

THE DREAM IS OVER, LONG LIVE THE DREAM – Published 8th July 2010

Okay, re my last column and my World Cup dreams and Bambi fixation, well the dreams are shattered, Bambi is still on my hit-list and I'm now free on the 11th of this month.

Let's face it, with a lack lustre performance in the qualifiers and a controversial and calamitous confrontation with the Germans, (It was over the line by miles!), the only way England were going to stay in South Africa was if there was another volcanic ash cloud.

Apart from the obvious, one of my disappointments over the past few weeks has been the disappearance of the St George's flags and bunting that fluttered cheerfully in both the breeze and anticipation. I know some saw these varying displays of patriotism as tacky, but it cheered me and instilled a feeling of fun and hope in these times of such uncertainty.

I'm also going to miss those impromptu conversations with compete strangers of both sexes in shops, petrol stations and queues. Chats that started with 'Are you watching the match?' and finished with a sense of camaraderie that at other times remains hidden under English reserve and only briefly pops above the parapets during the run up to the festive season

As much as it pains me to say it, my World Cup dreams is over, but let's not stop the spontaneous socialising it created. We may not have the football to talk about anymore, (Well not for at least a month!) but we're British, there's always the weather.

WORLD CUP MEMORIES AND DREAMS – Published 10th June 2010

What do I remember of that summer's day in July 1966 when England won the World Cup and became the greatest football team in the world? I tell you what I remember, a 'Bambi' jigsaw.

There I was, while Dad screamed at the television as English football history was being made, on the front room floor looking for a piece of jigsaw that would complete Bambi's bottom. I can vividly remember that, but the excitement of the match was never logged. Admittedly I was only five at the time, but how I wished I had remembered it. Why didn't Dad tell me to stop mucking around with a pathetic puzzle and watch the football? Perhaps he tried and gave up because I was more intent in finding Bambi's missing cheek. Curse you Bambi.

So I missed out on that particular England memory, but I remember crying when Bonetti fluffed the save from Muller, screaming when Maradona punched the ball into the net, inconsolable when Pearce, Waddle and Batty missed penalties, gob-smacked when Seaman was caught napping and forever cursing penalty shoot-outs. I didn't miss any of them, forty four years of hurt forever etched into my memory.

However, this year, there's a chance, that on the eleventh of July, I'll remember exactly where I was, remember exactly who I was with, remember exactly what I was doing and most of all, remember exactly how I felt when England won the 2010 World Cup and maybe, just maybe, I'll forgive Bambi.

FLICKERS OF BRAY – Published 13th May 2010

I was saddened to hear that the final credits may roll on our little slice of Hollywood on the banks of the Thames at Bray.

Once Bray Studios was home to the blooded fangs, heaving bosoms and quintessential British 'Hammer' monsters movies of the fifties and sixties and should not be allowed to disappear like a vampire on a sun-bed.

Not as grand and glamorous as its neighbours, Pinewood and Shepperton, this unique studio has both cinematic and local heritage. The original house, Down Place, dates back to the 17th century and the studios are where the cult classic 'The Rocky Horror Show' was filmed, along with some of the groundbreaking miniature special effects work on 'Aliens'. I personally spent some very happy years working at this friendly studio on productions such as Gerry Anderson's 'Terrahawks' and 'Dick Spanner PI.'

I know that today the studio may not be thriving, but it's surviving, playing host to the odd feature film, TV programmes and commercials, as well as offering rehearsal spaces to the likes of Cliff Richard, Eric Clapton and The Kings of Leon. So rather like the vampires that roamed the back-lot, it's not quite dead yet.

In this media obsessed world, where every other graduate seems to have a degree in the visual arts, there must be something that can be done to save Bray Studios? Surely letting this original Hammer House of Horrors be replaced by a faceless residential complex would be the biggest horror of them all.

RUSTLE CROW – Published 15th April 2010

This month I have had problems with Rustlers. No, I've not had any cows stolen from my front garden, but I have had visits to the theatre and cinema spoiled by them.

The 'Rustlers' I'm referring to are those people who find it impossible not to fidget, twiddle or make annoying noises when watching a play or a film.

I was in the cinema recently and sat behind a gent who having already noisily unwrapped the crackling cellophane from his hard boiled sweet, spent the rest of the film intermittently fiddling with the wrapping. Annoying though it was, the volume of the film did mask this irritation somewhat, unlike when in the theatre.

That night I found myself sat behind a woman who spent the entire play either sorting out the contents of her handbag or taking off and putting on her coat and scarf with an alarming regularity. There was more movement in that seat than there was on the stage.

