



# **Eileen McHugh**

**a life remade**

**by Mary Reynolds**

**Philip Spires**

# **Eileen McHugh: A Life Remade**

**by**

**Mary Reynolds**

**Philip Spires**

[www.philipspires.co.uk](http://www.philipspires.co.uk)

## Remaking a life

Let us imagine an artist who struggled to complete anything, left near-unintelligible notes and was probably incompetent in the use of materials. This was an artist who found any focus hard to maintain, who seemed to dabble in multiple forms and spread apparently undisciplined attention so thinly across a multitude of whim-driven activities that hardly any project came to fruition. Picture a corpus of surviving works that only just creeps into double figures, some of which are dubiously attributed, while others may have been reworked by other hands. And imagine a signature work so incompetently produced it is literally disintegrating whilst, in that same room on a facing wall, there exists another work, largely unknown, by a different artist, who has remained almost anonymous, despite producing something that is arguably as beautiful and technically superior to its neighbour. If asked to assess, how might contemporary viewers, coming to this body of work for the first time, judge its worth or its creator's achievement?

And how might we judge another artist who has left just one work, which exists only in reproduction as a contemporary photograph, taken in the few moments the work existed? But this artist, we now discover, left a variety of notes, descriptions and indications of materials to be used that are sufficient to reconstruct lost works. Is it not our duty to remake this life's work, to recreate this legacy that might enrich lives, change perceptions and reinterpret experience? This artist is called Eileen McHugh. The previous, unfocused incompetent was called Leonardo da Vinci.

But where might I begin to remake the life and work of an artist like Eileen? We have no works, no studies or even failed projects awaiting reassembly. We know little of her

undocumented life, whose destination remained unknown even to her own mother. But we all leave our own marks on time. Identifying them is the challenge, and then describing them becomes possible. Once reassembled, we might then remake Eileen McHugh's life and reconstruct her works to enrich our collective experience. But where to start?

London, of course, changed everything. She was just eighteen, adult, though not formed, not yet consciously searching for herself, but, despite that, still discovering it anew. The city played its crucial changing part, its immediate and permanent mutability forever challenging, forever creating, forever destroying. Thus, she arrived an adult and gradually learned to recreate the child, consciously and perhaps pretentiously following Picasso's stated example. At least that was her stated aim.

Before art college, her work had dithered between what her teachers demanded and, more originally, what she momentarily and arbitrarily imagined. This was what she had learned to call her art, but she later conceded that she was nothing special in that regard. Occasionally, her style had suggested its maturity, but she would only become aware of that some years later, mere months before that artistic life ended prematurely.

So London is the place to start, her arrival marking a cusp that separated the juvenilia from her own style. I will, during the course of this re-evaluation of her work, place her identity and the events that shaped it at the very centre of my story, because, like her work, her life can now be remade only via these once discarded memories, these near-forgotten trivia. The remaking of Eileen McHugh, however, must reconstruct the individual, the person, because, as Eileen herself noted, it was e e cummings who wrote that 'the artist's only inevitable country is himself' and, in the case of

Eileen McHugh, the words ring completely true after the obligatory change of gender. She was her art and her art was her, personal, personalised, inseparable, utterly individual and yet ultimately effectively anonymous.

After all, from the early nineteenth century onwards, the expression of individuality is what art had progressively become. Before then, she imagined, it had been the paymaster who had called his piper's tune - church, rulers, feudal barons, bourgeois accumulators, states and corporations - and so style had been essentially dictated by expectation, form by commission, content by intended use. This recent, emergent philosophy that art must be individual expression implied that the first thing an artist should achieve is self-knowledge and self-awareness. That was the difficult part and had to precede the easier activity of producing objects. Once achieved, however, continued originality implied equally continued self-reappraisal, a process that, each time it was repeated, had to confront and overcome the same challenges but finish at a new uniqueness. For Eileen McHugh, this was perhaps the source of her ultimate failure. In a sense, she simply opted out of that essential process. Achieving the unique always remained in her power. Having it seen as such was always the challenge.

Her art, like her artistic life, ended prematurely and, because of her pursuit of impermanence, it obviously no longer exists. In *Eileen McHugh: A Life Remade* I will try to bring back to life both the artist and her work so that they can both occupy their rightful and deserved place at the forefront of our experience. But this goal of the ephemeral makes her œuvre difficult to recreate. The style and concept are easy and remain accessible today. But the materials she chose were specific to their time, as were many of her inspirations. Imitation is available to us, but it remains mere imitation.

And strangely, a recreation of her life shares that same restriction.

Arguably, she was the product of a place and a time. Now we are all slaves of time and live to the rhythms it imposes. But in Eileen's case, it is not only era that is intangible, because the place she knew cannot be revisited, probably cannot even be imagined by a contemporary critic, for it has been physically changed by the years, its social fabric unwound and rewoven.

It is today impossible for a contemporary reader to appreciate the unique character of her adolescence. Her experience itself was also unique in its own time and place, and it is now impossible to reconstruct it, almost impossible to describe it, as she would have experienced it. Education is something we have learned to take for granted, an expensive necessity desired by all. But in Eileen's era, it was a rationed good, cheap if you could get it, but available only to an elect few.

In Eileen's case, she did not follow any predicated path. She did stay on at school until sixteen, though there was no requirement. She did seek qualifications, but her route was unconventional, and her achievements hardly recognised. She did, however, obtain the bare minimum of what she needed, albeit a year late, and this passport to further learning opened onto a future of creativity.

But today, neither can we recreate or envisage the environment of the time. Attitudinally, it was as removed from our own era as it is possible to be. Abortion and homosexuality had only just been decriminalised, and the latter only in England and Wales. It was less than a decade since the last executions and most adults had lived through at least one World War. Possibly it is this era's proximity to our own that erects the greatest barrier to its understanding.

We might assume similarity to today, but that would be wrong, especially in its attitudes towards race.

Eileen Mary McHugh was born on August 8, 1952 in Wakefield. It was a town with a major literary and artistic tradition, though hardly anyone living there was aware of it. Writers such as Mercer, Storey, Braine and Bairstow were or had been nearby. Sculptors Moore and Hepworth had matured in the area. Lindsay Anderson would make one of the films of the era in the town, its plot drawn from David Storey's book. It was a time when an accent became acceptable and the experience of a life less than privileged had become an avenue to be explored, no longer seen as simply a dead end.

But the Foundation Course that Eileen McHugh followed in the town's college hardly even acknowledged the contemporary. Tutors presented the learning experience as if it had been drawn from a Renaissance studio, with a stress on technique, life drawing and apprenticeship. It was an experience that was universally criticised by students who dutifully but resentfully followed its demands, before rejecting its values. And Eileen followed this path, faithfully completing all the set tasks, but consciously trying to reject what they were trying to impart. It is no surprise whatsoever that she later destroyed all her work from that period. And this is why London marks a cusp between the juvenile and the mature.

The nineteen-sixties was a decade when British society still rationed education. One still had to be worthy to receive it. Eileen was not among the mere one fifth of the population pre-qualified for exposure to academic study. Thus branded as an eleven-year-old, it was assumed she would leave school at fifteen, since the raising of the school leaving age, ROSLA, an acronym that sent shivers up the spines and set

icicles in the wallets of those who had become used to their right to privilege, was still in the future. It was surely educational experience that formed her as a person, her view of the world and thus her art. Of course, she would not be alone if this were true! In her case, the experience was very much of its time and will perhaps be unfamiliar to many.

If artists must inhabit themselves, Eileen McHugh's clear problem was her inability to decide who she was. Moulded and branded by society via her school and college experience, she fought to find her own voice. Eventually she surely did just that, but it was a state that was only temporarily maintained and soon ceased completely, never to come to life again. Her style and artistic language inevitably mean that we have no enduring evidence of her work. But now we have her notebooks, so some of her genius might be reconstructed and her work reimagined. Hence now is the time to write the official biography of the artist, hence *Eileen McHugh: A Life Remade*.

"Life's greatest moments are the ones that are lost." *Forgotten* is what Eileen McHugh meant to write. But popularity identifies greatness. It uncovers talent's otherwise hidden achievements. Cream floats, says the cliché, but it's only a cliché because we recognise the analogy's recurring truth. The artist must inhabit a private world of inspiration, of course, but she also exports a personality, markets an identity that is no longer the artist's property. And then, possibly, an unpredictable popularity makes that parochial identity universal, confers and creates status, confirms genius that will be remembered.

In Eileen McHugh's case, however, popularity alone is not enough to locate her vision, identify her achievements, or display her talent. There is much more to this artist than the single work for which she is now so widely known. The



time is surely now ripe for an examination of her life and work, because there are surely other gems waiting to be discovered, despite her own wish that none of her art should endure. For her, true greatness was to be achieved only if the work was dismissed, discarded and then effectively ignored. In her view it would, however, be absorbed by its everyday environment and thus paradoxically be given a kind of permanence, becoming a part of what everyone merely took for granted. Her creations were objects of the here and now, ephemera calculatedly conceived to have no lasting consequence, nothing that might aspire to or achieve longevity, let alone permanence. Paradoxically, however, she appeared to appreciate that if left where she put them, they were all potentially, but anonymously eternal.

So what might Eileen McHugh, the artist, have made of her current fame, achieved over thirty years after her creative life came to an end? Marion McHugh, Eileen's mother, at the end of her life enabled me, despite the difficulties of communicating with a memory so disabled by dementia, to build up what I sincerely believe to be an accurate, sympathetic and penetrating portrait of the young Eileen, when she was at the height of her creative activity. And, given that the art becomes the eventual property of those who experience it, rather than those who create it, it may be that we can only reconstruct the artist from others' experience of her.

There is, of course, the inevitable question of what Eileen might have made of a project to promote her name into a permanence she herself always rejected. Indeed, we must try to envisage how she might have reacted to the fact that one of her works, just one, it has to be said, has achieved such fame. As ever, putting words into the mouth of an historical personality is easy, but rendering them convincing is

eternally problematic. One of my purposes in constructing this biography is to create a discussion of Eileen's work, an examination that might reassess its impact and its worth. Obviously, I remain convinced of its originality, individuality and uniqueness, and I intend in these pages to illustrate these qualities, and to reconstruct other examples of her work. This has become possible only because of the journals and letters her mother kept so carefully, sealed, unthumbed, undisturbed in an attic box.

Such a project is rendered doubly problematic when we remember that Eileen McHugh's personal ambition was to be forgotten and to leave no personalised mark. Surely, then, this new fame has placed her memory into an uncomfortable limbo, a state that she herself would not have sought. Surely an enduring celebrity would have been the last thing desired by an artist who strove to achieve the ephemeral, the purely instantaneous anonymity of permanent non-existence. These are serious and important considerations, of course. But I will argue that Eileen's goals were dictated by her concept of what was possible. I will suggest that if she had shared the privilege of a different family environment or birthright, or even a different educational experience, then her attitude to her work may have been transformed. After all, Eileen would not have been the first artist to have pursued the ephemeral, only to find it achieving its own permanence. What do we now think that Duchamp was doing with his Fountain, for example? With our hindsight we know that eventually he reproduced it!

The dilemmas posed by the apparently random interaction between artistic motive and achievement have been repeatedly voiced. Though *Eileen McHugh: A Life Remade* certainly began as a project to reconstruct a life, the inseparability of the artist from her art means that merely

relating events leads directly into critical appraisal of her creativity. Ironically, I cannot answer the criticisms that arise, for there is no material evidence for the stance I have now adopted, except for Eileen's own words, here published for the first time. I cannot answer the questions posed, and neither can Eileen McHugh, since her artistic personality ceased to exist decades ago. Eventually history decides and, in Eileen's case, history has bestowed an institutional permanence via popularity of its own accident.

Marion McHugh would surely have had her view but deciphering what this might have been is a route full of wrong turns, cul-de-sacs and, eventually, fantasy. On most days, Marion believed her daughter had been killed in an accident. On other days, she was convinced it was no accident and believed that Eileen had killed herself. In moments of lucidity, she might even admit that she simply did not know what happened. At other times, she bowed to what surely is the truth, but then she never did open those crucial letters, only some of which had actually come from her daughter. My hope is that this work may go some way towards addressing and illuminating Eileen's life, so these points and others will be addressed. But, rest assured, neither life nor art will admit answers, only motives, and these, still disputed, will be forever debatable.

Eileen McHugh is one of those rare figures who is well known and unknown at the same time, a brand name not a person, a product not an experience. How many people at breakfast associate the family name on the cereal box with Malthusian philosophy that demanded the creation of a food with no nutrition in order to reduce sex-drive? And how many of us would dream of vacuuming the floor with a Spangler? Eileen might be known for nothing more than *"He's on the other line..."*, but there is more to her work

than this single, iconic piece. So it is thus time to put the record straight by recreating and then displaying the artist's life and work, thus permanently and justly associating her name with her achievements.

A biography of an icon, however, must never be a mere event. It must grasp a status demanded by its subject and inhabit that citadel throughout. So, in the case of my efforts on behalf of Eileen McHugh, let me fail from the start, since she has now become so well known, so obviously recognised and widely described that I, from my relative obscurity, could never even aspire to such status. At best, I can be a medium through which Eileen's work can be revealed.

It is over thirty years since Eileen McHugh last worked. For most of those years, her name would hardly even have registered in the memories of her former neighbours. In some ways, she may even have been labelled as better forgotten. She lived in a pre-internet era, and so never contributed to social media, never owned a mobile phone, never owned a credit card and so left neither a transaction trace nor a download history. She did not even own a camera for most of her life, so pictures of her exist largely in other people's memories. A life so recent was thus unknown in our times at the dawn of my interest in reimagining her work.

It might be legitimately asked if anything remains to be said about a figure such as Eileen. Received opinion is that she left no work, desired no legacy, despised the very concept of permanence, rejected longevity and treated life itself with apparent contempt. These assertions, I will argue, remain true, but the reality was considerably more complex, and thus of interest. For me, personally, this reconstruction of Eileen has been a voyage of discovery via the memories of those who knew her, and it is this journey I seek to share. No matter how anonymously we choose to live, our very

existence inevitably leaves its imprint in the crushable fabric of life, and forms moulds that can be refilled into recreated form.

Talent, in itself, is already success, and recognition confirms talent. Ideas are in themselves achievements, but when the ideas are born of great talent, it is almost inevitable that they will capture attention and, like floating cream, rise to achieve the prominence and status they deserve. And even when such ideas possess no physical existence or expression, if they be the product of genius, they will prevail and ultimately emerge to demand recognition. Such was the process by which Eileen McHugh became a household name, despite her complete lack of physical legacy to advertise her genius.

And given the prominence of her signature piece, it is now essential that someone attempts to reconstruct the body of her other work. Remaking the products of Eileen's undoubtedly fertile imagination, however, poses greater problems than reassembling the little we know of her creative life. Though she did leave us copious descriptions of some pieces, most had to be re-imagined through the memories of those who saw them, sometimes at the very instant they were created, for in many cases that is as long as they existed. That she destroyed most of what she produced is now common knowledge and, as a reader of this critical biography, you may legitimately ask what now can be authentic in a corpus of work which only exists in modern reconstruction? My answer will be revealed as the biography proceeds, but at the outset I need to stress the importance in this process of Eileen McHugh's own notebooks, which have come into my possession only since the recent death of her mother.

Never before have we had the privilege of seeing the

sculptor's work from the perspective of her own thoughts, her own choices, inspirations and justifications. I discovered the texts, which were never released by Marion McHugh during her lifetime, in a forgotten box of personal effects that had not been touched by anyone since it was lodged with the owners of the care home where she spent the last years of her life. Marion McHugh had not deliberately hidden the notebooks, nor had she destroyed them, so one must conclude that her intention in preserving them had been to share them. Marion's state of mind, her incapacitating dementia and latterly her struggle with Parkinson's Disease probably meant that, by the time I began visiting her, she had merely forgotten the notebooks had ever existed.

It was just a few years ago that Eileen McHugh's legacy changed my own life. By chance, after contact with Marion's carers during her final months in the care home, I was presented with that box of memorabilia. Inside I stumbled across what I then believed was the only item of Eileen's work still in existence. For some unknown, unconscious reason, I decided not to throw it and the other contents of that private box into the plastic bin liners that were rapidly filling with Marion's few, but unwanted possessions. And so "*He's on the other line...*" came to the world's attention. This work, alongside assembled memories from the single shoebox that Marion had brought from the house she vacated, the house that had been sold to fund her care, were passed to me as the only possessions she retained. And when I took that now fabled object in my hand, its contents struck a previously un-played chord and thus demanded their own preservation. Perhaps it was the immediate sense of genius, an implicit but vivid recognition of genuine talent that immediately imprinted on my consciousness. I decided to keep it for whatever frivolous reason and the rest is now mere

history. As a result of keeping this apparently trivial object, Eileen McHugh's name just a year later had become pure currency, exchangeable anywhere. It is my sincere belief that my reconstructions of work from the notebooks will also remake the future, assuring her legacy and confirming her genius.

But given that Eileen McHugh's personal ambition was to be forgotten and to leave no mark, surely, then, this new fame has placed her memory into an uncomfortable limbo, a state that she herself would not have sought. But here, in *Eileen McHugh: A Life Remade*, this re-examination and reconstruction of her work, let me assert my belief that any art must become the property of its audience once the creator has given it an existence. It is the artworks themselves that are communicated via the artist's ideas, and then these concepts, which now have lives of their own, enter a form of independent public ownership, so they can be legitimately examined, repeated and even remade. Once created, they own their existence and retain their right to that life, their internal meaning remaining their own property.

Eileen McHugh was forever burdened by meaning, her short burst of creativity stacked with experience, her imagination emotional and vivid. If fame had come earlier, during her short creative lifetime, her story would now surely be altogether different. Inescapable and irreversible is the fact of her cessation of activity, aged just twenty-four, having received no recognition, fame, wealth or, arguably, even contentment. But like all great artists, it falls to her followers, her devotees, her survivors, whose lives have been enriched by the power of her vision, to ponder what might have been and to raise her legacy to the stature it deserves.

Who knows what she might have produced had she not achieved her apparent goal of becoming unknown? What

might Schubert have composed if he had lived as long as Brahms? How might Raphael have represented the world had he survived into Mannerism? And what would Owen have written about had he outlived Armistice Day? In the case of Eileen McHugh, it could be argued that she achieved the anonymity she desired. But here I intend to question this view, to demonstrate that the young artist's vision was coloured by the deprivations of her environment and that her creativity did conceive of the permanence that it has since achieved. After inheriting her notes, sketchbooks and journal, I can shed new light on what she might have achieved and, indeed, they have illuminated the manuscript of an artistic life story as yet untold. It is not often that a household name belongs to a person unknown and I hope to put flesh onto these unclaimed bones and answer the question of where her work might have travelled if she had attained a longer creative life, one that might even have reached middle-age.

