

Reflections

Jane Ep

We live in challenging time - a time to realise how important it is to have friends and family.

I moved from my friend-base some twenty years ago and as a consequence lost the casual contact I had with those friends. The day to day events of my life, those events that would fill a coffee date seemed hardly important enough to put into writing, even by email. So contact dwindled to birthday and Christmas greetings despite me thinking of them often. Then, one night last year, when we were in lockdown avoiding an invisible deadly enemy, I saw a full moon emerge from clouds. It was a wonderful moment. Moon light illuminated the path before me and I wondered if my friends across the country had seen the moon too. As soon as I got home, I sent email greetings telling them of this encounter and established the conduit to say 'I'm thinking of you.'

Each full moon thereafter, I have written with a summary of my month. Perhaps, had world events been less worrisome, if my own mind-set had been more positive, these monthly exchanges would have remained a simple, welcomed, 'hello' but they became increasingly miserable. It became an opportunity to dump my worries and woes because the first thing you are encouraged to do when your mental health takes a downward spiral is to talk it through. The last thing you realise, and no one tells you, is how tedious this is for the recipients!

Reading over my texts from one month to the next, I realised just how repetitive and dour my letters were. Nothing was resolved or made better despite the sharing. So, I had a choice: stop writing or stop complaining. I didn't want to break off the communications now they'd been re-established. So I decided to stop complaining about my lot and to find something else to say. And that has been more therapeutic than I could have imagined. I've become more creative, content with myself and resilient to the hardships of the restrictions. I've learnt to use my time more effectively.

I've shared my thoughts on abstract subjects like how to be a Good Samaritan in a socially distanced manner. I've given my views on the restrictions, on new hobbies, recycling,

redecorating, on the loss of income and on not spending money. These longer missives rambled across thoughts and experiences. I've described the old past-time of letter writing from the stilted formulaic letters composed at boarding school, comparing them to the chatty notes I send to my mum now residing in a care home. I've also shared my achievements making things from abstract art, fancy cakes to soft toys. And I've shared the story of how I began to write creatively, writing stories, observations of character and, more recently, poetry. Moreover, I took the liberty, for a liberty I feel it was, to include examples of my art work, pictures of the things I've made and examples of my poetry. However, these communiques are different from meeting face to face. These moon-letters, or moon-logs as one recipient called them, are one-way 'blind' exchanges. And that's a worry. I cannot see the recipients' reaction. I have to trust. I realise, where I might bring a homemade cake or loaf to share, I'd be unlikely to bring my art work or poetry if I popped around for coffee. The response to homemade food is one thing we can all understand, but, for some reason, it would feel embarrassingly childish to offer up my art or poetry to unsuspecting friends. It would presume a response, an appraisal. How would they feel put on the spot like that? Fellow artists would know how to respond, but my moon-log recipients are practical people not prone to fanciful excursions into creativity. And poetry might be a step too far! Would there be a impenetrable silence or a change of subject? Would I trust my friends to tell me if they found my poetry was truly awful or my artwork naive to the point of childish scribbling? Would I believe any praise? I know I would read their face rather than hear their words.

There are specialist occasions for presenting such things; specialist recipients experienced in delivering a measured response, knowing it will be taken without hurt. There are numerous popular T.V. programmes where participants dance, bake, potter, paint or offer up their entrepreneurial endeavours for critique and I squirm every time thinking of my friends considering my work. But I realise, it is academic because I would not have put them in that position in person. Thinking it through, if I saved my creative efforts for those increasingly such specialist events, it would mean I'd have very little to say to my friends and they would never see, hear, read or know how much my creative achievements mean to me. I think that would be a shame.

It is odd to be grateful for the lockdowns. The pandemic has been a terrible thing for so many, but it has also enabled many of us to find something within ourselves that might not have been discovered otherwise. For me, it has provided the opportunity to reconnect with old friends, to be brave, to share a part of me previously, if not secret then definitely not for general consumption. I can be proud of my efforts regardless of its reception. Would I have explored my creative side, shared so much or written my moon-logs at any other time? Probably not.

Jan Ep is the writer persona of Jane Prior. She writes fiction in both long and short forms and dabbles in poetry. At school, it was noticed that she was 'something of a story teller' but she did not coming true to her calling in middle life. To date, she has won a number of prizes for her short fiction. Two of her short stories were published in DC Thomson's *My Weekly* magazine and her poems have appeared in *Dundee Writes*, a small press magazine published by the University of Dundee and in an exhibition of work by artist Moira Buchanan. Since completing postgraduate studies, she has completed two novels and has another as a work in progress. During lockdown, she discovered Surrealist Automatism or accidental or automatic drawing. This technique suppresses conscious control over image making allowing for free-expression. Her art can be seen at *Miscellany Jane Recreations* on *Flickr* or *Facebook*.