Not one to cause a scene, I did offer some hard stares when she looked around to see who was sighing behind her every time she jangled some keys or fiddle with a snappy spectacle case.

When the play finished I leant forward and was about to pass a comment on her distracting behaviour when she turned to her companion and said, 'Nice play, just a shame the actors couldn't speak a bit louder, I could hardly hear them.' I said nothing and walked away... in bewildered silence.

BATTLE OF THE BANDS – Published 18th March 2010

It's time for me to enter The Battle of the Bands. Firstly, litter is litter, no matter which way you look at it, but I think there are more unsavoury sights fluttering in gutters and swinging in plastic bags from trees, than a scattering of red rubber bands.

The initial argument that these loops of elastic could harm wildlife was well put. However, where are they placed in the league of dangerous detritus amongst the likes of discarded plastic bags, thrown away takeaways and pooch poo? Surely they are more 'Portsmouth' than 'Manchester United'.

Unless there is Phantom Red Rubber Band Dropper in our midst, then the fault must rest on the already heavily burdened shoulders of the Postie. Saying that, I'm sure in most cases, the dropping isn't deliberate. Similarly, the excuse that there isn't time for every dropped band to be picked up, is a little stretched. I wouldn't mind certain bills being delayed for the sake of a couple of retrieved rubber bands.

With public services disappearing faster than winners of X-Factor, I don't think 'Shaming' the postal service is going to help. Highlighting their responsibilities regarding litter is correct, but collecting the offending items and using them as evidence is pointless. Wouldn't it be better if we worked together? 'Posties' pick up what you can and 'collectors' why not take your ball of bands to your local Post Office, who I'm sure could return them to the sorting office to be reused. What could be simpler?

QUESTIONS, QUESTIONS? – Published 18th February 2010

There is a question that is perplexing me at the moment. There must be an answer to it somewhere, but for the life of me I can't find it. The question being 'Why have some dog owners started hanging their plastic bags of dog mess from the overhanging branches of trees?'

I just don't understand. Am I missing something? I'm not a dog owner, so I'm curious as to these recent additions to our trees and hedgerows. Is it more environmentally friendly to hang 'what Rover did' in full view, rather than putting it in appropriate dog litter bins or disposing of it discreetly at home? Does the height and being open to the elements help the contents inside break down quicker? Does the fall from the tree, when the bag rips, help distribute the decaying doggy doings more evenly on the ground?

On a recent stroll with the better half, a normally pleasant tree-lined path was festooned with these gently bobbing reminders of how much easier cats are to look after. Not the most pleasant of sights to grace our local countryside.

Perhaps I'm barking up the wrong tree here and most dog owners aren't responsible for these dirty decorations, but someone is leaving these bags of unpleasantness behind. Perhaps other less health conscious parties are involved. Maybe the same people who plant empty beer cans in horse droppings. Just who are these hangers-on? Why do they do it? Do they wash their hands afterwards? I'm intrigued to know.

RUNNING INTO TROUBLE – Published 21st January 2010

As a jogger of no fixed speed, I enjoy running around the highways and byways of our area and the recent Artic conditions have not stopped my energetic excursions. I do run a bit slower and have been developing a sense of balance that would impress the Dancing On Ice judges, but I have also come across a situation that is causing me some concern.

How do I run past someone who is walking ahead of me, with their back to me, wrapped up against the cold, without frightening the living wotsits out of them?

Normally the slap of trainers and my laboured breathing or even a theatrical cough is warning enough, but when my impending arrival is muffled by woolly hats, ear muffs, scarves, hoods and in one case, headphones, what chance do I have? Already this year I've made two dog walkers jump their own body height in fright and on one occasion was accused of creeping up on a gent as he strolled in the snow. Now, I'm not a fast runner, but my pace is hardly a creep.

Being a courteous jogger I always apologise for my sudden appearance, but one day I'm going to shock the wrong person and end up limping into casualty. What can I do? I've thought about carrying a very, very long stick that I could gently prod the back of the person I'm about to pass a few metres before I do so, but am I just running into trouble?

A BIT OF CHRISTMAS WRAPPING – Published 24th December 2009

I can't wrap Christmas presents. No matter how much I try, me, sticky tape, scissors and wrapping paper, just don't get on. It's not that I'm some cack-handed-sausage-fingered-imbecile, for normally I have good eye-to-hand motor skills. I can draw and I'm quite nimble-fingered when picking out tunes on the ukulele, but when it comes to covering a gift with a brightly coloured sheet of paper, I, rather like the paper, go to pieces.