This and other questions have been at the core of my work. Through forensic and painstaking research, I have reassembled detail of the artist's life and have reconstructed many of her lost works, a catalogue of which is in preparation and will be published alongside this biography. The work's very nature, of course, means that none of it can be described as *original*, in the sense that it comes to us directly from the artist's own hand. We can have no problem with this, however, especially when we cannot be sure whose brushstrokes painted a canvas from the studio of an old master, or which particular printer was responsible for etching a plate, or even which unrecorded editor created that now famous line. Art is in the communicated idea and its formulation, and these can be appreciated in the work of Eileen McHugh as completely as they might be for any artist,



alive or dead, private or public. It is the art that lives on, not the artist. Music lingers while its composers decompose.

But also, by its very nature, Eileen McHugh's work challenges our very understanding of what is original, since from the outset she sought to redefine our perception and experience when we view a work of art. In a sense, she became the ultimate denouement of the arts, Dadaist by achievement as well as ideology, in that she wanted all of us to become participants in the process of creation, to remake the object itself. In her version of reality, it is not the product of the artistic process that matters, but the process by which our attention comes to rest on a form, on an object we are invited to see. It is not the object itself which forms her art, but the experience of attention diverted and focused, however momentarily or ephemerally. It was that moment, when perception is possibly changed, that she explored. Objects we would have normally not even noticed thus become, by virtue of the artist's vision, objects of our concentration, perhaps interest, perhaps not. But our lives have been changed by the encounter, and that cannot be denied. I hope here to lead the reader along the pathways of the artist's now revealed intentions. It is a path that must also inevitably follow her life, because in her case, perhaps more so than for any other artist, her life was her art and her art was her life. The two are inextricably intertwined and must be understood as one and the same, despite our possessing little evidence of either.

I accept that Eileen McHugh did not foresee the enduring success her work was destined to achieve. And it is also clear that the very notion of that success might for her have been anathema. None of us can imagine, however, how we might react if the unimagined and unexpected spotlight of fame were to fall on us. It has the power to change people, and so

it might have changed Eileen McHugh, whose individual vision was probably not even understood by her peers, family or teachers. Thus, we may only speculate how attention, if it had arrived earlier, might have transformed her attitude to permanence. Now, as a result of my research, I feel personally qualified to speculate on how this might have affected her. I have used, for want of a better term, a process of psychological extrapolation, drawn in part from my own reactions to my own attainment of recognition when previously I had never even considered the possibility. The position is also justified, because history cannot be rewritten. The question of whether Eileen McHugh herself would have accommodated her changed status is now an irrelevant consideration, since *de facto* her name is now public property. Both fame and status are now irreversibly hers, whether she might like it or not! As such, she has become the public property of anyone who experiences the product of her genius, in whatever form.

So intertwined are the events of the artist's life and the products of her creativity that I have rejected the idea of dealing with them as separate topics. Throughout I will deal with the physical and artistic lives together, illustrating how completely intertwined they were. Sometimes one becomes the other, and thus illustrates how the artist herself chose to express her genius in the objects she constructed. It is surely impossible to separate any artist from the art, the person from the work. We see both as manifestations of the same humanity, an exported personality from an individual's country, preserving a response to a precious moment in time and space. Via its extended permanence, this shared humanity becomes part of each and every one of us who experiences its message, with value and worth communicated, absorbed and incorporated. Whatever we do

from that moment, our changed perception endures, its influence on future thought and action assured. Once experienced, these objects cannot be excised from our memories and thus they leave us changed.

And the rest, it has to be said, is history. We are now some years on from that day when Marion McHugh herself passed away, over three decades after her husband, after growing frailer by the day in her nursing home. But the preceding year witnessed the development of a bond between Marion and me. Via my inheritance of that forgotten box, Eileen's probably forgotten papers came into my possession, documents without which this biography could not have been written. This material, alongside my own research now forms the most complete archive currently available on Eileen McHugh and will itself eventually be catalogued and displayed in the museum I intend to build and dedicate to her life and work. I hope that this artistic life will be transformed into a permanent memory that can be experienced, understood, incorporated and absorbed by anyone who cares to share it.

## London

She was just eighteen when London claimed her. The town itself was older, but to the naïve teenager arriving at art college in mid-September, it felt younger, like a tabula rasa she could mould in her own infinite image. For Eileen, as for most of us, the city's power to absorb without changing counterbalanced Eileen's exuberance, cancelled it out to leave a plain, self-preoccupied normal. She would never have claimed that at the time, of course, since her opinions would have then been constrained by the insecurity that almost inevitably steers youth away from individuality, mingled with the narcissism that denies anything existed before the self. Her youth convinced her she was unique, but London had seen it all before. This painful realisation would come later, and gradually.

Her art college started two weeks earlier than the university places that just one or two of her higher achieving former friends had proudly secured, a fact of which they never seemed to tire of reminding her in those months that followed their individual decisions about their no-longer collective future. She had little to do with them after leaving school, but they were still there, just down the hill from home and still seen on most days. But at least she was here, or there, ready to start her pursuit of the one thing she had convinced herself she wanted. Of course, there were other things that attracted her, but she had yet to believe that they were truly for her. Art college, and thus the status of the artist, the visionary, the one anointed with the ability to see and communicate, that status was for her and at the time she was determined to claim it.

It was a mock-classical Victorian brick pile that welcomed its new intake. Eileen, like most of her fellow

students, had little knowledge of the origins of their college, but detailed awareness of what had unfolded there just a couple of years before. The fact that the institution had been changed by student action was immediately conceded to all those newcomers who heard the head of school's address. He stressed the proletarian and therefore respectable and noble origins of the institution. He also acknowledged how minimally the building had been converted on becoming an august modern institute of higher learning - a lick of paint here or there, all neutral, functional, boring, and an occasional opening up of the classroom spaces to transform them collectively into a salon-studio. It was definitely not perfect, but change was on the way, he said. The assembled new intake accepted his apologies, but they were thus prepared for the relative deprivation of their coming experience, but not yet aware of how they would react.

This meant that the three storey, wooden sash-windowed, green copper-topped, porticoed pile atop a rise near a famous north London hill welcomed Eileen McHugh into its intellectual care, but simultaneously warned that the experience may indeed be limited. It would take less than a term for the positive to be hollowed out, but she, along with her fellow students, mostly female but all called fresh men, still managed to pursue their increasingly individual paths while they enjoyed a collective, if competitive, friendship.

They were almost all teenagers, overwhelmingly female and all, in their collective analysis, attractive. The few blokes were gay, but the word would never have been used, because it had yet to be redefined. In that era, they preferred 'queer', labellers and recipients alike. It did not go unnoticed amongst the new recruits that years two and three both matched the same profile.

It was the end of London's swinging decade, just after the

year of student protests, sit-ins, lockouts, marches and wilting flower power. It was the era of mods, rockers, hippies, anti-war movements, emerging awareness of the planet's resource limits and nascent anti-consumerism in a generation that would go on to out-consume all that went before. It was an era where being left-wing was cool, but an era where they would have preferred the word 'fashionable'. The fact that fashions can change is evidenced by this same generation's election and re-election of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan less than ten years on.

And Eileen McHugh was deeply into all of it. On some days she saw herself as a mod, adopted a crew cut and wore braces and boots. On other days, it was sandals and a long, loose, ankle-length skirt with tee shirt above, thin enough to advertise she wore no bra. There was a jacket for colder days, an embroidered Indian fake, with little mirrors stitched into the patterns. She had bought it on the secondhand stalls in Wakefield market on one of her ritual Tuesday morning rummages about a year before. She hadn't grown much in that year in any direction, because the jacket still fit her, or fit her as badly as it always did. It had probably been discarded by someone who had acquired it as an act of worship after hearing Sergeant Pepper's, and then got married. Having no ideological preference, she could be mod one day and hippie the next, at whim.

Before she arrived in higher education, she played Progressive Rock and Ravi Shankar in equal measure. Her tastes were catholic, matching her religion save the case of its initial letter, though the music was not lapsed. She worshipped Yes and Chicago, retained a soft spot for Fifth Dimension, and regularly played Richard Harris singing - for want of a better word - songs by Jim Webb before an orchestra of kitchen sinks. Where the hell was MacArthur

Park anyway? And did it matter? Iron Butterfly was something to dance to, especially if she was drunk enough not to know what she was doing. But already for a year or so new sounds had begun to stir her imagination. They were largely American, as were all the others, but not exclusively so. These new sounds fit no marketed mould. They were raucous and poetic, individual and collective at the same time, random and yet forcefully structural.

She had first heard jazz on BBC2 and had concluded it was played by old men who smiled at the camera. But then she heard Tubby Hayes and Mike Westbrook and was enthralled. She soon progressed to BBC Radio Three's jazz, late at night, in bed, under the covers with a trannie and earphones. It was far from the dance music of the bands, even a long way from the celebrated self-promotion of bebop; no, this was different. This was the flamboyant introspection of Coltrane, Coleman, Davis (already passé), Ayler, Shepp, Taylor. Already she had absorbed the British scene. Skidmore had just been awarded his prize in Montreux. Osborne was to become her manic hero and Surman was always there, except when she tried to get to one of his gigs. But more of that later...

It was a new world, a synthesis of fragmentation, an unpredictable, never to be repeated dose of individualized sound, which coincided with the ideological route her art had already taken. The experience convinced her that she had been right all along, and sure enough London's fringes drew her into free jazz. She arrived looking up to pineapple and cheese on sticks washed down with Hirondelle at parties, and continued the fashion, because food was just not something you thought about. Where she came from, male friends considered an evening with a Watney's Party Seven to be just about the coolest thing on the planet, despite the beer

being warm because the giant can would not fit in a sixties fridge. But her tastes began to change, and the total freedom of the music symbolised, even idealised that change. Increasingly, she saw cultures, like religions, as she had been repeatedly told during her Catholic upbringing, as stained-glass windows, grey and flat on the outside, yet coloured, inspiring and magnificent inside. But the London Eileen still saw only from the outside still seemed multi-coloured, surprising and exciting. Its glass shone from every angle. And its jazz she would see coloured from the inside.

We can be sure about the details, by the way, from the previously mislaid archive of Eileen's notes that were rediscovered in her mother's stowed-away box. At least in those early months, Eileen was a very conscientious communicator. She had promised her parents she would keep in touch and wrote home regularly, at least in her first year. And the letters were not mere summaries, and often contained verbatim accounts of what she had done at college, rewrites of material she offered her tutors during the day. For an artist who trusted to the moment, she displayed a surprising need to perfect and refine, as if each raw statement needed redefining and reworking. Let's let Eileen describe herself. It was the first task of her induction week and preserved in the sketchbooks she kept so conscientiously and carefully under instruction at the start of her course.

*Task 1 Describe yourself and your education to a stranger*

My name is Eileen McHugh. I am eighteen years old. I come from Wakefield, halfway to Pontefract, to be accurate. It's called Crofton. It's quite a big town now. Before it was just a mining village, with terraced houses on streets that had numbers, not names. Before that there were farms. But then, about ten years ago, they started building estates, but not



council houses. They were new houses with all mod cons, like gardens, built-on garages, driveways, bathrooms and indoor toilets. We even had central heating installed a few years later, and a telephone. We moved to a semi near a new pub called The Weavers Green on Slack Lane. That really is its name. I'm not lying. I never do. We have a Cock Lane as well. There's a Grime Lane in Sharlston, another village a mile away.

I went to secondary school in Crofton. I didn't pass my scholarship. I went to a school called Browns. It was a private school in Crofton. It's one of the reasons my parents decided to move to Crofton from Wakefield, so I could go to that school. My parents knew I wouldn't pass to go to Grammar School. I was in a junior where they had two streams in each year. It was the other class that was preparing for the eleven-plus. We got the same work, but nobody actually did it. We were being told all the time about sheep and goats needing to be separated. I can't remember which one I was. The other reason we moved was that the area where we lived before, near the rugby ground, had lots of immigrants and we didn't feel safe.

My parents did not want me to go to a Secondary Modern. They thought it was not right for me, but I think that it was more likely not right for them. Most of my friends went to the Secondary Modern, but not the one in Crofton. We moved just as I finished junior school, so they went to a school close to where we used to live. I had to make a new set of friends when I started at Browns.

We had to wear a uniform, just like in Grammar School. Except our uniform was green, and striped. There wasn't another school that wore green. We stuck out like sore thumbs. It was the only cheap private school in the area. There were other private schools in Wakefield, but only for

rich people. We used to be laughed at by the Grammar School kids, who called us dumbos and also by the Secondary Moderns, who called us stuck-up dumbos. Perhaps they were both right. And also wrong at the same time. For most of the kids in Browns, it was the parents who decided they should be there.

The school was in Crofton New Hall. In fact, it was an old house behind stone walls at the bottom of Cock Lane. It had a little stream, the beck, we called it, running across the back. The school wasn't up to much. We had no equipment. The science labs were just benches with sinks and gas taps. Every floorboard creaked, and the plaster was cracking off. It wasn't a big place, but everywhere had an echo. And most of the teachers couldn't care less. Except for art, which I loved. The art teacher was Miss Wallace and she cared about what you did and talked about it. She didn't just put a tick and a mark out of ten at the bottom. I didn't like school.

At least, I didn't like it during the day. But I enjoyed it in the evenings. One of my best friends was Martin. His father was the caretaker at Browns. They lived on-site but he went to the Grammar School. And so did all of his friends. Apart from me.

But because his dad was the caretaker, he and his friends used to meet at Browns in the evenings, usually around six o'clock, and play football in the school playground. It wasn't very big, but enough for five-a-side. The advantage for the boys was that the school was being cleaned in the evenings and because they couldn't afford to employ enough women to do the job, Martin's mother and father did most of the work and they hardly ever finished before ten o'clock. And, while the school was being cleaned, they kept all the classroom lights on, so the playground was lit up and the lads could play all year round. The boys played football and the

girls - there were four of five of us - used to sit at the side. The boys thought we were watching them, but we were chatting. And because I was in the school during the day, I knew my way around the buildings, so sometimes we went inside if it was raining. Martin's dad didn't like that, but we didn't do anything wrong, so he usually turned a blind eye. I used to enjoy the wet nights inside, which forced the boys to talk. And we used to look at my work, which was always on display. And then we would talk about it.

Like all school students whose projected grade average is below A, Eileen was self-deprecating. She would always get the excuse in first, well before the criticism had been aired. It's about knowing your place and then not aspiring to a status beyond your station. In her case, like everyone else's, it was never a conscious trait, but a conditioned response, brought on by a repeated perception of being belittled. She had friends she valued, that she thought she could not live without, and it was they who, collectively though implicitly, ruled out of order any attempt to step outside their assumed norm. It may have been an age of freedom, individuality, self-expression and of letting it all hang out, but woe betide anyone who challenged social norms or threatened convention. So things just never change, at least at home...

But for Eileen McHugh, going to college meant leaving home and London was about to change everything. It was big. It was anonymous. Anything went. At college she met new people, who all arrived in the group with individual but apparently no collective social baggage. She felt she could become the person she wanted to be but remained unclear as to who that person might be. The anticipated change did emerge, but neither immediately nor swiftly, and eventually it took her to many places she never imagined she might go.

It had been her parents, her father in particular who had insisted on her tenancy of a single room in a family house north of the college. In those days they were called digs, possibly because they were both archaeological and grave-like. A college-backed list of officially registered, and therefore trusted accommodation had arrived in an information pack alongside her college acceptance letter. It was a few stapled sheets onto which addresses and telephone numbers had been listed. It had been typed onto a spirit duplicator master, with corrections still evident, and then run off, as the teachers said at school, to multiple, vaguely blurred copies. Eileen saw it as a school worksheet, that excuse for not having textbooks, that she had seen every day of her school life and she prejudged it accordingly. Names of proprietors were included where relevant and Eileen's father, Thomas, had ringed a half a dozen places they might try. All were private addresses, offering one room, where the proprietor was listed as a Mrs Something-or-Other. After all, misters could not be landladies and that was the heading above the column of names. If Tom McHugh's daughter was going to London, then he was going to make sure she would be looked after like she was still at home.

They had made the phone call in August, a month before she was due to start college and had paid rent from the date of the call. "It being hard to say no to someone else willing to pay the extra..." said the apologetic but emphatic voice at the other end. Eileen was worried from that point, and her fears proved justified. Mrs Duke would probably be large, maternal, judgmental, stern and intolerant. The assessment proved nothing less than accurate.

That suspicious, bigoted landlady came with a poky space attached, and it soon began to grate with a young woman who had suffered visions of liberation. Away from home for the

first time, Eileen wanted to stay out late, invite an occasional friend around, possibly even someone who wasn't female, but the short dark, almost cubist lady who owned the place had an explicit, written condition of tenancy that stated, 'No visitors'. She double locked and chained the front door at ten o'clock and clarified from day one she would not get up to admit any latecomer, even a tenant. And any tenant that did arrive home after ten would be a tenant no longer. If awakenings could be rude at the end of the nineteen-sixties, then this one was near-pornographic. Let's say that Eileen suffered the destruction of multiple preconceptions, the blocking of imagined opportunities and the complete restriction of a freedom she had imagined but had yet to claim. The experience of London, adulthood she had yet to approach, independence she had only imagined, all these simply disappeared before a landlady with house rules and a door chain.

She was also under pressure. For the first time in her life, her tutors made demands on her that she was expected to fulfil. No more the promise, no more the excuse. Students were handed project briefs describing assignments that would last six weeks, sometimes longer. And these were project briefs whose distribution came with completion dates attached and an expectation that each individual would deliver on time and in full. She took time to get used to such demands, to realize they were as nebulous as what had gone before. Initially, she took them all at their word and did her utmost to deliver.

The first three months were a quiet time, perhaps the quietest of her life, since as a teenager in Crofton she had been given much of the freedom she asked for, though never more than would trouble her conservative parents. It was a freedom with strict but unwritten limits that were publicly

respected implicitly by both sides. Paradoxically, London, which she imagined as the great liberator from these invisible boundaries, initially reined her in, dictated a work and no play cloistered monasticism she had never before experienced, and it was a shock of sufficient severity to provoke reaction.

And so she spent an isolated term, during which she almost religiously consulted each day's listings in the almost biblical, fortnightly edition of *Timeout* to scan the events. It was of course the jazz section that interested her the most, even more than the gallery listings. From the distance of West Yorkshire, she had notions of going to Ronnie Scott's once a week, of rubbing shoulders with some of those American names that she knew only from album covers and radio. That was before she knew how much it cost to get in. And if that surprised her, then eventually so did the price of a drink inside. But with all that wisdom still in the future, she read in each issue that there existed a special student rate for anyone arriving before nine thirty and buying a drink. And the frustration of her confinement started to mount. Eventually, it would be the other venues that would attract more, but in that first term, the 100 Club, Peanuts, Bedford College and the Jazz Centre Society were just names, but names that amplified the frustration of not getting to Frith Street.

