



The Roaming Pen... - dries off

Autumn draws on, the season of mists and mellow fruitfulness and just for a change I am moving away from my usual subject of the highways and byways of Kemp Town.

I have noticed that all over the media recently the word community has been used to describe any vague grouping from the European Community right down to plane spotters.

For a long time I have been at loggerheads with a friend who's opinion and views I usually hold in high regard but on the subject of 'community' we part company. He is strongly of the opinion that people who have something in common whether it is address, skin colour, religion or sexuality become a community. I totally disagree; I share many things with lots of people, address, age, marital status etc., most of whom I have absolutely nothing of any consequence in common with at all. We might as well say that as I have grey hair I am part of the grey haired community. Cohesive communities as such only arise if they are being attacked or find themselves isolated. We are currently commemorating the 70th anniversary of the London blitz, that event without any doubt brought people together; they were united against a common enemy. I entered this world in SW London a few years after the blitz and still recall my mother talking about how neighbours that she had never spoken to, all coming

together to help each other. That was real community spirit and of course today we all help each other when the occasion arises but is that community spirit, personally I don't think that it is.

I don't want to get into the realms of social philosophy but in biological terms, a community is a group of interacting species sharing an environment. There are 94 definitions of the term; traditionally a "community" has been defined as a group of interacting people living in a common location. I have lived at my present address for over 20 years and know hardly any of the other people living on the road. I feel that I have very little in common with any of them apart from a shared post code. Undoubtedly most of them will be very nice people and some maybe not so nice, I may be the poorer for not knowing them all but in today's world I simply have neither the time nor inclination to go the extra mile and get to know them, that, of course, cuts both ways. Since the advent of the Internet, the concept of community no longer has geographical limitations, as people can now virtually gather in an online community and share common interests regardless of physical location. Of course there are many exceptions; some religions do very much form into close knit communities as do some from particular ethnic backgrounds. We all see the travellers that come and wreck the Kemp Town slopes on a regular basis. They probably are an example of a community as they don't mix with anyone outside of their group and move around as one.

From Old Steine to Boundary Rd; and from Freshfield St to Marine Parade. An interesting market to reach.

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As everyone now knows we now have an allotment up on Whitehawk Hill and there we have met a lot of new friends, we are all united in several areas mainly ones of vegetable growing and fertiliser and there are even two 'community' plots up there. But we don't feel part of that or any other community. The word is used constantly without much thought being given to its true meaning. It is derived from the Old French communauté which is derived from the Latin communitas (cum, "with/together" + munus, "gift"), a broad term for fellowship or organized society. So we come to the nub of the subject, are we all part of the overall community ie the human race or are we all unique individuals who occasionally happen to share something whether it is an address or a belief. Do we feel part of the community, what exactly is this community spirit that we hear so much about, it might have existed once but I wonder if it is still there?

As they would say in college "discuss"

Take it easy and keep the spirit alive.

roger@kemptownrag.co.uk



Dennis the Menace

I had an odd childhood; I suppose partly because I was an odd child. But I couldn't have got that way without dear old dad.

My partner has this little game he plays sometimes, in which he awards me 'Dennis Points'. Dennis was my father, and if the word odd weren't already in the dictionary, The Oxford English would have invented it especially for him, and the definition would have taken enough pages to keep J K Rowling happy.

When I was growing up, I was told from a very early age that disaster could happen at any moment. Mainly when we were out of the house. So not only did we have to check, every time we went to the supermarket, that all the plugs in the house were switched off, we also had to take them out of the sockets and put them a distance away, in case the electricity magically jumped from the three little square pins and connected with the wall. Only the fridge was exempt from this, because the fridge would never do anything so nasty as to short circuit and burst into flames; anyway if we switched it off, the food might give us all food poisoning. And who'd turn the lights off then? I swear, if it had been possible, we'd have been carrying all the electrical stuff with us on the way to Tesco, or on holiday, just so we could be sure it wouldn't misbehave. Thank goodness TV sets were already the size of

Volkswagen's back then and were usually housed in small little cupboards, ill-disguised as sideboards for no apparent reason other than to help you pretend you didn't own one.



It rubbed off though. I still have this habit of always taking a bag with me, containing stuff I couldn't bear to lose should the roof fall in of its own accord! Who backs up their computer via memory stick, CD and three different external hard drives? (Not that that even helps, because I can never remember where I've put any of the files or what I've called them!)

It rubbed off on my mother as well. Both my parents were smokers, back when it was a fashion statement, before it became a stigma, and before you needed to go outside in the rain to light up. But whilst she would happily inhale the thousands of possibly carcinogenic poisons in every cigarette that might have destroyed her lungs, she would fastidiously go round the house and put her hand over every ashtray before going out or going to bed, to make sure that, whilst cancer might be a possibility, at least we wouldn't come home to people roasting marshmallows on the lawn.

It drives my partner mad. I get Dennis Points for every time my over-cautious nature steps in, and he deducts them if I act like a normal human being. It's obviously a bit of a joke, but thankfully the combination of that and my near death experience has made me take a few more chances, like only locking only one of the three locks on the door when I'm just nipping up the road. (Oh, I shouldn't have told you that, because you might be a burglar. That's it. I'm never leaving the house again!)

No, I really am getting better. Life's about today; plans are great but write in pencil.

Good and bad intervene. One minute you know where life is taking you, the next you're in love and reconsidering everything. I thought I knew where I was going. Then I met Pete, and here we are 21 years later. But there will always be disease, idiots and lawyers. (So just to make it clear: if you disapprove of my 'lifestyle' get a life or a lobotomy; don't claim you're God's representative on Earth when there are kids being abused regularly by the ones they thought they could trust and you're not doing anything about it; and you're not making a sensible point if you still think book-burning is the way to do it.) You see? I'm becoming much more secure in myself. I still watch the road, but only because it's sensible, not

because I'm worried a plane's going to fall out of the sky if I'm not crossing at the Green Man. I still shred my paperwork in case of identity theft, but have realised that everything I've typed into Google Search probably means I'm on a Homeland Security watch list. You try doing research and then work out how many times you've type in things like 'pornography', 'serial killers' '9/11' 'fundamentalists', 'untraceable poisons', 'forensic blood spatter patterns'. OK, so my fiction stories are darker than they used to be! But that doesn't even include things I might have looked at personally, or been sent by phishers, or received from the latest scam merchants, which now start with 'Hey we met at a bar! Don't you remember me? Check out my webcam!' Makes me fondly remember the days when all I was offered was Viagra or breast enlargements.

Anyway, I'm safe and sound. My Dennis Points are finally in single figures. And who knows? Tomorrow I might take up bungee jumping!

Oh, and my latest venture, which dad would never have approved of unless I'd found a cardboard box to live in when the bank foreclosed, is a website I and a good friend of mine (fellow writing competition entrant and KTR contributor) have set up offering prizes to other story writers like us. This isn't an advertisement, but feel free to check out the website if you would like to... oops, I almost put check out our services, but that might give people completely the wrong idea! Anyway, it's only a click away and it'll save me trying to explain.

Sorry, got to go. I think I hear an intruder, so I have to turn on the electric fence.

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