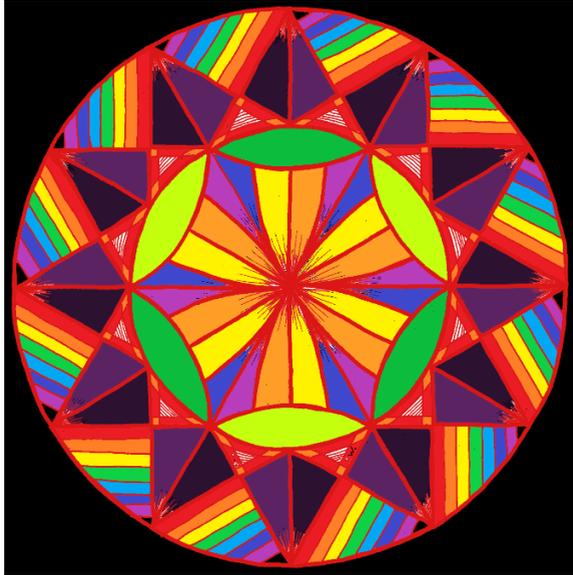


BROMLEY AND SHEPPARD'S COLLEGES
WEEKLY HERALD

BRANDY'S BIRTHDAY SUPPLEMENT



Wednesday February 3rd 2021, will be my 70th birthday. I can't have a party, nor even drinks in the quad, so to celebrate, I am putting together this little booklet of some of my art and writing, (in the manner of Mr. Toad in Wind in the Willows) hoping it will provide you with a little entertainment.

On my birthday, I invite you to raise a toast of thanksgiving with me – for the blessings of my life, in whatever beverage you prefer, at 5pm (at about the time of day I was born).

I hope you find my little supplement diverting. The picture is a mandala representing the passing of time, with rainbows symbolising hope.

The W3 Gallery in Acton held an exhibition a few years ago about the journeys people went on to live in West London. It made me think about my own journey, not from India or the Caribbean, but from Southampton and round various parts of London, and I wrote this poem about some of the factors that affected my own journey and that of my husband Rob:

HOW WE GOT HERE... OR WITHOUT WHICH...

Double tides sweep up Southampton Water
 without which the transatlantic liners would not have
docked there
 and my father's family
 and Rob's great grandfather
 would not have moved to Southampton to work on
them
 without which we would not exist

The arrival of comprehensive education
 meant that Rob came from the other side of the city
 to the Sixth Form College
 that I already attended
 without which we would never have met

I dropped out of university and went to Art College
and Rob spent three years in the sixth form
 without which we would not have not been finding
colleges at the same time
 Rob was drawn by African politics
 and I was drawn by my boyfriend
 without which we would not have both moved to
Coventry
 without which we would not have come together
 without which we would not have got married

Rob always wanted to live in London
and we came to stay with friends
in Norwood Junction
to find somewhere to live
without which we would never have lived in Penge

Then our landlords wanted to do up the house
without which we would not have lived in Norwood
Junction
then our landlords wanted to do up the house
without which we would not have lived in Crystal Palace
where we had our children and found our faith

Then Rob was called to ordination
without which we would not have lived in Oxford
There were missed appointments and answered phone
calls
without which we would not have lived in Stoke
Newington
nor Haggerston
then he became a Prison Chaplain
without which we would not have lived in Wallington
nor Palmers Green

Then God called me to ordination
without which we would have not lived in South Acton

Then the bishop rearranged the parish
and the council purchased our house to pull it down
and I retired and was offered a house for duty
without which we would not be living in West Acton
which is where we are now!

Double tides sweep up Southampton Water
without which we would not be living in West Acton

THE SOUNDTRACK TO MY LIFE

If I had been able to have a party for my birthday, there would have been music! I had my first record player when I was about 11. It was a blue and white Dansette on black tapering legs. Since then I have never been without recorded music. Portable cassette players, stereo sound systems, and now I listen to music on my phone, my computer and on TV. What music would you play at your party? Here is a random selection of the music I would like to hear echoing round the quad. (Don't worry, I'd ask first!)



"Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" by the Beatles,
"John, I'm only dancing" or "Starman" by David Bowie
"Walk on Gilded Splinters" by Doctor John
"Pappa was a rolling stone" by the Temptations
"I feel love" by Donna Summer
"Son of a preacher man" by Dusty Springfield
"Respect" by Aretha Franklin
"London Town" by Bellowhead
"Sleepers Awaken!" by the Incredible String Band
"Scots on the Rocks" by the Peatbog Faeries

One of the great joys in my life is listening to the Blues, whether old crackly recordings of Robert Johnson or Bessie Smith, The Rolling Stones or Cream when the blues became popular in the UK, or brand new recordings by new young musicians.



This inspired one of my poems that I am quite pleased with. I was listening to Huey Morgan's Radio 6 programme one Saturday in 2011, when he announced that it was Robert Johnson's 100th birthday. (He actually died in 1938 at the age of 27.) This is the poem I wrote:

ROBERT JOHNSON'S HUNDREDTH BIRTHDAY BLUES

I was listening to the radio
feeling hard pressed and blue
when Huey spread the news -
And so -

This is my Robert Johnson's hundredth birthday blues.