It was December before Eileen, Linda and Charlotte finally agreed to pool their respective grants and move in together. They found a little flat above a shop in Muswell Hill, right on the Broadway. It had a large lounge that could be divided with furniture so that two of them could share, while Linda, an older, late-vocation artist could have the single room, because she also had an established boyfriend, who conveniently had nowhere permanent of his own. There

was a shared bathroom and a kitchen of sorts, a kitchen that also boasted the flat's main entrance, which was at the top of the external fire escape at the back of the property. It was going to work and the three of them agreed to make it happen.

It was probably only later that Eileen realized that it was this break with the past that most contributed to the change in her outlook. Until then it had been family, school, dependable, trusted encounters with people who were always there. All of a sudden, she realised she had remained blind to the fact that her entire life, and not just the last term, had been confined, defined by others, lived to external demands placed on her. Suddenly she felt she was alone, paradoxically in control of everything, but sensing a powerlessness, an inability to decide or to act. Art college, at least in the first month, felt like it might occupy the same ground as her adolescence, imposing its own rules and limits. But she soon learned that a landlady was not a mother and a college tutor was anything but in loco parentis. Moving in with her two flat mates opened her eyes to changes that had already happened but had gone unnoticed. She was now on her own, together with Linda and Charlotte, but separated by their individual needs and competitive setting. She was suddenly responsible for herself, queen of her self-image, but a mere pawn in the space that the chess moves of their selfish sharing created.

Initially, Eileen found Linda a challenge, because she was different and fit none of the models that life had thus far convinced her existed. Linda was older, from Eileen's perspective an almost incredible eight years older. She was almost old enough to be Eileen's mother. She had left school at fifteen and taken no public exams. But that was where the similarity of their experience ended. Linda had done a

secretarial course before taking a job to do what the training had taught her, that she should commit to paper and ink permanence what the creativity of the male mind dictated. It is hard for contemporary experience to comprehend that less than fifty years ago documents were produced on typewriters, on sheets of paper with carbon copies, by women, always women. Men thought up the words, but none of them was able to type, because typing was not considered a skill. It was menial, repetitive, not worthy of brains trained to think. Neither was shorthand a skill, despite it having to be learned in detail and at much cost of time. But a secretary's lot was nice work if you could get it and paid the mortgage if you could stick it. Linda couldn't. By twenty-four, the fifteen-year-old's ambition of a semi in Harlow, husband, kids and two incomes no longer appealed in the way that the teenager's previously conventional mind had imagined. She was bored. She was bored shitless, especially in Harlow. It was a time when the term 'far out' was cool, and the Essex dormitory suburbs were just too far. She felt she was on the wrong side of the river, her bridges burnt, but in fact, as far as the geography was concerned, she was on the right side of the river and didn't even need a bridge.

She had taken up painting as a pastime, had followed Kenneth Clarke's every civilizing word, had taken a holiday to Florence on the back of the enthusiasm his presentations generated and then decided to chuck in the salary and study art. A foundation course at a local college began the transformation and now here she was at Art College on a Fine Art degree course at twenty-six.

The boyfriend from Harlow had to go as well, of course. He had been long-standing - four years they had been together - but his unquestioned assumptions matched what she was trying to reject. It became an ideological separation



and nothing the predictable lad from Epping could do or say was of any consequence for a woman whose mind was made up. He worked in a bank and spent most of his time weighing bags of coins that local shop keepers produced from their bulging holdalls. His name was Rod and he was pretty straight, so straight that his ambition was to occupy one of the desks behind the bank's glass screens, where daily totals of the coin-haul were logged by people a few years older than himself. Rod's heaven, forever to be imagined, was that semi on a new estate, a Cortina outside and Linda with their two children inside. Though he worked with money, he had no head for figures and had yet to realise the financial impossibility of this imagined paradise. This, however, was definitely not for Linda, and the day she broke the news to him, she broke him as well as their assumed engagement. She was not proud of what she did, for she still loved him, but she had to learn to love herself more, and so he had to go. They had lost contact soon after the break, which was over a year before Linda arrived on her Fine Arts degree. She did, however, often speak to the others of her time with him.

The new boyfriend was Alan, a betting office manager from Aberystwyth, a name none of the girls in the flat could spell without a map. He worked in a place whose name none of them could be bothered to remember in the eternal daylight world of the suburbs between Essex and London, a place that would forever identify with both, but be part of neither. It became clear just a couple of weeks into their tenancy that he would be a permanent fourth resident of their flat share for three. What a coincidence it was that the lease on his previous place, a bedsit in Stamford Hill had expired the same month the three of them planned to move in. The journey would be a pain, much further and involving more than one change, but thank goodness for British Rail. A

measure of the distance that separated their camaraderie was the inability of either Charlotte or Eileen even once to confront Linda with the suggestion that she might even have planned things that way. Each of the women continued to pay a third of the rent and Alan was living for free, despite being the only one of them who actually earned a wage. He did buy occasional goodies, however, goodies that gradually became more important contributions to their collective happiness.

For Eileen, Alan was something of a problem. He was the first real foreigner she had ever met. He was not only not English, but he was fiercely Welsh, even supporting the Welsh rugby team when it played England, not that she knew anything about rugby, except knowing that the ball was not round. This is perhaps a measure of how introverted, presumptive and parochial had been her upbringing, her education and social experience to the age of eighteen. Despite assumptions of enlightenment superior to anything that had gone before, assumptions adopted by children of the sixties as if by right, she still found herself thinking that there was something wrong with not being English. London was to change all that, and Alan's singing Welsh twang, though not quite the first time she had been confronted with a foreign accent, since there had been a girl at school from Newcastle whom everyone called "Jock", it was the sheer persistence of Alan's Welsh, every word of which initially needed translating, that introduced her to the concept of 'foreign'. It was rather a shock. For some weeks, she regularly told him he should change, though into what she generally left open.

And then there was Charlotte. She was very much the middle-class hippie, the epitome of 'Peace, Brother' whilst holding an anemone. She was so gentle, apparently, she could hardly be heard to breathe. She wore floppy hats, flowery, flouncy dresses, bangles on her ankles, listened to

ragas and didn't even wear sandals, preferring unshod dirty feet, at least around the flat. She ate lentils, smoked pot, which she soon learned to call dope, endlessly plaited and unplaited her hair, believed in free love, world peace, ban the bomb and Janice Joplin, and would vote Conservative for Heath against Wilson, when the opportunity arose in nineteen-seventy. Independence, it seems, rarely gets beyond the confines of one's parental prejudices, no matter how different it might look.

Charlotte's art was a cross between William Morris, Aubrey Beardsley and Claude Monet, artists whose styles she consciously amalgamated through direct quotation, nay copying, of motifs, all of which could be identified from the pages of *From Giotto To Cezanne*. She had been brought up and schooled in a place called Pinner which, as far as Eileen thought, might still be trying to enter the twentieth century. From Charlotte's point of view, and in the interest of balance, Eileen's origins simply did not exist since they were probably north of Watford. It was some months after meeting Charlotte that Eileen learned Pinner was just six miles south of Watford.

Charlotte oozed middle-classness, like a mint prints money. Its mustiness oozed through the loose weave of her Indian cheesecloth blouse, enabling her to leave the scent of her opinion on whatever she encountered without ever breathing a word. She was designed, it seemed, for respectability, family, professional job, moderate status via financial solvency of a husband, eventual Tory party membership and a blue rinse in the suburbs. The problem, however, was that home did not quite match up to the mould, and she was in the process, apparently, of doing everything in her power to reject what it stood for, deny its reality and be seen to opt for an alternative to what she perceived as its

stifling duplicity. Her parents were saddled with mortgage debt, her mother drank a bottle of gin a day and there were constantly perceived threats of domestic violence whenever the long-established arguments turned to shouting matches. At least that is how she herself described her experience of domestic bliss. She exaggerated.

To say Charlotte hated her parents would have been an overstatement, but only just. She did trust them and occasionally relied on them, but she always wanted limits placed on how near to her they should approach, at least that is what she said. She seemed determined not to become infected with anything associated with their way of life, but without realising she was already duplicating it via her attitudes. Her father, who clearly worshipped his only daughter, did come to college to visit her, but her mother stayed away. It was just too far, Darling.

Charlotte, it seemed, was offered and accepted the blame for not going to university, a reality her mother had not been able to live down from the day her daughter started secondary school and failed to get in the stream destined for an academic curriculum. Charlotte did get a couple of O-levels, but what good was Art, for heaven's sake? In a fit of pique, her father, citing what he deemed under-achievement as potential evidence, at one point suggested his wife may have been pregnant by someone other than himself. Her mother shouted abuse at her husband, but never opined on the substantive issue. The parents always maintained their decorum in front of Charlotte, of course, but also never missed an opportunity to talk about the other partner when alone with her. And so the three very different women set about sharing their flat, Linda in the private room and Eileen and Charlotte either side of their wardrobe divide.

It was Linda who presented Eileen with what she felt was

a challenge, though she never perceived it as such at the time. As her flat mate, especially in those meandering months that summed to form her first year in college, she unwittingly began to see Linda as a surrogate mother. For a start, she was those years older. The difference was only eight years, but when you have only yet lived eighteen, then the other has spent almost fifty per cent longer coming to terms with the emerging reality of life. It is a status to be first respected, later explored. Alan added to the illusion, perceived almost as a surrogate father. He was at least two years older than Linda and could even have been completely ancient, maybe over thirty. He never admitted he had been married before he met Linda, but somehow his presumption of an almost family life suggested he had.

It was much later that Eileen realized how powerful an influence Linda had been. At the time, she was not even conscious of how she deferred to her elder, rarely contradicted her, even more rarely questioned her, and always unconsciously allowed her to lead. Perhaps it was not obvious because Linda, herself, was so personally insecure, so socially unassertive. Like an assumed mother, however, she always seemed to be there. She also disappeared each night into her own room with her boyfriend, emerging the next morning displaying neither guilt, embarrassment nor achievement. It was a normality that for Eileen was both recognisable and addictive, a state to be publicly dismissed, yearned for in private.

It was Linda's obvious physical maturity that also dominated their relationship. Linda's body was that of a woman. She wasn't fat, but certainly wasn't slim. She wasn't tall or short. She wasn't pretty, but she was very attractive, a fact that Eileen grew ever more surprised she should notice. Linda's hair was not long, but then it wasn't short, either. It

was shoulder length, naturally curving in towards the neck, not out like the girls in adverts. Her breasts were large, but always covered by the loose round-necked tee shirts she invariably wore above her perfectly fitting jeans that seemed to have been specially made for the detail of her body. The protruding bust and loose tee shirt always suggested a void below, a void that might soon be filled with a planned pregnancy that would hide itself for a number of months. She also smoked, and, for Eileen, this only enhanced her similarity to 'mother'.

If that particular association grew stronger, then Alan, after that initial sense of his being a 'dad', grew less and less like a 'father'. He was showing signs of overhanging at the waist, thus forcing the top of his trousers increasingly out of sight. As the manager of a betting office, he was obliged to wear a suit and tie to work, despite traveling there by bus and train, along with all the other working males who did the same at the same time. He was a chain smoker, changed into jeans and denim shirt when he came home and drank two cans of Worthington E before settling down to the meal Linda always cooked for him. Increasingly, Eileen found him uninteresting, even boring. He expressed few opinions, was interested in very little other than sport - a preference that led him habitually to consume newspapers with increasing speed from back to front - and lifted not a finger around the flat, even to the extent that it was Linda who lugged his washing to and from the launderette, and struggled to iron out the creases the ultra-drying centrifuge inserted. Linda's relationship with Alan, at least in Eileen's younger eyes, was that of an established, taken-for-granted marriage.

Linda's work was not what might be called 'inspired'. She was a competent artisan, representationally accurate, faithful

to the appearance of her subjects. But she displayed little intellectual involvement with her art and even less interpretive rigour. This, of course, meant that she was diametrically opposed to Eileen's own approach, which rejected the need to represent anything other than the objects she assembled and focused on the viewer's intellectual interpretation of its possible meaning. In Linda's work, a finished object presented the onlooker with a final statement, whereas Eileen aimed at highlighting a concept which would form no more than a starting point for extrapolation. For Linda, the Pre-Raphaelites were close to gods. Stylistically, she kept them as her idols, whilst immersing herself in later models. She would drool over the print of Waterhouse's Lady of Shalott above her bed, spend hours on a flower painting in the colours of Holman Hunt and without thought render figures in the contours of Burne-Jones.

As artistic opposites, however, they attracted. Linda's opinion of Eileen's work was as detached and uninterested as the reciprocal relationship. Because they were so different, they could communicate across the known gap that separated them and, because there was no obvious commonality, there was thus no competition. Their aesthetic difference was accentuated by their complete physical contrast. Where Linda's shape was full, Eileen's was slender. Linda's womanhood was the opposite of Eileen's boy-like shape. In character also, they were diametrically opposed. Linda's apparent submission without opinion to Alan's needs was quite unlike Eileen's assertive, even domineering presence, a quality she herself would not have recognised. Basically, after a few weeks, Eileen could no longer stand the sight of Alan and Linda knew it. The subject of relationships was thus a taboo and remained an unspoken-of waste of time that hid behind most other opinions they exchanged.

They shared their flat in Muswell Hill for almost two years, until the end of their second year, when events forced each of them into different paths. By that time, Linda had decided to train as a teacher, a profession she would not take up before the age of thirty. Eileen, of course, pursued a different path, and they never met again after the end of that second year, by which time Linda had already moved out of the flat to set up independently with Alan in Palmer's Green. So it was with interest that I approached my interview with Linda, having tracked her down via Facebook to a housing estate in Milton Keynes.



## Eileen

A document in Marion's box was one of the first written assignment her daughter did in college. It was clearly an introductory exercise, no doubt aimed at beginning a process where the budding artists would examine themselves, their interests and their identities so that later they might discuss their personal artistic aims and direction. The document was undated, hand-written, and had clearly been sent along with a letter from London, possibly the first letter Eileen wrote home after starting her course. The letter, itself, is lost., but a credible scenario is that Eileen was proud of what she had written, proud enough to want her mother to see it.

There was a comment from Eileen's tutor at the end. It was probably the nature of this comment that prompted her to send the document to her parents, probably as a way of confirming that her decision to attend art college had been the right one. The tutor had written, "An excellent start to the course, Eileen. Let's get together soon to identify ways in which you can develop your original ideas. JD."

Later in this remaking of Eileen's life, I will include descriptions of her work. These were taken from pages of the sketchbooks where she originally wrote about her ideas. In later texts, there have been significant changes to what she wrote, largely because it was in note form. This separate document, however, is entirely in her own words.

*What do you want from the course and what do you think makes an artist?*

I want to be an artist. It's all I've ever wanted to be. My parents don't understand me. My friends didn't understand me. But I want to create. I don't want to make things. I don't want anything that can be put on a pedestal or preserved. All

I want to do is make thoughts. And once they are thought, they have to be re-thought, remade, reconstructed. I never destroy anything, but I don't keep it either. I want my work to have its own life, not a permanent death on display. I don't paint. I don't sculpt. I make. Then I unmake. And then I remake.

I want to learn to paint, make prints, sculpt and do ceramics. But I want to learn those things to make sure I avoid them. I want to create ideas, ideas that will last maybe only an instant and then they are gone. Art is the idea, not the object. It's not the writing in the exercise book that should be marked, but the ideas that were trying to express themselves. It's not my fault if my words written in ink don't properly represent what I have in my head. If I had one leg, I wouldn't be criticized for not running a hundred yards in ten seconds. My body doesn't work through words and my brain seems to hate anything permanent.

I suppose it became serious with our dam. We were all about 11, 12 or 13 at the time. There was a stream called the beck at the back of the school. I was quite new to Crofton, but the others said they knew where it came from. I can remember a summer evening when we all walked up Cock Lane and around the corner. And then we turned past the pub at the top down the main road towards Doncaster. Beyond the pub and its car park, going down the hill, there's a pavement on one side of the road. But on the other, there's a high stone wall that looks like it's the boundary of a private estate. My friends told me it was originally just that, the boundary of the grounds belonging to the New Hall, which was now my school. Except that when the land was sold by the original owners, the grounds were parcelled off and local farmers used them as meadows. There's a pigsty up the hill and then a field of barley before you get to Slack Lane. Now,

most of what were meadows is covered with the new estates but back then some of the newer ones hadn't been built. Just at the back of this wall on the main road there was some land that was never used by the farmers. It's a lake surrounded by trees, part of the landscaped gardens that the original owners of Crofton New Hall designed along with the house. Basically, the beck that runs across the back of the Hall originally comes from the higher ground towards Charlston. It used to go under the main road and then on the other side ran down the hill towards the old house. The people who built the New Hall dammed the beck to make a lake and then, to create the view they wanted, they built an underground passage for the stream out of stone and then landscaped the soil over it so that it disappeared until it got to the gardens at the back of the house where it came above ground to create pools and other features. They are all gone now, of course, as are the house's original gardens, which have become the school's playground and gym. The dam is still there because it would take a big effort and a lot of money to demolish it. I suppose the underground channel they built also still exists. There's a weir at one end where the stream drains from the dam and there's a stone tunnel, but it's dry nowadays and the water goes through a pipe further down. We tried crawling down the tunnel, but you can only get a few yards along it before you reach a wall of earth. There's a couple of old stone boat houses at the other side of the lake, just by the wall next to the main road, but they've been abandoned for years. The roofs caved in years ago and the window frames and doors have all gone, but there's a fireplace in one and part of an old stone table in the other.

When we first went there, the boat houses were full of junk and rubble, as was the stream that ran past them from under the road, the inlet to the dam. Where it comes through

the tunnel under the road, there was a mountain of junk, most of which had been dumped over the wall. In those days, you could stop the car on the road and throw your junk over the wall into the stream. Lots of people had clearly done that and there were pieces of furniture, old clothes, vacuum cleaners and all sorts of junk in a great big pile. The junk had partly blocked the inlet stream and the whole area was muddy. It was clear that if we moved some of the junk, then the stream would not overflow, and the ground would dry out.

I was only eleven at the time and new to the area when I first went there. We were all like that really, kids who had been brought up somewhere else, whose families had moved to the new houses. Most of us had no links to the village because we weren't from there. We had no idea who owned the dam and the land around it. All we knew is that there were sometimes people fishing. It just seemed like an abandoned place.

I didn't know my friends all that well, and I suppose the project we started brought us together, gave us something to share that later became a symbol of our friendship. I suggested we clear away the junk, put stepping stones across the stream and then clean up the boat houses so we could meet there. And it was when we started our project that I suddenly became aware of the history embedded in each of these discarded objects. To me, this was not rubbish, it was discarded life. Someone, somewhere in a different life from ours, had used, cherished, taken for granted, loved, hated or made each of these things. Now they were ours. My friends thought I was daft because I wanted to use everything and throw nothing away. It was stupid, I suppose, because it had already been thrown away once.

Destroyed, repaired, painted, repainted, broken, forgotten, stored, rediscovered and eventually discarded...