The first thing to abandon me is estimating paper to present coverage. It's either too much or much too little. Many a sheet of festive wrapping paper has become hamster bedding after it failed to fully cover the present I'm trying to wrap.

I watch in awe as my wife folds and creases her paper into technically perfect angles with the dexterity of a black-belt origami master. Folds interlock with symmetrical precision, delicately embracing the contours of the present and then are anchored with the merest sliver of tape. With me, the paper ends up with more creases than an unwashed suit and folds with more unusual angles than a Guy Richie film. As for sticky tape, I use more on one present than is used on a complete series of Blue Peter. The final result is frightening and I'm sure the recipients of my presents are only eager to get to the gift within so they can rid themselves of the hideous wrapping.

Next year I'm giving everyone a book token... in an envelope. Merry Christmas.

TURN IT UP – Published 26th November 2009

Come closer as I've got to keep my voice down because apparently in this cotton-wool clad society we live in, noise is bad. It appears that for some local authorities, anything louder than a flea passing wind in a library is a blight on our sensitive ears. This 'silence is golden' mentality is worrying me, especially when it seems intent in targeting live music.

I'm not turning a deaf ear to anti-social noise, but I am concerned that social noise like live music will suffer if these overly sensitive rules regarding volume control creep silently into our area. Noise patrols with the power to pull the plug on tunes louder than one of Timmy Mallet's shirts is a frightening concept.

John Lennon said 'Give Peace a Chance' but it's pushing it a bit when local bands playing at a decent time and volume in venues in and around our area, play in fear of a visit from these potential Off-Switchfinder Generals. Fear, that their gigs will be reduced to acoustic renditions of the sound of silence.

Music needs a certain amount of volume and I'm sure some will agree with me that the reverberations of these hushed actions would sound a muffled death knell for live music and to some extent, live entertainment.

I also suspect that there are some who would welcome the quiet, but I do believe something should be done before live music is too quiet to enjoy. It's just a shame I can't shout about it.

CAN I HELP? – Published 1st October 2009

While researching an article about Bray Studios for a nostalgia magazine that looks back at the days when e-mail was something a Yorkshire postman delivered, I chanced upon a perfect reference book. Not having enough financial wherewithal to rub two credit card bills together, I decided to ring my local library.

'It's called 'Hammer Films – The Bray Years.' I said. 'That sounds interesting.' Said a very pleasant sounding lady, adding that she was taking notes. Pleasant and efficient, how refreshing. 'Do you have the author's name?' She enquired. 'Wayne Kinsey.' I replied and pictured her carefully writing the name down with exquisite handwriting. 'You did say 'Wayne'? She asked. I confirmed as such and waited as she went off to look.

After a couple of seconds of silence and not a version of the 1812 overture played on the comb, she returned. 'I'm so sorry, but I can't find it' She apologised. 'Have you tried the library?' 'But isn't this...' was as far as I got before she told me that I had rung the local nursery.

Understandably embarrassed, I made my excuse and hung up, but the thought of this pleasant lady, obviously well trained in customer relations, rifling through the likes of 'The Very Hungry Caterpillar' and 'The Big Fat Hen' looking for a book about a series of rather explicit horror films, proved to me that in this cynical world, there are still people willing to help even when the chances of success are oh so limited.

GOING TO B&Q – Published 1st October 2009

I had to buy some shelf brackets last weekend, and the sweats started Friday night. 'Dread' slumped in my stomach and 'anxiety' wandered aimlessly around my head, like the road layout of the new Sainsbury's car park.

After a restless night, the moment of loathing was soon upon me and it was time to say goodbye to my family, for who knows how long, and travel to that place, where many go in and just give up hope. Yes. I had to go to B&Q in Cippenham: 'B' as in building materials and 'Q' as in queue endlessly.

The journey begins along the slowest road in Christendom, the Bath Road. A road that possesses more red lights than Amsterdam and is so slow that it's been known for MOT's to run out mid journey.

Crawling into the labyrinth of lost hope deemed the 'car park', lives are wasted searching for a space, knowing that if it's this busy here amongst the exhaust and expletives, inside it will be worst. And it is.

Looking for carefully hidden products sucks up your time and assistants taunt you with promises of 'They're in aisle 19.' They never are.

Eventually you find what you seek and then join the almost endless shuffling lines of weekend DIY'ers watching their life ebb away for the want of a packet of screws and a shelf bracket.

ou wait but you know the ordeal is far from over. Outside the queues are already forming, making the expectation of a return home before nightfall, a fruitless dream.