In this place called earth
where heaven meets hell
the devil has set up his barbecue.
He has draped his jacket over a cotton bush,
wrapped a towel round his waist
that he borrowed from a friend
to keep his red suit sharp
his sleeves rolled up
his hat pushed back behind his horns
a reefer tucked behind his ear for later

a black ribbon in his tail.

Huey spread the news.

This is my Robert Johnson's hundredth birthday blues.

As his steaks sizzle
Jesus sets up the bar
he is dressed as a ted
with a heavenly quiff
an electric blue jacket, drainpipes
and suede brothel creepers
crossed guitars on his pencil tie.
Blues kings crowd around
with harps and guitars
now promoted to glory
all in their prime
and Saint Bessy sets up a shrine by the road
with flowers and candles
a photograph of a sharp young man
in a hat and pin striped suit
with a cigarette and a guitar

Huey spread the news.

This is my Robert Johnson's hundredth birthday blues

Then the choir of blues queens
in sequins and furs
bring the birthday cake
in the shape of a guitar
iced in delta blue
with one hundred candles
Jake and Elmore crank up the old gramophone
place the needle in the groove
and spread his music all around the world.

Huey spread the news.

This is my Robert Johnson's hundredth birthday blues

And when Gabriel blows his horn
the man himself appears
in a suit so sharp
it cuts through times and dimensions
and the great guitarists
living and departed
are caught up in the rapture.
Blues men and women -
old black guys in red crimplene suits,
pasty white kids from Surrey with long red hair
Professor Eric and all the rest
welcome him with
"Come on in my kitchen"

Huey spread the news.

This is my Robert Johnson's hundredth birthday blues

Were you gone before your time – or was that all the time
you had?
It was enough to sow such seeds
to lay down such riffs
that they echo along the roads of eternity
make grown men cry
and women moan
as we wait at the crossroads
of living and dying

Huey spread the news

this is my Robert Johnson's hundredth birthday blues.



When I went to Taize many years ago I bought a cardboard copy of this ancient icon, which has been part of my prayer life ever since. My copy is a little dog-eared and has candle wax on it now, It depicts Jesus with Saint Menas, and the original is in the Louvre. In the shop at Taize, it was called: "Jesus et son ami" Jesus and his friend. I wrote this little poem after I moved here, sitting on the bench near the slip gate:

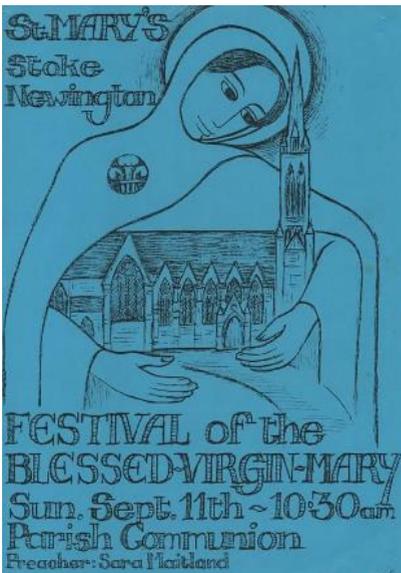
JESUS ET SON AMI – JESUS AND HIS FRIEND

November day
Sitting on the garden bench

Clouds have cleared
Surprise sun shines out
Illuminating tiny globes of dew
scattered like strands of stars
on the shaggy grass

Jesus sits down beside me
puts his arm around my shoulder
like the ancient icon
Jesus et son ami
I relax into his presence

It seems so long
since we last met this way



POSTERS

Rob's curacy was at St Mary's Stoke Newington, in North London, and I designed quite a few posters while we were there, as well as designing a mural for the church hall.

This is Our Lady protecting St Mary's, from the late 1980s.

THE KNITTED BEARS

About three or four years ago, Rob started taking silly photos of a group of knitted bears, that he bought at a sale at St Mary's Convent in Chiswick and posting them on Facebook. Gradually, these evolved into "Stories of the Knitted Bears", some of which can now be found on YouTube.

Apart from a few breaks, the Knitted Bears are still appearing everyday on Facebook and Instagram. My part in this is sets and costumes, and the occasional plot suggestion. in 2019, we put on a small exhibition of props etc. in one of the chapels at St Martin's West Acton, as part of the Christmas Fair, and we sold calendars for 2020.



These are scenes from their stories. The first is Captain Poopdeck Monkey rescuing the bears from the sea.



The second is of Aunt Dahlia's Guest House on Bear Islands, with the bears, Aunt Dahlia herself with Hapshetbobsheput (call me Bob), whom she has subsequently married.

The third picture is taken from their trip to the moon. They have also visited Mars and landed on an asteroid threatening the earth.



The fourth picture is of Kilbearan Castle, ancestral home of the McKnittedbears, with Great Uncle Adelbert and Miss Mahalia, the housekeeper. The castle is in the style of Eggbox Baronial.



At the moment, they are drawing near to the end of this year's pantomime, Cinderella. Last year they put on Jack and the Beanstalk.

We like to think this is both daft and arty – an example of radical eclecticism.



Mandala representing the dance of the Trinity, the three in one and one in three.

Booklet designed and chosen by Brandy Pearson
Flat 14.