We salvaged each and every item, from shopping trolley to rocking horse, shoe to bike wheel, from curtain track to toilet brush. Every item represented some part, large or small, of those who had owned it, used it and then dumped and disposed of it. Just putting the things together in groups made families of strangers, whose experience and collective history suddenly came alive.

And, just like people meet by chance, momentarily share the same supermarket queue, watch the same football match or walk down the same road, only to reassemble in a different order in another place, then these objects put together for just a while mirrored what people do in their daily lives. And just as the groups of people deserve to reappear in new groups, then these objects could be taken apart and re-grouped. It's as if they have lives of their own, lives, like our own, that are constantly changing, never set in stone and always impermanent. It's not the objects themselves that create the art, but the stories they invite the viewer to imagine, to invent, to visualize. And these stories should be different each time the work is seen, so what better way to encourage the viewer to take part than to reassemble or at least rearrange things every day?

It took a while for these ideas to come together. When I first started, I wanted to assemble objects and then make up a story to go with my sculpture. But as time passed, I became more interested in the ideas that my friends invented when they saw what I had done. My teacher at school understood what I wanted to do and she encouraged me. I think she was bored with what she had to teach and really enjoyed having a student who didn't want just to make yet another copy of the same still life set up in the middle of the art room. We had one art class a week. And each time I used to bring in a few of the bits of junk from our boathouse at the back of the

dam. In class I would put the things together in some new way and then we had a class exercise to make up a story about what we could now see. In some ways, I was something of a celebrity in the art class.

I had an amazing art teacher, who was really interested in what I did. I used to have extra classes with her sometimes.

I have written too much and started to ramble. What I want from this course is just the opportunity to develop these ideas, to find new ways of making history out of objects, and then to remake them, just as temporarily.

## Journal

During her first term in college, Eileen clearly had time on her hands. She saw a lot of the walls of her rented room and Mrs Duke's house rules enforced a concentration of thought and energies that Eileen had not previously achieved and would not attain again. She took the instruction to keep a journal seriously and clearly spent some hours during those months before the turn of the year faithfully, seriously and conscientiously reflecting on her classes in college.

I found these pieces in her sketchbooks, which Marion had preserved. They were written by hand on lined paper, but bore no comments from her tutors, so one must presume they were never submitted for assessment. I conclude, therefore, that they represent the closest we have to her own, personal thoughts. They have been edited, but the content has not been changed.

### *Introduce Yourself and describe how you discovered art*

My name is Eileen McHugh. I was born on the eighth of August 1952. It was a Thursday, unfortunately, which means I have far to go. I am eighteen years old. I have never been abroad. I went to primary school in Sandal. But it's not really in Sandal, which is posh. It's more like Agbrigg, which is near the rugby ground.

The school was walking distance from home, but you had to cross a busy road to get there. When I was small my mum always took me as far as the zebra crossing. I always used to complain, because that meant walking in the wrong direction for a whole fifty steps. My mum then went the other way to get the bus into town.

Down at the school, there was always a lollipop lady on duty, so I was all right to walk the rest by myself through the

streets. I used to call in at the shops on my way home to buy sweets or crisps. For some reason I was always allowed to cross the main road by myself in the evenings. By the time I was eight, I was doing the whole trip by myself. But by then my parents said I shouldn't call at the shop any more.

My mum was often at work when I got home. She worked in Wakefield town centre and had to get the bus home. The buses were often crowded and she could be late. I stayed for school dinners so I could wait for my tea. My dad was usually home about half past five from his office. He worked for an insurance company. I left home at half past eight and got home about five, unless I stayed longer at my friend Julie's house, which I often did, especially when I knew my mum would not be in until six anyway.

If the weather was fine, we would take Julie's dog for a walk as far as the park on Sugar Lane. If it rained, we stayed in. We used to finish school at half past three and then it became four o'clock. The walks round the park were the best. Sometimes we crossed Doncaster Road, which we were told not to do, so we could get as far as the canal. The walks made a change from being bored at school all day, because there was always something interesting to find.

People used to drop their rubbish by the canal and Julie's dog, Sam, used to go rummaging about in whatever he could find. He would bring back things to us and drop them at our feet. It was almost as if he was proud of what he had found. We often used to try to work out why he might have chosen this thing rather than that, but he always seemed to choose things at random. Anyway, we used to throw the things back where we found them, and Sam would run after them and fetch them back. We would always laugh. Every time it was funny. It was almost as if he had discovered treasure every time.



We used to run through the park as fast as we could and Sam would have to chase us. We always did a run if he had been into the canal so he could dry off before we got home. Sometimes we did get wet as well, in which case I always used to wash my school things out by hand when I got home. My mother always liked it when I did my own washing, especially when she was ill.

Sam used to bring all sorts of things. There were bits of rubber tube, pipes, sometimes stones, sometimes old toys, or bits of wood. Now, when I think back to those times, what interested me is why Sam chose one thing rather than another. We used to talk about it, and we had some ideas. We thought it might have something to do with the colour, but it didn't. We did some experiments, but he seemed to choose things at random.

Obviously, whatever he chose he had to carry in his mouth, so the size was important. But as often as not he would choose something he couldn't carry, and it used to drag along the ground by his side as he pulled it out of the bushes. That used to make us laugh, especially when he got stuck in the undergrowth. Sometimes the thing he was carrying wouldn't go past a bush or tree trunk. But he would never give up on what he had chosen. He never went back to get something different just because what he had chosen proved hard to move. It's as if he had made a choice, a real decision about the thing he had picked up. It's funny how I always refer to Sam as "he", as if he was a man, but he wasn't. He was an 'it', because he had been doctored. He didn't have a tail either. He died.

I think it was when I was about nine that I really got interested in the things that Sam picked out from the rubbish dumps. I hadn't finished primary school, but I was not going to school very often at that time because my mother was

poorly. I can remember it all being a game until one day when I started to keep the things he brought. I don't really know why I started to keep those things, but quite soon I had filled a shelf in our shed at the back of the house and my mother told me not to bring anything else and to clear out 'all that rubbish', but on most days she was inside, so I could put things in there without her knowing.

Sometimes, I used to keep the shape of what he brought, as well as the things themselves, exactly as he dropped them. I used to stick them on pieces of hardboard and hang them on the wall. It was like my own little house and Sam's things were its ornaments. I used to spend a lot of time in that shed, sometimes all day.

Of course, I soon ran out of wall space, so I had to think up something different for Sam's sculptures, as I called them. Then it dawned on me to leave them exactly where he left them. Then, not only had Sam chosen the things, he had also arranged them. I used to keep a note of what I left and where it was, so that next time we walked there I could see if someone had decided to rearrange the objects. If they had moved, I tried to work out why the person had chosen to move this thing or that, and then I rearranged them again into a new work.

I failed my scholarship, but my parents did not want me to go to the Secondary Modern School. A lot of the pupils from my class went there, because we were streamed at school and Mrs Johnson took the scholarship class. I was with Mr Cartwright. So my parents paid for me to go to Browns. They couldn't afford Silcoates. We also moved house.

I had a really good art teacher. She was young and always seemed to be interested in the things I did. Sometimes I took some of the things I had collected into class and talked about

them. She seemed really interested. I used to bring in the things from our den, which a group of us set up at the back of the dam. I had a big collection by then, because we had to clear a lot of junk from the stream. Our art teacher at school was really interested in my sculpture. She wanted me to do the kind of work she thought I personally would find interesting, so I got a free hand. I would like to have remade some of the things I did from the bits and pieces Sam collected, but it all got thrown away when we moved.

She was also into anything she could call found objects, objets trouvés, as I was told to call them when my mother asked me what they were. I now know it's supposed to be French and I learned enough in school to be able to spell it. My mother never believed me when I told her I was doing homework when I was over at the dam sifting through rubbish.

I would put a couple of bits together. Sometimes it was funny, and sometimes I chose them just because of the shapes. I remember some of them. One was a baby's bonnet, pale blue and knitted, with a little stringy bobble on top. I stretched it over some mangled old plumbing bits. They had started as a length of lead pipe. They were old water pipes taken out of the old houses that were being knocked down. People used to tip their rubbish in the spinney over the dam wall in those days and the pipes were all bent, gnarled and tangled because they'd had to fit in someone's car boot.

I chose one piece and helped it on a bit with a couple more bends. I made it so it would stand up by itself and then I stretched the blue bonnet over the top. I called it Pipe Dream and the teacher really liked it. She laughed. She wrote a letter to my mother in my second year. I remember giving it to my mother, and she immediately thought I'd got into trouble. The letter said I had individualism, that I had the potential to

do something unique and outstanding. My mum told me to be quiet in class and do as I was told. I still have the letter and still read it occasionally. I can't think of another time when someone said something nice about me.

My mum patted me on the shoulder and was quite encouraging, but only for about a half an hour, when I was told to get on with my homework. My dad seemed more interested at first, but then he realised it was a letter from the art teacher. He said I should be getting letters like that from the science teacher. "Always wants to be the centre of attention, that one" is what I was told to my face when I showed it to my grandma. I don't know why she said, "that one", because I didn't have any brother or sisters.

I hardly went to school in those days. I played truant or bunked off as we called it. I went to registration in the morning and then escaped through the wire fence at the back. There was a park at the back and then the dam next to the main road. At the back of the dam, not twenty feet from where traffic was whizzing past on the other side of the wall, there was our old boat house. It was across a stream in an area that was fenced off. But it was easy to get across and through the fence. It was another stone building, but the roof had gone. It did, however, have a fireplace and it was in the middle of a little wood, so there was always something to burn. I used to go there even on cold days and make a fire, rather than go into school.

I think that in that school they didn't care whether you were in class or not. When I was about thirteen, the art teacher, Miss Wallace and my friend, Martin, persuaded me to stop playing truant. Without them, I doubt I would be in college today. I have never written this much before.

*What is your personal artistic goal?*

I want to do sculpture. I want to be a sculptor. I want to make things. I want to make people notice things, shapes and colours. What they see will change the way they see everything else. I don't want to be famous. But I do want to make things that are mine. I want to be listened to. I want people to notice the things I make. I don't want them just to walk past without looking. I have just finished reading about Michelangelo and I don't want to end up like him. The teacher yesterday gave us a class on sculpture. We looked at some famous old works and some other modern ones. We looked at Michelangelo's David and a few of us got the giggles. His head's too big, for a start and other bits are too small. All that stuff is too fixed, too permanent for me. I want things to last as long as it takes to see them. And then they should change. And they will change, because when people try to remember what they have seen, their memories will change it.

The teacher showed us some other pieces by Michelangelo called The Captives. They aren't finished, but to me they are more complete than the David. He is marble and seems to be fixed in stone, imprisoned by it. The Captives are trying to escape, and they are moving all the time, no matter how many times you look at them. Then we looked at some Henry Moore. I didn't know he was from Castleford. It's hard to imagine anyone from Castleford being famous. There used to be a Henry Moore in the art gallery on Wood Street and I've seen that lots of times. For me it's as bad as the Michelangelo. It's too fixed and for ever.

The teacher also showed us some sculptures by Man Ray, Duchamp, Picasso and Dali. I really liked the iron with tin tacks stuck to the bottom. It was very funny. I also liked the toilet because it's the kind of thing that I do every day when

I add to my collection. When I said that to the teacher, he said that would have been exactly what Duchamp himself would have wanted me to say. I did not understand that. The Dali lobster was also very funny.

But what really got me was the Picasso, the bull's head made from two bits of bicycle. The Dali was trying to do the same thing, by putting two things together that don't normally go. But the Dali was trying to be just too clever. The Picasso felt like it was something he had just discovered. It made me want to go through my collection and find out if I had anything that would work like that. The teacher asked us to start planning a work of our own based on found objects, as he called them. I have already started, which amazes me because if I had been at school I wouldn't even have listened.

I was no good at school. I hardly ever went. And when you miss lessons it's hard to go back because you don't know what's going on. You have also lost touch of what is expected of you, so everything you do or say is wrong. And then you stay away again. That's what happened to me. I can do all the basic things, because that's all they ever taught us, round and round the same textbooks all the time. It never varied, so I felt I wasn't missing anything when I bunked off. When you have to go back, being in school is like being in prison. It takes your life away. What I want from this course is something for me, not something for the teachers, or my parents, just for me. I want to make things, things that come from inside of me, things that are part of me. I want them to say what I want to say. But I don't want anything set in stone. Or metal. Or concrete. Or anything that will last for ever. What I want is something for now, not something for the past or the future, just now, for a moment, to be seen and enjoyed. And then thrown away, but not destroyed, so that someone

else can pick it up, pull it apart and make something else of their own, something that's all their own so they can feel the same achievement of creating something original, something personal.

I couldn't go straight to art college because I don't have any O levels. I wanted to leave school at 15, but I needed some exam passes. And then I did a Foundation Course but spent longer on it than I wanted. Now I am here, I will do what I really want to do.

*Write down your thoughts on today's sculpture appreciation class.*

We were looking again at modern sculpture in John Daly's class. He asked us two questions. "What is sculpture?" was the first one. While we were trying to think of an answer, he asked the second question, which was "What is a sculpture?" Now as far as I can see they are the same, except for the letter "a". But after thinking about it, I can see what he was getting at.

He made me think because he started with a painting. It was a painting of a pipe with words in French underneath. Even I could see it said, "This is not a pipe." I was confused and I asked the teacher why the painter had done it. The teacher answered, "Because it's a painting, and not a pipe. A pipe you could smoke, but you can't smoke this pipe." I said, "Well it's a painting of a pipe," and he said, "Precisely." I was confused, and so was everyone else. And he said again, "Precisely. It's a painting. It's not a pipe."

He then said, "This is an example of painting, which is about the abstract representation of things - and not always objects - but things that can be seen and represented as flat surfaces. Even when a painting is 'realistic' - he used his fingers to show us where he wanted the inverted commas - it

is still abstract, because the object, or even the expression being communicated is never itself flat. It is up to the viewer to interpret what the painter has put on the surface.” He even wrote the whole thing down on the blackboard, so I copied it. That’s why I knew his finger flicks meant inverted commas.

Then he asked us again. “So what is sculpture, and what is a sculpture?” I surprised myself, because I put my hand up to answer. I never used to do that at school.

“It’s the same as a painting, except it’s an object, and it has no frame.”

“Can you walk round a painting?” he asked

“Yes,” I said, “but you can’t see it from the back.”

Everyone laughed.

But it wasn’t the kind of laugh I got used to when I was at school. They weren’t sniggering. They weren’t laughing at me, they were laughing with me, because of what I had said. And I didn’t mean it to be funny. To me it was just obvious, but when I thought about it, I laughed as well. Why would anyone want to look at a painting from the back? But then that’s the difference, isn’t it? You can go round the back of a sculpture. It’s solid and an object. You can look at it from anywhere you want.

And when everyone laughed at what I said, I thought to myself that’s what I want my sculptures to do. To surprise people and make them laugh. And then we looked at some pictures, pictures of sculptures. You couldn’t walk round the back.

The first one was Saint Sebastian by Bernini. John Daly asked us to say what we thought of it. What I saw was something that was trying to be perfect. It was a dead man tied to a tree. He had been shot with arrows, most of which had nearly missed. He could easily have been asleep. I don’t



know anything about Bernini. I copied down that he lived three hundred years ago. Perhaps three hundred years ago people were only shot politely. The sculpture was very beautiful, but I think it says nothing about what it must have felt like to be shot with arrows while tied to a tree. It seems to show something real, but when you think about it, it's as far from the truth as you can get. He could be just asleep, resting his arm over a branch. There wasn't even any blood. You could imagine people going past it in a gallery and saying, "Oh, that's nice. It's so beautifully smooth and finished." I thought that Bernini could have left the back unfinished because he obviously wanted people to look at it from just one angle.

John Daly then showed us a different Saint Sebastian, this time someone called Paolozzi. I gasped when I saw it, because it was brilliant. It's not a human being, but it's clearly human because it's got legs and a body. It's made of junk welded together. It looks like what might be left of Saint Sebastian a long time after he has been cut down from his tree. Not only would you be able to look at this from every side, you would want to as well. It would be different from every angle. I surprised myself because I spoke up in class again. I never did that in school. I said I could have made that, using bits of stuff from round the dam in Crofton. I was laughing. I got embarrassed in case the teacher thought I was laughing at the sculpture, because I wasn't. John Daly's answer stopped me in my tracks. "That's why you're on this course," he said, "because we want to help you do exactly that. And tell us, Eileen, what would your Saint Sebastian look like?"

I don't remember ever being asked by a teacher what I wanted, and so I couldn't answer at first and the teacher went on to something else. I was still thinking, and not listening.

After a couple of minutes, I put my hand up. "Yes, Eileen," said John Daly.

"My Saint Sebastian would look like that one," I said, pointing to the one by Paolozzi, which was still pinned on the board, "But mine would be made of lots of different bits and pieces that wouldn't be permanently joined together, just jammed and balanced. People would be able to walk around it to see it from all angles, but also, they would be able to take it apart and put it back together however they wanted. They could even throw some of the bits away again if they thought they didn't fit."

The teacher didn't say anything for a while. Neither did anyone else. I thought they were going to laugh at me, show me up for saying something stupid, but they just stayed quiet. And then John Daly spoke.

"San Sebastian is one of the great subjects of Western art," he said. I was ready for the put-down because of my lack of respect. "He personifies sacrifice, and the reaching out of being human to achieve something greater, something transcendent." I realised I had never actually listened to a teacher before this. "How would your work convey these ideas?"

Again I thought. "Well, the things I would use to make him have all been used and thrown away. Every one of them has been sacrificed. And by putting them together, you are going beyond the fact that they are seen as rubbish. You are recreating them, giving them new life, and in a way that was never intended." Everyone was quiet. I looked around the room, scanning the faces, which were all turned towards me. I decided to finish. "And yet, anyone can decide to return bits of the sculpture, or even the whole thing to the rubbish heap at the side, if they want to... But then someone else might come along and put a piece back. I suppose what I am saying

is that people can make whatever image of sacrifice that suits them, that expresses what they want to see or say. Whatever anyone does, the things themselves have all been thrown away when they are still useful, so discarded or reassembled, they will always represent sacrifice.”

The teacher thought for a few seconds. I was waiting for him to come up with something crude and dismissive, like a school teacher might do to put himself back at the centre of attention. But he didn't. He asked another question. “Why do you think that Bernini showed Sebastian like this?” He pointed at the picture pinned to the board.

“I think he's trying to impress people,” I said. “He knows how good he is. He wants to show off. That's why everything is so polished, so perfect. You wouldn't even think that this was made out of stone. It's disguised. He wants everything to be pretty. The figure doesn't even look dead. And half the arrows seem to have missed... They weren't very good shots...”

John Daly interrupted me here. I hadn't even realised I was still speaking. It was more like thinking out loud. “Has anyone any comment here?” he said.

