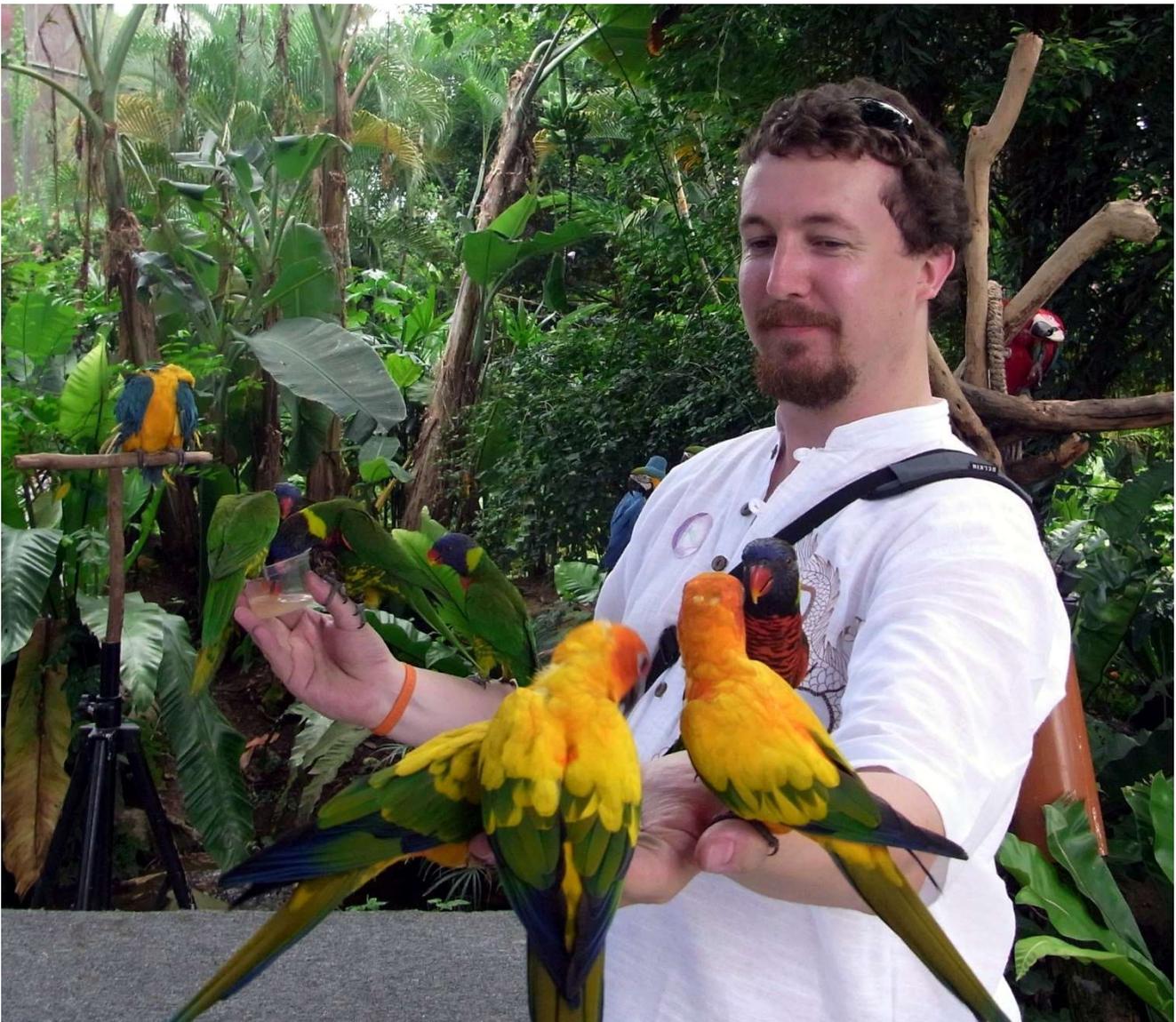
“I didn’t find out until a few years later when I happened to see a picture of Major Polly at an investiture by the Queen. She was pinning a medal to Major Polly’s left breast, just on his shoulder. The medal was awarded for services to the Public Good. I found out from a lawyer I know in the Home Office that the award is known as “The

Parrot” as a sort of euphemism for the award which is very colourful and is made to members of the security services, on their retirement, for exceptional service. It seems that Major Polly had been under cover at my school and had provided the evidence which had convicted the headmaster.”

“Is he still alive”?”

No, I think he’s long dead now”

“Pollygon then”



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THE OLD MAN AND HIS PARROT
BY

WENDY PENTLING

This old man and his parrot
would hang around the quay
I loved to hear his stories
which he would often tell to me

He said he was a pirate
and sailed the seven seas
he rescued Polly parrot
when she fell down from the trees

He sailed on the jolly Roger
with Blackbeard and captain Kidd
the other kids would laugh at him
but me, I never did

As soon as school was over
I would hurry to the pier
to hear his tales of days gone by
of bravery and fear

He spoke of raging battles
and making captives walk the plank
sword fights with the navy
and war ships that were sank

Then in a storm their ship was wrecked
left only two alive
they built a raft and sailed for home
so lucky to survive