A tall, goofy lad from the other side of the room spoke up. He had a soft voice, but assured, and he talked posh, without any accent. “That's because he isn't dead. Sebastian didn't die when he was shot by the archers. It was a show. I went to Saint Gregory's, so we did all the saints.”

I heard someone behind me say “Catholic”.

“Go on, then. Tell us what you know of Sebastian.”

“Well, he was a Christian, but at a time in the Roman Empire when it was illegal. It was during the persecution. He was a soldier and his fellow soldiers were also all Christians but had not made it public. When they did, they were executed. So Sebastian said he was a Christian as well and

he was tied to a tree and shot with arrows, but he didn't die. A woman called Irene saved him and then nursed him back to health. When we see him here, he isn't dead, and the arrows have not killed him. Bernini is simply telling the story."

"And when he had recovered, he went straight to the Emperor and once again declared himself a Christian," said John Daly, addressing the whole class.

And then the same lad from the side continued, without being asked. I thought he'd get told off for speaking out of turn, but he didn't. "And then they beat him to death and threw his body in the sewers."

"And that's the Sebastian we see in the Paolozzi," I said, surprising myself. Suddenly everything was so clear.

The teacher nodded. He continued. "And what is also interesting about Sebastian is that he's not associated with any miracles or great deeds. He's a saint because he died - eventually and not in the scene Bernini sculpted - for his faith."

"And his body was thrown away," I said.

The teacher nodded. "So, Eileen - isn't it? - you were right to read into the Bernini the feeling that Sebastian was not dead. You were right to say that the arrows had not pierced anything vital, because they hadn't. Unlike many artists who portrayed Sebastian, Bernini, though polished, finished and idealised, was actually trying to be faithful to the story."

"And his body was thrown away...?" It was me speaking again.

John Daly nodded.

For once in my life I felt confident. "And so my Sebastian will already be dead, and his body will have been pulled from the sewers, along with bits of other rubbish mixed in with him." It went quiet for a few moments and then I spoke again.

“And because Sebastian is a saint, each generation learns about him and so remakes him, how they want him to be. That’s exactly what people will do with my sculpture, remake it if they want to, into whatever collection of objects and images they choose. I’m going to call it Sebastian Recycled. So in a way I am going beyond the Paolozzi. It’s not just a collection of rubbish from the dump, it’s a remarkable pile of rubbish that can change for each different person who looks at it.”

John Daly turned to the rest of the class. I thought he was going to rubbish what I had said. “That’s how I’d like everyone in this class to think about their work. What Eileen has just done is exactly what the act of creating is all about. Think and feel. Then think again and feel again. It’s like a set of questions and answers. Not all the questions have answers, but they still have to be asked. Then express yourselves.”

It took me a while to realise that he was praising what I had said. Now I am going to make my Sebastian Recycled. And I’m going to start with a copy of the Bernini, break it to pieces, and stick it back together at random.

### *What colour should a sculpture be?*

Today in John Daly’s class we looked at colour. He started by asking what colour a sculpture should be. Most people in the class just laughed. He immediately asked why anyone would find his question funny. A girl called Charlotte with a plummy voice spoke up.

“Because sculpture is about shape, form, texture and plasticity. It’s not about colour.” It was only after someone else had asked about ‘plasticity’ that I - and about half of the class - realised that it didn’t mean made of plastic.

Once we had sorted out that confusion, John Daly put a slide on the screen. It was a Madonna and Child in polychrome. And that's another word I didn't know until this morning. It just means coloured.

The Madonna was pretty. Her cheeks were the kind of rosy pink I might have used when colouring in when I was eight. She had lots of reds and golds in her clothes. And she was holding a stick that looked like a leg from an old chair, the kind of thing we used to find chucked away in the bushes. She seems proud of it, as if she had just recycled it from a dump. The Jesus looked more like a doll than a baby, and he was holding a blue ball. It took me a while to realise it was probably the earth he was holding, but it looks just like a blue rubber ball. What is really surprising about her is that she is standing on a row of heads. I think they are supposed to be cherubs, and I think they are supposed to be supporting her or giving her strength. But the impression I got was that she was so proud of her little boy that she was willing to walk all over everyone else to make sure he gets what he needs. She's staring into the distance, as if she doesn't care that she is squashing babies under her feet.

The teacher asked us to write down a few words to describe what we thought the work was trying to convey. I wrote - colour, rich, red, gold, sentimental, wealthy, queen, worship, sick.

We had a few minutes to look at the Madonna and Child in detail. John Daly then showed us the next slide, and we all expected that we would be looking at that for a while as well. But he showed us the slide for just a few seconds and then clicked the projector on to the next slide, which was blank, so we were all staring at a blank screen. Then he said, now write some words about that second image. I wrote - wood, knots, gnarled, abstract, dark, decayed, natural.

The teacher then asked some of us to read out what we had written. After a couple of people had read out their lists, he asked, "Has anyone written 'brown'?" Only one person had and even he, when the teacher asked why the colour had stood out, he replied that he only wrote the word because the title of the lesson was colour, so he thought he had better concentrate on it. A couple of people suggested that wood and brown were the same thing.

John Daly then showed the first slide again, flicking past the piece of wood on the way, so we got another sneaky view of it. And there she was again in all her glory, the passionless Madonna holding her old chair leg with her baby Jesus and his blue ball. He told us this was an example of polychrome wood carving from the baroque period, when it was used often to make religious images, especially in places where they could not wait for or afford work in stone or marble.

He then showed us the second slide again, but this time he left it on view. He asked us to look at it in detail, and then I noticed what he wanted us to see. No-one else had seen it, but to me it was suddenly obvious. "It's the same shape as the Madonna and Child..."

John Daly smiled and said, "Thank you, Eileen." The he flipped forward past the blank slide to the next picture, which was the first two pictures placed side by side. It was then completely clear that they were two pictures of the same work, one from the front and the other from the back. The front, of course, was all finished and coloured and grand and rich and detailed and painted, but the back was just a grubby piece of wood. There was a close-up where you could even see the holes left by the woodworm. The work had been carved on one side of a piece cut from a hollow tree.

"This illustrates that the sculptor here was trying to produce a functional image, something to do a specific job

in a church to focus people's worship. He was not trying to produce something that would exist in three dimensions as an object. This is clearly meant to be viewed from only one side, more like a painting with a relief than a sculpture. Now I want to ask you how differently you would view the image if it were presented as a free-standing sculpture, so a viewer could walk around it and see it from both sides, both from the front and the back?"

Well, here's my two pennyworth. I think it would completely change the experience. Seen from the front, the Madonna and Child is about power and certainty. She is confident - not particularly happy, but certainly sure of herself. Her beauty is the kind of beauty that the male church expects a woman to have... She's meek, mild, silent, dressed well, pretty and carrying a baby. But she is confident as well, as if she knows she's a cut above everyone else, especially the children she is treading on. It's a strange mix, when you think about it. But when you see the wood as well, the work becomes vulnerable, a reminder that we are all made of something physical, something that can and will decay, but whose components will some day in the future grow up again into something alive. In the way we think nowadays, it's a more religious image when you see the unfinished and unworked wood at the back, rather than the perfection of the front. When only seen from the front, the colour enhances the richness and power. But when you see both sides, it just amplifies and strengthens the contrast and the questions.

We then went to the next slide and looked at it for a minute or so. He then went quickly onto the next one and we looked at that for about a minute. John Daly then moved onto another blank screen and asked us to write down our impressions.



For the first one I wrote - group of figures, people look as if they are praying, kneeling, beautiful, sad, detailed, coloured. And for the second I put - pain, screaming, fear, terror, crying, brown, not painted, dead Jesus Christ.

John Daly then asked a question that baffled most of us. "Now who can tell what the figures are made of?"

A few people offered their ideas. Someone said wood, others said stone, some even thought it might be plaster. Then plummy-voiced Charlotte spoke up with the kind of confidence that only comes with having rich parents. "I think they are terracotta. I went to see the second group last year when I went on holiday with my parents."

John Daly nodded. "Yes, you're right," he said. "In fact, both groups in both pictures are made from terracotta, essentially the same material we use for plant pots. The first group is painted, and the second group is the colour of the pot. And both groups are in fact witnessing the laying out of the body of Christ after it was taken down from the cross. In the first group, the body of Christ is missing. It's been lost. Now is the way we respond to these sculptures influenced by their colour?"

"Completely," I said. "The colour in the first group almost hides the emotion. The lack of colour in the second group strengthens it. It's as if the bland colour forces you to concentrate on the message, not the appearance." To my great surprise, most of the class agreed with me.

"But both were originally painted," said the plummy-voiced girl. I spoke to her after the class. Her father is a solicitor.

"That is right. The second group probably were painted just like the first group, but the paint has either fallen off or been removed. And what about some dates for these groups?"

Charlotte, you clearly will know, so please let the others guess first.” She smiled.

And we guessed. We all thought the second group was more modern than the first, but then John Daly told us they were both made in the fifteenth century, the first by someone called Mazzoni and the second by Nicolo dell’Arca. Then he continued his explanation.

“I think we can all agree that using colour in sculpture can change how we respond to an object in many different and often surprising ways. Now let’s look at a couple more, very different images. No comments, please, until you have seen both. Here is number one... and now number two.”

“Why purple?” asked Charlotte.

“You tell me,” replied the teacher.

I was ready to speak again because what we had just seen was a collection similar to Julie’s dog Sam might have found, Sam’s droppings, as we used to call them.

“The colour makes you notice it,” I said. “It makes you realise it’s not just bits of iron dropped at random. The colour says, ‘Look at me. I am art. I’m here. Notice me’.”

“And does it change what we see, as well as how we see it?”

I had to think for a moment or two. I really knew what I wanted to say but didn’t know how to say it. Luckily, John Daly waited for me. I now realise that everyone else was waiting for me as well. They really did want to hear what I would say.

“When my friend Julie’s dog, Sam, pulled bits of stuff out of the bushes, he’d drop them at our feet. In some ways they were just random piles of things. Sometimes I would rearrange them, sometimes not. We used to call them Sam’s droppings.” People laughed. “I left them there deliberately to see what would happen. I sometimes used to sketch exactly

what I had left and where I'd left it. What I now find interesting is that almost always, when we went back to the same place, the things had been at least moved and sometimes they had disappeared altogether."

"Perhaps people thought they were rubbish blocking the path," someone said.

"It's possible, but they had hardly ever just been pushed to the side. Sometimes it looked like somebody had deliberately rearranged the objects and left them there." I paused again to find the words. I was flabbergasted that people were actually waiting to hear what I would say. "But if I had painted them bright purple, I reckon that more often than not they would have been left where we had put them. The colour seems to make an object more permanent. It's almost as if the colour allows the object to claim ownership of the space. But then... the colour has also taken away the objects ability to change or be changed."

Another student spoke. She's called Linda and is older than the rest of us. "Last week we looked at the Picasso Bull's Head and the Dali Lobster Telephone. The fact that the Dali is coloured has the same effect as what Eileen is saying. It makes it an art object, whereas the Picasso feels more like a passing thought."

John Daly nodded and then spoke to the class. "These last two images are works by Anthony Caro. Over the next week, I want you to look in the books over there on the shelves. There are more examples of Caro's work illustrated in some of them. And there are more by this next artist as well."

The teacher then showed two more slides. We looked at each for quite a long time. It seemed that the more we looked, the more we saw. Both works were quite big and heavy. The previous sculptures might have crawled out from the undergrowth, but these ones had very much been built where

they stood. Like the Paolozzi from last week, they were obviously human figures. But they were made from bits and pieces of junk, some of them coloured and some of them not. There was no obvious colouring, like in the previous slides, just shades of what might be white, perhaps a brown streak, possibly grey, or even black. But the shapes themselves were really interesting. They appeared to have been chosen at random, but then when you looked longer it was clear they had been put together with care. Some of the shapes were even regular, being smooth curves or boxes. They had been deliberately placed.

“What about the use of colour here?” asked John Daly.

“There’s not much of it...” someone muttered.

“Do you think there could be or should be more?”

“We were all silent for a while. It was Charlotte who spoke up. “It depends on what we want to convey. Do these works have titles?”

John Daly answered immediately. “They are both called Tanktotem, numbers nine and ten.”

“Tanktotem,” I repeated, just trying to get the word into my head. “Like a totem pole we see in Indian camps in Westerns on the tele?” The teacher nodded. “And tanks because they both have enclosed spaces that could contain things... It’s as if the sculptor is deliberately taking everyday objects, things with a clear use, and making a structure that itself could be used, but making it totally abstract at the same time... so that it becomes transformed into something that also has religious significance... hence ‘totem’.”

John Daly smiled. “Thanks, Eileen. You have made my day.”

I was not sure what he meant because everyone laughed.

“I couldn’t have put it better myself,” he said, much to my relief. I blushed. He smiled. “Let me explain. When I put this

class together, I wanted it to come full circle, so that we arrived back where we started. At the start there was a Madonna and Child, a functional, devotional image that became abstract when we walked around the back and realised it was just a piece of decaying wood. And now," he said, gesturing towards the image on the screen, "we have a work that is clearly abstract in its conception, but also invokes the idea that it might be a functional and a religious item at the same time, a tank and an object of worship. Here, however, unlike the Madonna and Child, the material of the sculpture is at the front, on show, and we have to confront that first, not go round the back to discover it."

I spoke up again immediately. I wasn't satisfied. "But what about colour? You haven't mentioned the colour. And that's where we started."

"And colour, Eileen, is where we will end." He did not pause. If he had, I would have spoken, but he answered a question I didn't ask. "These are both works by David Smith. He was an American sculptor, working in the fifties and early sixties. It was Smith who convinced Anthony Caro to use colour in his work. But, like the *Nocolo dell'Arca* we saw earlier, that should have been polychrome, but has lost its colour over the years, some of Smith's work has had the colour he applied taken away. Much of David Smith's work was reworked by a critic friend of his, who thought that colour got in the way of any appreciation of a sculpture's form and shape. The friend, therefore, deliberately removed the colour from some, though not all of Smith's work, so now we might have to imagine - just like with *dell'Arca's* terracotta - what it might originally have looked like."

We were all quiet for a while. Perhaps we had all had enough by then. I was confused, however. "So what did

David Smith think when this friend of his started stripping the paint off his works?"

"I'm afraid, Eileen, that David Smith was dead by then. He died in a car crash in 1965 and the re-evaluation of his work happened afterwards."

"So his work was changed without his knowledge?"

"Exactly," replied John Daly. "But then your work, as you yourself described it, invites people to change it and without any reference to yourself. And the people who change the things you have left on your path by Crofton dam don't even know it was you who left them there. They don't know they are changing anything."

"But they do know exactly that. They might not know why they are making changes, but they know they are doing it." I paused, surprised that everyone was listening to me. "I didn't have to die in a car crash to make it happen."

It was the end of the class and I closed my book and stood up. I then felt my knees go like jelly and had to sit down again for a moment. Plummy-voiced Charlotte put her hand on my shoulder and asked if I was all right. I nodded. After a moment I said to her, "He said Crofton. Not only did he listen to what I said, he actually remembered it."

## Sculptures

Again, I presume this was an introductory exercise. It was handwritten on lined paper, and later folded and taped into a small sketchbook with other material.

*Describe sculptures from the twentieth century, saying what you think they communicate and how they might influence your own work. Choose five to ten examples.*

### Picasso Bull's Head

It is two found objects. Picasso has assembled them, remade them in a way they would not otherwise be seen. It's a bicycle seat and a set of handlebars. Now every bicycle I see has a seat and a set of handlebars. Both things are used by a rider of a bicycle for their functions, so they are usually experienced via their uses and not their appearance. You can't have a bicycle without them. But when a rider gets on a bike, he probably does not think 'bull'. But after seeing Bull's Head, it becomes impossible not to see the bull in the bike. Merely by placing these two objects in space and giving them a title, Picasso has changed forever how we see them. For me, there is also another dimension. Someone owned the bicycle. Different people have probably sat on the seat and held the handlebars. They have ridden it to different places at different times, when different things have been happening along the way. The journeys were probably made for different reasons. When Picasso places these objects side by side, he changes the way we see them. But what might we see if the people who used them, alongside the events witnessed and the places visited could also be evoked? If I made Bull's Head, I would want to tell these stories.

## Brancusi Bird in Space

This is about as far from a found object as possible. The artist has clearly designed, planned and sketched. He has made a model. He has had it cast in bronze like a solidified idea. But the idea was far from complete, because he has spent a lot of time and energy finishing it, polishing the surface so it shines, probably just like Michelangelo did with marble. The surface is so perfect it seems not to have a single blemish and no texture. As an object it does not fit with my approach. Its shape is very beautiful, but it has none of the rawness of being used and none of the immediacy of being found. But two things attract me to this work. First it reflects the world around it. A viewer sees a distorted image of their own world, reflected in its surface. The second reason is the story that surrounds it. I have read that when Brancusi had it shipped to New York for an exhibition, the customs officials did not believe it was art. As a work of art, it attracted no import duty. If it was not art, then a tax had to be paid. The level of the duty was fixed by how they classified the object. They wanted to classify it as Kitchen Utensil or Hospital Supplies. An expert was called in to give an opinion and this art 'expert' said if this was art then he was a bricklayer. A few years later people were laying bricks as art anyway. Bird in Space is like my work in reverse. What I want to do is assemble unfinished, damaged or discarded objects to suggest a story which will lead a viewer to a special, unique, singular experience. With the Brancusi, you have a perfectly finished object that, for some special people called Customs Officials, is seen as a kitchen utensil or hospital equipment, almost the complete opposite of what I am trying to do. I would like to experiment with an arrangement of pans, spatulas, graters, syringes, sick bowls and scalpels stuck together called Bird in Space or Brancusi.



## Picasso Woman Reading

This is not really what I want to find in sculpture. I find it too literal. The title is Woman Reading and what we see is a woman, who happens to be reading. It seems at first sight that there is no space for the imagination. Anyone who wants not to challenge, to disturb - to be memorable, even - might see this, walk past and say, 'That's a woman reading'. An object becomes art only when some aspect of imagination is provoked. If I see a shelf of books and say, "Books", they are not sculptures. If the same shelf of books is made from marble, they are not books at all. Then they can be art. It is similar to Magritte's painting of a pipe called, "This is not a pipe". But what makes this Woman Reading by Picasso a sculpture is that it is not literal at all, because if it was literal, it should be called old bits of wood, nails, screws and a bit of paint. Now the last word is important. We are not used to seeing sculptures in colour. I have read that ancient Greek and Roman statues were originally painted. And yet, in museums, art books and in people's assumptions, these works are always shown monochrome, or whatever colour is the material they are made from. Because the colour has fallen off and because we all learn that these are great works from history, we then assume that all new sculpture should follow this model and not be coloured. So, what we see are finished surfaces, polished, white, black or brown. But the originals were painted in bright colours and we have no real ideas what colours they used, so we do not know whether they always tried to achieve realism. How would our experience be changed, for instance, if Michelangelo's David were painted in blotches, or had a red face, blue legs, black arms, yellow body and a crimson fig-leaf? And where did the fig leaf come from anyway? Did Michelangelo find it in his garage like Picasso did his bits of wood? Woman

Reading prompts me to discover literal images in unexpected collections of objects, and then use colour to challenge the viewers' assumptions, and then create works such as a Black Orange, a Purple Lemon, or a golf course with red greens.

### Moore Reclining Figure

Henry Moore did lots of these reclining figures. As time went by, he moved away from the need to represent the figure literally. In the earlier works, you can see how the blocks of the human form were beginning to dominate his thinking and how the detail of the figure was gradually disappearing. It is as if he has reduced the figure to its elemental, essential components. He then asks the viewer to recreate the form by imagination, based on these abstract shapes. They remind me of prehistoric cave painting, where the artist who drew pictures of animals or humans used just a few short strokes, or a patch of colour, but did not try to represent any detail whatsoever. What is amazing is that these reduced marks convey perfectly what is being communicated. You receive by virtue of imagination a perfect communication of the object, itself, even the movement of the figure. There is no movement in Moore. His sculptures are statuesque, giving an impression that they never moved, that they were always part of a landscape and remain connected to it. And yet, by the time we look at the later works, the blocks from which he is creating these impressions actually do not seem in any way to resemble the objects that they are representing. I want to achieve the same kind of essence of shape and form in my work, but I want my sculptures also to be dynamic, never static and changeable. One last thing about the Moore is that there is a small one in the art gallery of my home town, Wakefield. It was donated by the artist because he was from down the road in

Castleford. Visitors to the gallery use it as an ashtray. So, I want to make an essential reclining figure out of ashtrays.

### Boccioni Development of a Bottle

It's a bottle. But it's not a bottle. Bottles hold things. They enclose. They can have stoppers. Bottles can enclose space. But this bottle can hold nothing but space. It's opened up, like it's made of plastic and has been slashed into shreds. But it's made from bronze and could not be cut. What I find interesting about this piece is the idea of development. It's not the bottle that's developing, but the idea of a bottle that is being transformed in the viewer. The term 'opening up' is one I like to use when I look at this work. It is a bottle that is opening up to the viewer and therefore inviting the onlooker to open up in response. It's a message I would like all art to convey, because unless we open up to what a work is saying, then it can never say anything, apart from a literal message which will not be interesting. It is always easier to dismiss something than spend time analysing what our responses to it might be. And this is especially easy when something challenges the viewer to see it in an unfamiliar way. I want my works to open up the history of the objects in the mind of the viewer.

### Giacometti Man Pointing

The form is immediately recognisable, but the detail is not. In some ways, it's like a child's drawing of a stick man, but this man is not made of sticks, lines, nor anything straight. It seems to be something familiar and easy to understand, but if we look at this work, we find it is a complex and emotional story. When you walk around a Giacometti, the object changes out of all recognition. From one side it looks like a conventional image of a human being.

But from another angle, the object is thin, so thin it could be abstract objects joined for no reason other than to make a pattern. I've seen some of his work in the Tate and you really can spend a long time looking at them, seeing new objects all the time. Close up, there is yet another and different experience. You realise that the human figure has nothing to do with anatomy. Each piece is complicated. The shapes seem to have been gouged out with the artist's own fingers. Each little piece could be a sculpture in its own right. The figure, itself, is so slender it might break. We know it's made of bronze and is probably heavy as well as sturdy, but the limbs look vulnerable, almost ready to break. In my work, I want to achieve something similar, in that I want to use recognisable images that the viewer can immediately identify with, but which then seem to get more complicated when they are studied.

### Gabo Spheric Theme

The work itself leaves me cold. I find it strangely predictable. It is abstract. It is quite unlike any natural or everyday object. But it appears to me to represent a logical process, something completely planned and thought out, rather than poetic, or inspired, or imagined. It should therefore be the exact opposite of what I think is important in sculpture, which is spontaneity and familiarity mixed with challenge and variability. But there is one aspect of this work that I find not just interesting, but fascinating, and something that is fundamental to what I want to achieve. Gabo said that he was creating an object that would exist as itself, not as a representation of something, not even an interpretation of something. It just is. Once it is made, it exists. It is itself. It is in our world. Our world is then changed by it. It needs no other justification. Once created, it also becomes the

property of those who experience it and they can make of it whatever they wish. Some people might ignore it. Some people might study it. Some people will feel it. But everyone's life has been changed because it exists. The real importance of this work for me is the complete contrast it makes with my own assumptions about what an object must be, but also how it is totally in line with my ideas of what the object should become. Yes, I want to create works that can be viewed independently and in their own right, but I also want them to have the ability to change. I will create a physical object, but I will arrange it so that the physical as well as the mental experience of repeated viewing is different each time.

### Caro Reel

Like the Giacometti, Caro's Reel might just be a literal object. It is a tube, unwound from which is a length of tape that has become folded and creased in the process. It looks like you could spin the tube and wind the tape back onto it. But the tape itself has creased. It would never go back into the shape it was before it was unwound. And that's the end of the literal experience. In fact, everything is made of steel and it weighs a ton. Everything is also fixed. Nothing moves. Nothing can move. The creased tape is a steel plate. And everything is red. It's also about twenty times bigger than it should be if we had wanted to pick it up and rewind it. So, Caro's Reel is an absurd object, apparently just a tube and a tape, unwound and discarded. But it has become fixed in space and time and because it's steel it's none of the things we thought it was. Again, it takes time to view an object like this if it is to communicate. Reel cannot be changed by its viewers, but it does have the feel of discarded objects, despite the fact that these things have been made to fit an idea first

and a space second.

### Smith Cubi XVIII

It looks like a jumble of shapes. It looks like they might have been thrown together and that they might just have landed like that. But, of course, that is absurd. They are balanced in such a way that they appear ready to fall, so there is a sense of movement about the work. But overall, it conveys a heaviness, a mass and, because of that, it looks contrived. He has chosen shapes that are ideals, pure geometric shapes that could not exist in everyday objects. These cubes and boxes are made of polished steel. With these highly ordered shapes he has created the contrast of something disorderly. It looks like it might just be a passing phase, a frozen moment in the existence of these shapes. But we know it is far from that. These objects are welded together permanently and are forever connected in this form, until they rust and fall apart. I think the random appearance is a success, but if this were my work then I would want people to be able to move it, take it apart and reassemble it. So, it couldn't be made of something as heavy or as permanent as steel.

Eileen's comments were more than minimal, but they clearly did not represent either thorough analysis or criticism. She has clearly described the works, but she has not tried to research their context. But then this was an assignment primarily aimed at how she imagined her choices might influence her own work. The teacher's comment was not extensive.

*An interesting list. It would help, next time, if you used more than one book. J.D.*

Eileen had written something beneath this, but it was

repeatedly scribbled over in ball point, so it was illegible.

## Linda

We shared photographs of the trio's life in Muswell Hill. The end of the nineteen-sixties was an era when photography was an expensive hobby, so there were very few, no more than twenty, pictures of their shared social life. What did still exist, however, was a folio of work Linda did in her second year, when she enrolled on a photography elective as part of her degree. She shot three rolls of film with Eileen as her subject in poses that ranged from fashion magazine to pornography.

The contrast between the Linda in the photographs and the Linda of the present, some thirty-five years later, could not be greater. She was already retired, taking an early option at sixty, having completed thirty years as an art teacher in six schools. She looked both tired and worn, her face heavily lined, contrasting fundamentally with the almost carefree, unruffled blandness of the student that Eileen knew. The full female figure had disappeared into a rotund, amorphous, almost anonymous collection of flesh that randomly adhered to a bone structure that was no longer evident. The house was conventional to the extent of cliché and frankly displayed little evidence of the art she had continued to produce. She had stopped smoking in her forties and gained weight she never lost. Her breathing still offered a slight wheeze and she coughed enough to convince me of her COPD. Let's hear Linda's own recollections.

*When the three of us moved into that flat we were all naive. I was older, but, if anything, I was less confident, less assertive... I was already with Alan, of course, so we were a bit like the parents with a couple of teenagers in tow. But we were never really conscious of that at the time; it's only later that you realize these things. Eileen was the one with the*



*energy, Charlotte forever the mystic, which meant she often slept in. The fact we were so different made us closer, less likely to compete. And when the others went frankly quite weird, I simply retreated into the relationship with Alan, who always kept my feet on the ground. We were together for ten years and had two kids. We didn't get married. That perhaps was my own rather pathetic act of revolt. All I wanted was to get one over on my mum and dad, whom I considered at the time to be so boringly conventional that I had to achieve something defiant. It was a mistake.*

*The others, it seemed to me, were always trying to be artists, trying too hard to be artists - at least to conform with some idealized version of what an artist should be, something that had coalesced from all the images and satires they had explored. The two of them used to sit up late at night in their room, drinking, smoking and talking about what it must be to be an artist, what an artist's experience ought to be, how an artist ought to relate to the world... and all that crap. It was a problem for us, Alan and me, because we were in the next room trying to go to sleep. It was often quite ironic, because there we were in bed on one side of the wall trying to get to sleep, arguing with one another about exactly whose turn it was to get up and tell them to be quiet, whilst what filtered through to us was Eileen and Charlotte's conversation about what we might be doing in bed. Irony...*

*And Alan was working, of course. He had to be up at seven, breakfasted and dressed before eight and on the bus by half past. His office didn't open until nine-thirty, but he was the manager and had to be there to let the rest of them in. He couldn't be late, because he had the keys to the shop. So, when Eileen and Charlotte were getting merrier by the minute at midnight - as was often the case, especially in those early months - one of us simply had to go in and ask them to*

*be quiet. The two of them started to call us mummy and daddy at one point and Alan went ballistic to make sure that it didn't become a habit. Later, of course, it went quieter earlier next door, but sometimes still got louder later on, if you see what I mean. By then, we were definitely not going to go in and tell them to be quiet!*

*I really never understood Eileen's work. She seemed to be able to talk about it for as long as she had breath. Every item she assembled had a significance that could be identified, described, illustrated and justified. It often took her an hour to explain just the context of what she had done. And after the hour, you weren't any the wiser. But then when she showed you the object, it was something that was barely worth a glance - and she would often change it on the spot, despite having spent the last couple of hours defending its form. It was quite strange... And she was defensive about her work. She did not want to hear criticism, unless it came from herself.*

*As for Charlotte's work, the less said the better... At the start of the course, she spent her time copying the Impressionists and Post-Impressionists. She seemed to be trying to impersonate Cezanne. Then she changed, consciously changed. It was all fad, pop culture, fashion and cult. Anything that was being talked about she did, she reproduced. When David Bowie was in, it was coloured lightning flashes and Ziggy Stardust. When she went to see the Rothkos in the Tate, she was into colour field. After a trip to the National she would go Renaissance for a week. She was all over the place. She had no style at all, artistically or personally. I never understood what Eileen saw in her, but they became very close.*

*They did share the jazz clubs, of course. I could never understand what they saw in it. I went with them a couple of*

*times, but for me it was just noisy, pretentious claptrap. But in some ways, it was like Eileen's work, bits and pieces of junk, thrown away and reassembled so people could talk about it.*

*Frankly, if you are looking for information on whereabouts or things personal, I can't tell you much about either of them. After the first few weeks in our flat, we lived our separate lives. Yes, we went to the same college and shared a flat for a year and a half. But in college, we were generally working at our own individual projects, and after college I spent all my time with Alan and a group of friends we already had before I started the course. They were a few years older, like me, mid to late twenties. It's amazing, looking back, how different we were from the younger set. And Eileen and Charlotte became the complete couple, even aggressively so. They became inseparable, impenetrable, even closed. They had their own world, which was jazz. They visited galleries together, much more than the rest of us and even took to visiting one another's parents. No... wait... Eileen did go to see Charlotte's parents a couple of times, because I met them myself when they came to see the flat, but I don't think Charlotte ever went to Yorkshire, certainly not during the year and a half when we were sharing.*

*Anyway, they did their own thing, became increasingly separated, certainly from the two of us, but also from other students on the course. They seemed to regard themselves as a cut above the rest of us, something special, even precious.*

*It was during the second year when they decided to do their summer trip. I don't know where they got the money from. Because they smoked and drank, paid entrance fees at their jazz clubs, and still had enough to go on holiday. Maybe they were selling dope as well as using it... I don't know.*

*It seemed that planning their trip became their sole*

*activity. They started talking about it soon after Christmas. By the end of that term they had some clearer ideas and it seemed to occupy both of them full-time throughout the third term to get things finalised. Which is why, of course, they both had problems in college. It is so obvious now, from this distance, but at the time all three of us were shocked, for some reason. Charlotte did scrape through in the end.*

*Alan and I were utterly pissed off by then. We were living in one room and the two of them had the big room across the front of the building. Originally, they had it subdivided, so they could each have their own space. But after only a few weeks, they had completely rearranged it so that they effectively had their own little sitting room. And they didn't usually invite the two of us to share it. We had to ask!*

*I suppose we couldn't have predicted when we moved in that the two of them would get along so well. But what they had organised in their space was selfish. Alan got angry and he used to take it out on me. So it would have been at the end of the second term in our second year, March or April, seventy-two, that we had our heart-to-heart. Alan did most of the talking, I recall. He told them that we were not renewing the lease, that from July we would be living in our own place.*

*We were giving them a good three months' notice, so they could easily have advertised in college to find a third person to share the rent, but they did nothing other than complain about us. Eileen was pretty abrupt but said very little. Charlotte talked for ages but didn't seem to accept that things had to change.*

*We did move out in the June. The other two had not yet found anyone to move in. I think they hadn't even mentioned it to anyone, let alone advertised. I recall Charlotte saying they had decided to think things through over the summer*

*while they were travelling. They basically had three options. One was to keep the flat and find a third person, by whatever means they chose. They were worried about advertising in case they got someone who didn't fit in with their lifestyle. But both of them thought that it would be easier to find someone in the September, after the new intake had arrived. Eileen was convinced there would be others like herself who had taken a room with a landlady and who would want something different.*

*Their second option was to keep the flat just for the two of them. This was their preferred option, because then they could use the big room at the front just as a living room and have our smaller room for sleeping, or whatever they did when they were in bed. The third option was to find somewhere new, just for the two of them.*

*Unfortunately, options two and three involved paying extra rent. Obviously, our place was fifteen quid a week, so they would have had to find an extra two-fifty each. But places for two people were marginally more expensive per person, because when couples are involved, it's a different market from the larger shares. They looked at a couple of places, but the only one they found at less than fifteen quid a week was itself twelve quid, and by all accounts it was poky in the extreme, not much more than a bedsit, less than half the size of what we already had.*

*They spent a lot of time doing their sums. I suggested they cancel their trip to save money, but they would have none of it. They were going to need an extra hundred and thirty quid or so to renew the lease for another year. In London, you had to take the full year, because the landlords didn't want the places empty over the summer during the break and they could always call the shots because there were so few suitable places available. Now that was a lot of money to*

*find. A year's grant was only four hundred quid in those days, and that had to cover all costs out of college, including books. We never bought books, by the way.*

*I did ask them what they planned to do, because Alan and I wanted to start moving things out by the time we got to the start of June. I can remember it well, because I had clearly hit a raw nerve. And we ended up having a real slanging match. We never got on well after that day. There was always a friction.*

*Charlotte said they were going to explore staying put, but they would have to clear it with their parents, who would have to cough up the extra money. They had already been to Charlotte's parents in Pinner and had the OK from them. Eileen did not plan to visit the north until the end of term, just before they were due to go on holiday. She said nothing about her having to stay in college, about her not having enough time because she was still trying to finish the work for her assessment. So Alan and I had already moved out before their plans were finalised.*

*Of course, I saw neither of them until the new term started at the end of the following September. I met Charlotte, almost in passing, on the first day of that new term and said hello. Her reaction made it clear that something had gone badly wrong. All she would say was that their trip had proved ultimately disappointing, that she was thinking of taking a year off, that Eileen had failed the course and would not be coming back to college. Charlotte did take that year off and that was the last I saw or heard of either of them.*

*I think Charlotte did go back and finish the course, but by that time I have already completed my third year, so I cannot be sure.*

Linda drew a line under our contact. She said she had moved on, and that she could add no more. I offered to travel

to Milton Keynes to meet her, but she declined, repeating that she had nothing else she could add.

## Home

*Rauschenberg did a goat through a tyre. Life stuffed through a dirty collar, death wrapped in rubber. Stuffed animal meets inanimate object. But the goat could be used, cut up, eaten. Its coat could become my coat, so then I would be the animal wrapped in the used tyre. But it's a car tyre. It's a symbol of being trapped in consumerism, having to buy a new car, drive it and wear out its tyres. And this kills nature, traps the animal, imprisons it, renders it just something to be consumed.*

*My work, Home, explores the same ideas. But in my piece, I focus on how we consume in our families. My animal is trapped because it's a pet, domesticated, tamed. It's not under threat, and it's not going to be eaten or skinned, but it's already dead, absent, missed and because of that a symbol of loss despite remaining also a symbol of domestic bliss. Although a dog is still an animal, most dogs are now bought and owned because they give their owner identity. They are just another consumer item, chosen for their colour and size from catalogues and shops. And then they are used until they wear out, just like Rauschenberg's tyre, not stuffed like his goat. I have included a car as well. Obviously, for most homes, a car is a must, but a car does not just have four wheels, go forwards, backwards and round corners. It says something about its owner, and this is why we are all encouraged to buy our dreams. But my car is a plastic toy, whose wheels don't even go round. And because it's a toy, it is going to be owned by a child, who, through the ownership of this toy, is going to learn how to become a consumer, how to be an owner, how to have likes and dislikes, how to choose, how to opt, how to become what he owns.*

*The dog's lead is glued to the back of the car, and the*



*collar is studded to tell others to stay out of this home. The collar does not go round a dog's neck, but wraps around a battered teapot, that symbol of family sharing, either used so much it's showing its age, or thrown across the kitchen in rage so often it's been dented. The car will never move because the child has lost interest, grown out of it, graduated to something bigger and more expensive. The dog doesn't exist - probably died or was put down because the colour of its coat didn't match the new sofa and the lid of the teapot can't open because it's tied down by the dog collar. Home.*

Home was one of the first objects that Eileen created in college. From this description it proved easy to reproduce the work, at least in concept. But it was when I later spoke to Linda, I realised I had it wrong.

*Home was important to Eileen. The three of us spent a whole evening talking about that work. We were around the table in the kitchen. Charlotte had cooked. That's why I can remember everything so well! It was awful, brown rice cooked to soggy, combined with underdone lentils that could break teeth. You don't forget experiences like that!*

*I think Eileen wrote the entry you sent just after we finished eating. We were all still separate at that stage, so it must have been quite soon after we moved in. That's right, because Alan wasn't there full time until we got to the February.*

*Eileen wanted to make a point about consumerism, but the things she eventually used were neither discarded nor found. She bought them. The plastic car started new. She scratched it with a kitchen knife and roughed it up with a pan scourer, a Brillo pad, if I remember correctly. It even bleached some of the colour off the surface and she was pleased when that happened. She also bought the teapot from a secondhand shop because it was stainless steel and plain. She called it*

*modern and characterless and then she spent hours with a little hammer making dents in it. She spent a whole weekend doctoring the car and the teapot. The dog lead was new, but it was a toy made from plastic, not leather, so she could stick it easily with UHU. It never did stick well to the teapot and kept falling off. Because the dog lead was plastic, it could never have been used to walk a real dog. It would have ripped in no time. It was the kind of thing you would buy for a four-year-old to attach to a toy, just for show. For Eileen it was a perfect message, something made to look like a useful object which was just a plaything that would break as soon as it was used. I remember the work well, because she did it just after we moved into the flat at the start of our second term. It would have been January 1971. It was the first time I had come across someone who wanted to do "concept" art and Eileen was special because she wanted to destroy it as soon as she'd made it. She couldn't, of course, because she had to show it to her tutor. But it didn't make it to the end of year show. It wasn't just abstract - in fact now I think about it, there wasn't anything abstract about it - it was all symbolic, loaded with significance, but you had to be Eileen to know what was going on. It caused our first argument because Charlotte dismissed it, 'rubbish masquerading as trash' is what she said. Eileen told her that was the wrong way round. Charlotte told Eileen she had no ideas, that she was full of hot air, making things up. Eileen told her to fuck off. They didn't speak for a couple of days. It was a bad start, but we got over it. Certainly, Eileen and Charlotte got over it! I remember that Charlotte was painting flowers upside down at the time, for some reason. It was the flowers that were upside down, by the way.*

## Marion

Deep down, Eileen McHugh knew how similar she was to her mother, but in her youth, she refused to admit it. Indeed, she seemed to manipulate events, choose clothing, pursue patterns of behaviour that defined, restated, even accentuated a desired difference between them. It might even be argued that her apparent yearning for impermanence and the ephemeral in her art was merely a calculated reaction to a quality of steadiness, of predictability she ascribed to her mother.

Marion McHugh, née Jackson, was born in Wakefield in 1920. She was brought up in a terraced house and then in a new-build semi-detached council house on the Eastmoor Estate, her father a baker, her mother a part-time house cleaner and launderer. Her father, Harry, worked shifts, whilst her mother worked whenever jobs might come her way. Neither parent either smoked or drank. The family ate a repetitive and predictable but adequate diet that, unlike many of their peers in the decade that ran between the mid-twenties and mid-thirties, was always sufficient to allow them health and relative prosperity. They lived to a strict routine, even eating the same dishes on the same days every week. They were never rich, but also, again unlike many others, were never poor.

The original family house had two bedrooms, but never seemed too small to accommodate parents, Marion and two older brothers. The two-up two-down allowed the upstairs front for the parents, upstairs back for the brothers and downstairs front for Marion, the youngest, who made up her bed on the sofa each night and packed it away each morning. This domestic situation eased when they moved to their new house. In the nineteen-thirties, this council estate was a new

local height of luxury. It was geographically close to their terrace, but felt like it was in a different world, where there were spaces with grass.

In their terrace, the living room was the kitchen unless it was bath night. The toilet was in the backyard and they had no bathroom, with ritual cleansing taking place once a week, usually on Tuesdays, when they took turns to top up a galvanised bath in front of the kitchen fire. Tuesdays were therefore days when Marion was allowed to go to bed late, because the whole family had to inhabit the front room. They would read or listen to the radio and then, at the end of the process, the two lads would take a bath handle each to allow a speedy emptying of the by then tepid, opaque, soapy water into the gutter on the street at the front of the house.

The *modus vivendi* of the Jackson house seemed unchanging. But the lads got bigger and so did Marion. Sexual maturity increased the psychological distance between the family members, but they remained a close family who shared one another's always gently expressed feelings. There was never a raised voice, apparently never disagreement and, crucially, little ambition. The move to the new council semi eased their domestic life considerably.

Marion's mother always referred to her daughter via a diminutive. Marrie, she called her, 'Our Marrie', pronounced with a first syllable of the long Yorkshire 'a', sounding like a sigh, the name itself having the short vowel. Marion never liked the name, believing it sounded too much like a command and thus made her feel both uncomfortable and inadequate. But it was certainly the two lads who followed the route to marriage before her. After leaving school at the usual age, they took apprenticeships at the pit and were bringing girlfriends home on Sundays for tea almost as soon as they had pay packets. Both brothers had identified their

respective spouses, had named dates and exchanged rings when the war broke out. They were also in potentially reserved jobs and by that time both had completed their apprenticeships which, although based at the colliery in Walton, qualified them in carpentry for the elder brother and electrical work for the younger. But both lads decided to join the armed forces, since both had previously been regular and conscientious attendees at the cadets. Both joined the navy as ratings and neither returned. The family did not recover, and Marion was alone.

She left school at fourteen, not really remembering anything she had done during the previous decade. She could wash, she could sew, she could do light gardening and she knew how to clean babies. She could also make jam. Her skills were of the home that war had taken away. But at least she had already met Thomas McHugh, always Tom, a local lad of indeterminate Irish heritage and a Catholic. Thoughts were expressed. Her father was stoical. "If you decide to go that way," he told his daughter, "then we will back you." Mother and father both approved of Tom, who already had a steady job, was literate and really quite educated. He was a trainee insurance salesman.

They were ready to announce their engagement when the war intervened. He was determined to join up and, over the next four years, came and went. He always, as far as the knowledge of the Wakefield family went, stayed faithful to Marion, repeatedly promising to come back and marry her. And this is precisely what he did, but only after both of her brothers had been lost. In some ways, Tom was a saviour for Marion's parents, a surrogate son to offer some replacement for the loss of the two lads in the Atlantic. Her parents, like Marion herself, adored him precisely because he was so very normal.

Marion was over thirty when she fell pregnant with Eileen. The verb was her habitual choice to describe the state and probably indicates an underlying associated guilt. It was only years later that Eileen would learn there had been a miscarriage in forty-seven, but this time the baby arrived to equal measures of celebration and relief, tinged, for Tom, with just a hint of never to be expressed disappointment that it was a girl. But they were still young.

Marion's employer at the Wakefield shop was enlightened for the time and gave her leave with pay, but then she was a senior employee by then, manager in all but name. Her skills, especially in customer relations, were invaluable. We are already into the fifties and, of course, Eileen and Tom had already moved to Agbrigg, a bus ride from town, into a terraced house that was still rented. This apparent step down from the semi-detached heaven of the council estate grated with all concerned, but at least this place was not rented from the council. Marion's mother volunteered to come and look after the infant three days a week so that her daughter could go back to work part-time.

A second pregnancy did not follow, which allowed a certain amount of saving. Tom was on a salary plus commission and Marion's job brought her into contact with the town's middle classes, who were grateful enough of her services to supplement her earnings with often copious tips. The food shop where she worked, in modern language, would have been called a delicatessen and sold the kind of high cost items that wealthier residents conspicuously consumed to assert their social class. With rationing of basics still in operation, the prices the shop charged were off the scale for ordinary folk, but the solicitors, the doctors, the business owners had already re-cultured their taste for wine, French cheeses and smoked salmon. The shop's most

successful line, however, was its own baking, which Marion supervised, and its pastries were simply the best in town, the best element of upper-end high teas, making the shop an essential resource for the financially comfortable.

Their house may have been rented, but they lavished care and attention on it as if it were their own. It was theirs, after all. A saying much used in the area during those years was, 'Where there's muck there's money.' Now if that had applied to the McHugh's house, then they were poor indeed, for Marion was the embodiment, as were most other working-class women, of a forensic desire for cleanliness.

She worked full time, left the house soon after eight and was finished with the washing up after tea only by seven. But every surface was dusted every day, with ornaments lifted not merely negotiated, linoed floors at least mopped, and usually washed with a cloth on hands and knees. Each room's central square of carpet was both brushed and then vacuumed - hoovered was the word, never Electroluxed, despite that being what she used.

She washed at least once a week but would almost gleefully 'run the machine' whenever any suitable textile displayed even a suggestion of mark or stain, there never being a need to inspect clothing, since once worn it was automatically in the wash. She used a cream finish, stand-alone Parnall that sported a rotatable mangle on top. It was kept at the top of the cellar steps and had to be wheeled across the kitchen to have its oft-used inlet hose connected to the sink tap.

Duly wrung as dry as physically possible with elbow grease, its cleansed load was almost invariably hung on a rack suspended on rope and pulley above the hearth so, especially when a sheet or tablecloth was involved, the family had carefully to avoid low hanging damp cloth when

crossing the room, lest it catch a mark and need washing again. It was possible to hang the load outside, but the weather had to be fine, the hour early and, crucially, it had to be warm, or the newly cleansed items would collect specks of soot from other people's coal fires. And, if you worked full time, a term that also included Saturdays, then the washing had to be hung out on Sundays, and that was not done, unless it proved to be a good drying day, in which case it was an opportunity not to be missed.

The machine would even empty its own water at the end of the process and all it involved was the disconnection of the inlet hose, its reconnection to a different nozzle, the repositioning of a selector switch, training the hose into the sink and switching on. You then waited for ten minutes with a mop in hand because it invariably leaked. Now that was progress, much less effort than filling and emptying a boiling tub mounted on bricks in the cellar that took an hour or so to heat up and another hour to empty with a hand pump.

Windows were cleaned on a regular rota, but usually only the inside, since the panes' outer surfaces were tended once a week by a specialist window cleaner, who went up and down both sides of the street, house by house, with his leathers and triangular wooden ladders that for some reason were always painted green. Having said that, a casual visitor to this street would regularly see housewives, females who were proud of both the name and the role, sitting on window sills, their bottoms in midair, two pane sashes pulled down to the thighs in case they overbalanced, washing, wiping and polishing their glass with their leathers.

All brass ornaments, silver jugs or teapots, if you had any, were attacked at least once each week with Brasso, with two dedicated dusters, an often-washed putter-onner and a more frequently shaken taker-offer, carefully stored in quarter



folds down the side of the shoe polish box. The same concoction was also regularly and very carefully applied to the silver frame that surrounded the wedding photo, a postcard-sized black and white print, but hand coloured by the man with the studio in Little Westgate, where previous generations used to go to commission their posed family portraits. By the fifties, his business was already largely weddings and, increasingly, passport shots. The wedding photo, surrounded by its always gleaming silver, occupied pride of place in the middle of the mantelpiece in a front room that the family hardly ever visited.

And it was not only the inside that Marion cleaned. At least twice a week, rain or shine, she would brush and wash down the pavement in front of the house - washing was 'up' in the sink but 'down' on the pavement - as well as brush and scrub the steps front and back with water containing bleach or ammonia, whatever was to hand. Where there's muck there's money might have been a mantra for some, but where there's means, there's a means to be clean, and woe betide any woman who fell short of this communal judgment of standards, because that same shared opinion would attach the label 'she's not fit' to anyone falling short. Imagine, then, the eventual consternation in the McHugh household when their only daughter later began to amass found objects she retrieved from dustbins and the gutter.

Eileen started school and made average progress until the age of seven and then one wonderful day, so full of joy and laughter she would remember it into adulthood, an ecstatic Marion took her on one side and announced that in a few months, before she was eight, she would have a little brother or sister. Well before Eileen's birthday, however, their world was shattered as blood flowed and Marion suffered a second miscarriage. But things would not be simple. She needed

surgery - a full hysterectomy with ovaries gone as well - no point in leaving those when the rest is gone - and for several months Marion was weak, listless and regularly ill. Tom was next to useless around the house and displayed what can only be described as an inability to discuss anything related to his wife's body. The child, Eileen, for several months became her mother's carer, unable to go with any predictable regularity to school, until an official-looking letter arrived threatening Tom with legal proceedings if his daughter continued to truant. She went back to school full time close to her ninth birthday, but she never caught up with the rest of the class. Less than a year later, when the children were labelled by their teachers as academic or other, she joined the latter group and did not even prepare for the eleven-plus. He never said it, but Tom did blame Marion.

And suddenly they were already into the sixties, those increasingly prosperous years that followed their being told they had never had it so good. Living standards were on the rise and, perhaps for the first time in the nation's history, masses of the population were being raised to a level of perceived economic comfort of which even their own parents could not even have dreamed.

And things were on the up for insurance salesmen. Tom had spent much of the fifties worrying about his bicycle clips, essential items of his business uniform, since two wheels were his only option for transport around the extensive housing estates and back streets where people contributed their two shillings or half a crown a week to their policies. He had so many customers on some streets that he would park his bike by a lamppost, pedal-secured on the kerb, unstrap his stuffed briefcase from the saddlebag he could not properly buckle, pocket his clips and walk down one side and then back up the other.

By the end of the fifties, however, the company had replaced Tom's bike with a car that came with a mileage allowance for fuel and so offered both an opportunity for moderate profit and free motoring for the family. And, by the time it was clear that Eileen would have no chance of going to grammar school, opportunities advertised by individualism had already been absorbed by the mass market toward which everyone felt individually and collectively directed. Ten years earlier, neither Tom nor Marion would have conceived that they may, one day, pay for the education of their daughter, but these were the nineteen-sixties and, after all, things were better when they were private, weren't they?

But there were other decisions to confront, some forced. They had moved to Agbrigg to avoid the stigma of living in a council house. In these years of progress, they were determined to achieve a status identifiably higher than that of their respective parents, whose example was admirable but whose achievements were not judged considerable. Continued residence in the council estate might entrap them within the same attitudes and lifestyle they associated with their neighbours. Both Marion and Tom felt they were destined for higher things. Renting a two-up two-down terrace near the rugby league ground at Belle Vue, however, represented only initial progress. This was later enhanced when, courtesy of government initiative and grant, they became proud owners of an indoor toilet and bathroom.

They had to divide Eileen's back bedroom, of course, but the remaining space was judged perfectly adequate. But they continued to aspire to ownership, to dream of a new house, one of those modern-style semis with a garden that were increasingly promised by and came to symbolise the achievement of a post-war utopia. But it took the couple

almost twenty years to achieve the economic stability that might finance the change and, coincidentally, that was achieved just as their daughter was facing the prospect of changing schools. If school and aspiration provided the pull, there was also developing nearby something the couple felt as a push.

Their town was still a manufacturing town. The coalfield was all around, but the city itself still made most of its money from textiles and engineering, a proud heritage that gave identity to an equally proud community, but an identity that was already reeling from competition driven by increasing post-war trade, cheaper transport and, crucially, cheaper people in countries that most British people of the time had heard of but probably could not locate on a map, places that most labelled 'backward'.

After the war, works buses that ferried women - always women - to their six-day-a-week labour still ran, but fifteen years later the noisy, dirty and poorly paid work in the mills was already unpopular and, by virtue of a colonial heritage that still made the British proud, there existed in South Asia importable human resource that was both cheaper and more docile than anything locally available. Areas like Agbrigg became associated with the immigrants who worked to keep dying industries alive for a couple more decades. The town - and its press - was awash with stories of ten to a room, the smell of garlic next door and the need for shopkeepers to keep a bowl of bleach handy for the coins that were handed over the counter.

It was also an era when the new estates were springing up in what appeared to be a modern, semi-detached conformity, but a similarity that paradoxically looked like an expression of individuality and independence. To think, as Marion no doubt said to Tom as they looked at a map of their plot, we'll

have a garden at the back as well as one at the front! And it will be so much cleaner than these streets, which was a word that, without a capital letter, was a social class label, not a geographical description. In the towns - and especially in the mining villages that surrounded them - to live in the streets meant identification with the working classes, the poor, two-up two-down in terraces, smoking chimney pots, peeling paint, where the folk might even be mucky. It was a word that signified parallel lines of back-to-backs, blackened brick, old jobs that no-one now wanted and, in many places, residual war damage, dereliction and demolition. That is why the new estates carried proper names such as avenue, close, rise, walk and even boulevard for roads that were wide enough for a couple of Ford Anglias. On the Ashdene Estate in Crofton, there were eventually even a couple of garths, though there was no cloister in sight. And the outline plot that Tom and Marion showed to their daughter represented a materialised new life and new identity in a wholly new Weavers Rise, without apostrophe, the potential command forever unnoticed.

The area was white, solidly white. It was also middle-class, at the lower end, in the sense that the British hear as a synonym for 'safe'. Though these newcomers to the area owned mortgages rather than property, they at least had created a vision, albeit a quarter of a century into a collective future, of being able to bequeath property and thus promise an inherited stability that surely none of their ancestors had ever felt.

It was a place where new cars that came with the husband's job appeared in driveways every two years. It was where foreign holidays were discussed, contemplatively until mid-decade. It was where people were having estimates for double glazing, a new garage, a conservatory or an

extension with a second bathroom. It was where do-it-yourselfers hammered, drilled and grinded through the quiet of fine weekends, to install fitted wardrobes, chipboard and melamine kitchens, storage radiators, crazy paving, garden sheds and little ponds with babbling fountains surrounded by pot figures from the garden centre. It was where lawns were kept mowed, woodwork was regularly painted, borders were bedded with lobelia and pansies and interiors were redecorated proudly in shades of white, the only colour that anyone would consciously admit.

Initial fears shared by both Marion and Tom that Eileen would not settle into her new school or indeed the area were soon dismissed when she met that nice boy Martin, whose family lived in the house within her new school's grounds. Back in Agbrigg, Eileen had always been an outdoor type. She could play in the street. She could go for walks over Heath Common with her friends, often as far as Warmfield and then back down Pineapple Hill, which was a very long way indeed, a trip that was not completely without worry for parents because there were main roads to cross.

But because Eileen's schooling had been so severely disrupted at such a crucial time, she seemed not to develop lasting friendships. And when the area started to change, these parents became reluctant to allow her far from home, because she might even meet some of 'them'.

And so it was with some relief they found, not even a term into Browns, that their daughter had not only settled in and found at least one teacher she liked, but she had also been admitted to a very pleasant group of young people, almost all from nice families, who socialised around that same school in the evenings. Everything was close by, apparently under control, and safe. It really could not have worked out better, except for Marion, who felt she never really did fit in.

Marion did, however, meet Martin and she was immediately impressed. In her estimation, he was exactly the kind of boy that her daughter needed, being honest, straight, clean, focused, responsible and, above all, steady. They even, perhaps for the first time in their adult lives, invited him, a total stranger, into their home and rather liked having him come and go as he pleased. In some ways, they adopted him as the son they didn't have and, despite Eileen's inexplicable but still tolerable obsession with art, things were very much on track. For sure it would be some years in the future, but they could certainly envisage the two of them settling down, having a family of their own and thus effectively reproducing their parents' lives in a different decade. But things were changing ever faster. And there came a day when Marion was aware of changes in her daughter, only some of which she found welcome.

A mother knows. A mother knows how to read changes in her daughter. And she knows what they mean. There are some things you just can't hide. Whether Eileen was aware of Marion's assessment, we don't know. That Marion was at least partially reassured that her daughter's relationship with Martin had moved further along its intended path towards permanence we can be sure. On reflection, Eileen must have noticed that her mother had registered these incremental changes and must have understood that her reaction was to extend even greater freedom and accommodation to herself and Martin. She must also have recognised how much her later estrangement from Martin had devastated her mother. This is my speculation, but I am sure you will agree that what I describe is completely credible and, despite there being no material evidence, perfectly explains how and why the relationship between mother and daughter changed for the worse and never recovered.

Marion had two miscarriages. We know that the second, at least, was probably life-threatening. She went through labour and delivered. Was she told it was a boy? We know that Eileen, as a child, had to look after her mother, that Marion was incapacitated for the better part of a year, that Eileen missed schooling and never caught up. So, it is just possible that Tom's analysis of Eileen's academic failure might just be correct that it had all been caused by his wife.

We do know that Marion had psychologically almost adopted Martin as her own son. And then Eileen ditched him. I have not a shred of evidence, other than the considered reflections of Martin's parents, with whom I met several times. But I do know that, uncharacteristically, Marion started taking extended sick leave from work, from the city centre food shop where she had been employed for decades. In those years before she took her early retirement at fifty-five, she suddenly became a liability, having previously been nothing less than a pillar of dependability.

Of this we are sure, because Martin's parents, who, on their own retirement, moved into a house just doors along Weavers Rise from Marion's home. They deliberately chose the location because of the friendship they had developed during the years when Eileen was seeing Martin and, when Browns School closed in the eighties, it just happened that there was a house for sale up the hill, just two hundred metres away from their existing home in the school's grounds.

In later years, they would provide significant assistance for their neighbour. By the time Marion had vacated her home, they had already been doing odd jobs, gardening, cleaning and shopping for her for several years. Indeed, it was they who first alerted Martin to the fact that Marion had developed, alongside her depression and agoraphobia, significant symptoms of dementia. And it would be their son



who would eventually oversee her transfer into care.

## John

John Daly has to be a crucial figure in this remaking of Eileen's life and work. We have met him earlier in the story, described by Eileen herself in her notebook at the start of her college course. He was her art history teacher, but his role, as we will see, was ambivalent.

John Daly was in his early thirties when he and Eileen met in that class during her first week in college. He was a Londoner born and bred and prided himself on his knowledge of the 'best places to go', the 'hip joints', the 'best hangouts' and other such insider tips. Both Linda and Charlotte described his manner as effusive. They both recall how he muscled into the students' conversations at the start of their course, placing himself at the centre of things even out of class, when they were taking a break in the middle of his session. He displayed a talent for identifying and then occupying the focal point of relationships that were in the process of forming, as the new students warily investigated one another. At that stage, these new students were grateful for what they perceived as his leadership, his desire to gel the group. They had yet to conclude that his true motive was to control. In those first few weeks, they had yet also to learn his true talents.

As a teacher, he aimed at transferring a copy of his persona, complete with its mass of accumulated knowledge, like an injection into his class. He would often place himself, his feelings and his experience at the centre of his narrative, as if his students might uncover the content of his subject via their discovery of his person. In his lessons, content and style intermingled, but what this apparently intensely transparent manner largely omitted was any tangible contact with his real self.

He had been an evacuee during the war, but that was over by the time he was six, so it was an experience he barely remembered. As far as he was concerned, he has a Londoner through and through, someone who had never lived anywhere else, someone intimately in touch with this city that now led the cultural world. He was ever keen to show off all aspects of its life to anyone new to it and open to its experience.

What he did not have was the accent. He was raised in a middle-class household, at least during infancy, by an accountant father and a general practitioner mother in an era when it was not common for both parents to be in full-time work. The household had a full-time live-in nanny who also performed duties as a housekeeper. He had an older brother, David, who became a journalist, the six-year difference in ages meaning that he himself was often left in the care of his older brother, albeit with the nanny in attendance, if needed. David really did take his responsibilities seriously and spent many hours teaching his younger brother knowledge that schooling otherwise would have deemed beyond his years. John Daly thus grew up precocious, some might say arrogant.

What John could recall from their wartime years of exile in Gloucestershire were the walks they used to take together and, since David was already a keen artist, they often sketched together as well, the elder brother always displaying infinite patience whilst the younger did his infant scribbling. John's head start in the visual arts undoubtedly arose from his brother's tuition.

When their father was killed in Italy in 1944, David was devastated, while John was still perhaps too young to take it all in. It must be recognised as well that John had virtually no memory of his father, so when his mother remarried in

1950, there was a chance for him to make a new start, whereas for David, the task was much harder. The fact that neither brother could relate to their new stepfather clearly locates the blame for the breakdown.

By then David was already eighteen and destined for university. He spent just a few months at home after George Sullivan moved in and hardly ever got to know him. John, on the other hand, was still only twelve and had only recently started secondary school. Margaret Daly became Sullivan, but the two boys retained their father's surname and this certainly contributed to the way in which George treated them. The Daly house was in a leafy part of Finchley, perhaps more Golders Green than Middlesex. It was quite large, apparently too big for a family of three. It originally had a self-contained top floor flat for the family nanny and still had ample space for the Dalys. But after George moved in, it became too small for John, not allowing him the space he craved, space to distance himself from the stepfather

Whether Margaret married George for the sake of her younger son, believing a father figure was essential for the boy's stability, we will never know, for she developed an aggressive cancer and died just two years after the wedding. Wills had not been redrawn in favour of George and so the two boys inherited their father's legacy and the substantial house, with George receiving a small stipend, but linked to a right to remain in residence. David was already twenty and looking forward to graduation and making his own way in the world, which is exactly what he did. He married at twenty-one, did postgraduate study funded by his share of the legacy and went on from a first job on a newspaper to develop a successful career in the media. It would be accurate to say that David never knew George Sullivan and perhaps never appreciated the life his younger brother was

being forced to lead.

It was that same legacy that funded John's attendance at Shortlands, later Challoner School, an institution that aspired to a public school ethos whilst admitting day students. Pupils were expected to be academic, and the pursuit of a predictable excellence was the institution's myopic goal, an outcome that John simply could not deliver, despite his brother's tuition in the early years. In the 1950s it was the way of the world that this particular young man simply could not do the work and little attempt was made by the school to identify the problems, the barriers to learning that John Daly might be experiencing. So he was allowed to drift.

Had the school, his housemaster, for instance, done any pastoral work with this underachieving student, the teacher might have discovered that George Sullivan drank, locked the boy in his room whenever he was in the house, and traded domestic services, such as the use of hot water, the use of the bathroom and the provision of food at an hourly rate that the boy had to hand over in cash. This was George's way of augmenting his measly, in his estimation, stipend to finance his craving for whisky. Unhappy, alone and friendless, the teenager became ever more withdrawn, unable to relate to his peers and academically under-achieving.

But what he could do alone in his locked room was draw. John Daly thus became an isolated but exceptionally talented artist, copying in pencil many of the illustrations from his father's art books, which George had consigned to John's room to get such clutter out of the way. David Daly's career blossomed, and he took up residence overseas as a foreign correspondent. The brothers spoke irregularly because of the exorbitant cost of international phone calls in that era, and when they did speak, it became a family affair with the stepfather always in attendance, so John's scope for telling

the truth was always limited. Throughout, David remained blissfully unaware of the problems at home.

John did well enough at school to go to art college. It was his portfolio rather than his exam results that secured the place and there was little doubt that he would eventually become a teacher. He continued to live in the family home during his college years and, as he grew into adulthood, he turned the tables on George and kicked him out. He was left, therefore, effectively the sole owner of a large, suburban Edwardian house in north London, which is more than many teachers achieve by the end of their careers.

If the 1950s had been almost a complete decade of abuse at George Sullivan's hands, the 1960s became ten years of parties, living it up, free sex, experimentation with drugs, flash cars and even flashier clothes. He was not rich, but he took to letting the house piecemeal, as two flats and a bedsit besides his own apartment across a complete floor, and thus he always had plenty of untaxable cash, which had to be spent.

He had his degree and a master's in art history and was gratified to land a job just down the road almost a decade before Eileen McHugh began her studies. Over the years, he had become something of a fixture, a symbol of the progressive from within his increasingly protected niche, despite his teaching style being didactic and conservative. He had never married, wore kipper ties, lapels stretching from shoulder to shoulder, Cuban heels and flares, though a Peter Wyngarde moustache was not for him. In fiction, he would have been a history man, whereas in reality he became an art history man. He was also a sexual predator.

Blind eyes had been turned for several years. After all, what happened off campus was no business of anyone in the college, a private matter between the adults involved. John

Daly's exploits, however, were common knowledge as well as common occurrence. He did actually plan how he might go through as many of the new intake as he might manage. Not everyone would prove available, after all. A party at his home was the usual technique. His doors were always open to students who, believing that being close to one of their teachers might just guarantee a pass on a course that was assessed by essay, the very epitome of what art students hated. In many ways, John Daly's pitch was perfectly prepared and expertly presented. He was a specialist in a compulsory part of the course, an acknowledged achiever in his area, having published strings of papers, and taught a subject that was a source of anxiety for most students. And, as his raw material, he was presented each year with a full room of predominantly young women, most of whom seemed to be attractive, which was no surprise, since John was one third of the interview panel that offered places. He was also bisexual, which is why most of the males were queer.

In the nineteen-sixties, John Daly was merely liberated, not a tyrant. It was a decade when, if it could hang, it hung out and batches of John's students were regularly invited to hang out with him. It was he who organised trips to the galleries, using the excursions to identify and illustrate topics from his classes, but also to cross the teacher-student divide he maintained so strictly inside the classroom. By the end of a trip to the Tate, for instance, he knew which of the dozen or so accompanying students might offer fertile ground for his attention.

In the mornings, art students did things, such as life drawing, hammering, chiselling, learning to weld, cut fabric or mix epoxy resin. In the afternoons they also did things, but generally fewer, alongside any reading (perish the thought!),

research and completion of anything left over from the morning except for one day each week, when they had a class in art history, for a whole afternoon. What saved John Daly's academic, formal classes for most of these reluctant doers, however, were the gallery trips, once a month at least, and those often needed an extra hour at the start or end of that whole afternoon. The trips would terminate, by chance of course, around five-thirty, just in time for early doors at the pub and he had several regular haunts.

From the National he would migrate down the side of Charing Cross Station, towards the river along Villiers Street to the subterranean Gordon's. From the Hayward, the Hole In The Wall was convenient. Round the back of the Tate, amongst the council blocks with their grimy brick uniformity there were several wonderful little dives. More resplendent was the Morpeth, which was almost next door. Near to the Courtauld on Woburn Place, he could access ULU, the University of London Union. This usually proved to be a fruitful hunting ground because the drinks were cheap and because trips to the Courtauld were made with only half a group to avoid any problems caused by repeated use of the lift, whose use was unavoidable and whose capacity was limited. The collection with its mix of the medieval, Renaissance and, for Britain, its almost unrivalled post-Impressionism was a must and he could spend almost all afternoon in there despite its limited number of works. From the V&A he liked to migrate towards Hyde Park rather than South Kensington because the Ennismore Arms was usually quiet, though pricey, but it could now double up as a venue because of its proximity to the newly opened Serpentine. It could, after a long walk, also serve as the watering hole after a visit to Lord Leighton's house, but then they had plenty of time for the walk because that particular museum visit



generally did not detain them for long. It was, after all, London and there was plenty of choice.

Expressions of interest were always followed by invitations to look at more materials which, inevitably, were in his apartment. It is perhaps hard for inhabitants of the twenty-first century to appreciate that this was a pre-electronic era. There were no mobile phones and no internet. The personal computer had yet to be invented. So to research the works of an artist, one either had to visit a gallery, where no photography was allowed and colour reproduction postcards were pricey, or access texts via libraries, some of which had to be ordered a week in advance. This often might entail three trips by public transport, one to find the book not in stock and make an order, one to collect it and one to take it back. The art book, probably designed for weight-lifters, had to be lugged home in proper protective covering, because there was always the weather that might damage it, and then it had to be returned with a repeat trip a week later to avoid fines, which weren't large, until you discovered a book under your bed that was supposed to have been returned three months ago. We can now appreciate how much easier it was to take a bus up the road to your tutor's home, where a personal library, not to be loaned under any circumstances, however, could be accessed and discussed with the very person who would later mark your work, especially when he threw in a glass of wine, bread, cheese or an occasional spaghetti Bolognese. For some who took up John Daly's open invitation, the experience led to substantially more than critical appraisal of reproduction, though it was, we have to admit, an era where aids to inhibit reproduction were already widely available.

Eileen's personal introduction to the process followed a visit to the Tate, where for the first time she encountered the

paintings of Mark Rothko. It was their emptiness that captivated. For her, this was the art of absence, of void, of spaces emptied so that imagination could fill them. It was Charlotte who remembered the conversation. That afternoon, they had not stayed close to the gallery for their early doors. In fact, the three flat sharers had decided to go home, largely because it was a foul afternoon, dark, wet and windy and staying out was less than attractive. Only Linda made it to the flat, however, because she had to get Alan's tea ready. When they arrived on The Broadway, the rain had stopped and it was still only six o'clock, so Charlotte and Eileen, plus a couple of the others who like them lived up the hill decided to go to the Green Man. John Daly had tagged along, ostensibly to continue discussion on the art. It was Charlotte, of course, who provided this detailed account.

"For me, it's the randomness that attracts. It feels like these works could not have happened twice," said Eileen.

A laconic John Daly leaned back in his seat. He looked interested. He was. "Where do you detect the random in Rothko?"

"It's in his use of space and light." Eileen stopped, looked around as if garnering support for her idea. People wanted to hear more, not really out of interest, merely because they could sense someone about to tread on a dick she didn't have. "When I was a kid..." There was a little titter from somewhere. "...I can remember looking up at the sun coming in through our sitting room window. I closed my eyes, because it was too bright, but there, behind closed eyes, I could see flashing patches of colour. But you couldn't look at them. If you tried, they moved, flashed away from your gaze. They faded all the time, and as they faded, they changed colour. They started yellow, turned orange and then red, that dark red, surrounded by grey and black. Sometimes

everything inverted and the colours reversed. It could have been a visual memory of anything, a landscape, a face, a garden, a painting... But the memory of whatever had been seen was now just patches of light that flashed, faded and ran away."

"There are people who do that in the park..." I can't remember who said that, which is probably a good thing. But it was said.

"Give Eileen a chance..." This was John Daly. His antennae were active.

"Fuck off," said Eileen to whoever it was. We knew one another quite well by then. "It's the same with Rothko. He has seen something and he's painting it. But he's not telling you what it was. He's only showing us a memory of something that was in his eye. All you get are the colours that are left behind closed eyes, with blurred edges where they are fading, flashing to nothing as we try to look at them. The challenge for us is to imagine what the original vision was. And that has to come from within ourselves. And that's why it's a random process. We can imagine whatever we please."

John Daly was clearly surprised with this. "So what do you think he was trying to say?"

She did not hesitate. "It has to come from inside ourselves. It's not a blank canvas. It's filled with memories of light. You have to look, then close your eyes and fill in the image. You have to remake the memory that left that light. It's not telling you to see something. It's inviting you to find something to see, something that you saw in the past and remembered. And that's why it's random. It has to be random. If you ask people who have looked at these paintings what they have seen, you could tell who has really looked at them. Anyone who answers red, black, grey, yellow has seen nothing. People who say Blackpool 1965,

the moon landing, my auntie's wedding, they are the people who have really looked, because they have found a link to their own memories. That's where the unpredictability and the randomness come in."

"What about spirituality?"

"If that's the way you are, then religion might come into your head..."

"I didn't say religion - I said spirituality."

Eileen did pause here. "If you have stirred a memory, then that's enough. If anyone has a spirit, then it's locked in their memory."

John Daly seemed genuinely impressed, Charlotte told me. I was impressed, she continued, because here was a young woman with a northern accent that sounded positively inane, coupled with an inferiority complex the size of a county, apparently holding the attention of an accomplished academic art historian. With hindsight, we know what he was up to and there's no doubt he was very practiced at it. We'd heard from students in other years that he had something of a reputation, but none of us were conscious that this was all part of the plan. He was totally convincing. But at the time I can recall feeling just a little taken aback, bewildered, but perhaps I was just a little jealous, because the attention was not mine.

Early in their flat share, Eileen did not yet know Charlotte well enough to realise that there was a sense of unease, perhaps even envy, across the table. They had yet to learn the nuances of silence that communicate one's feelings. There, that evening in February, with the rain starting again to beat against the Green Man's windows, Eileen had become locked in a private conversation with her teacher, so private it began to exclude Charlotte. Over the next half hour, one by one the others left until only Eileen, Charlotte and John

Daly remained, with Charlotte still largely silent, but equally unable or unwilling to break away.

“I’ve got some really interesting books on Rothko, if you fancy a trip to Finchley. It’s not that far...”

“Maybe at the weekend.” Eileen sounded positive.

“How about Friday night, after college?”

Eileen nodded.

She went to his place at six-thirty that Friday. By ten o’ clock she was already on her way home, having been greeted, wine, fed, read to and fucked in that order. It wasn’t her first time, but it was her first experience with a mature man who knew what he was doing. The other times, it had been with Martin and then a fellow foundation course student, who boasted much and achieved little. Here, in Finchley, in the second term of her Fine Art degree course, there had been no cajoling, no force, not even a hint of anything but consent, but it was an unequal encounter, with all the power on one side of the pairing. Though it was cold, she decided to walk home, because at that time of night she would have to wait ages for a bus anyway. A couple of them did pass her on the way, but she felt warm inside, wanted, desired, possibly even a little special, a star student praised for her insight. It all changed a fortnight later when John Daly fucked Charlotte after a trip to the Courtauld.

Things had to come to a head and they did, immediately. Charlotte had barely walked in the room, late that Saturday night, before Eileen snapped, “Did you fuck him?” There was an air of confidence about her flatmate, detectable even before they had seen one another. It could be heard in Charlotte’s uncharacteristic firmness in the closing of the door, the way she lingered in the bathroom, no doubt inspecting herself in the mirror, the attempted silent entry into their shared room via the calculatedly ponderous twist

of a handle that usually squeaked.

Charlotte did not answer at first, preferring to smile a little in silence, indicating the two of them had returned to par. The repeated question, firmer, closer to, though not reaching, a shout, elicited a formal, “Yes. So what?” which rendered Eileen speechless. Her mouth moved, but no sound came out, all of the rehearsed words apparently erased from her memory. She was hurt, humiliated, angry, resentful, envious and spiteful, all at the same confused time. It was an era where you could call him a callous bastard, but take it no further, because that was what men did. But then Charlotte and Eileen almost came to blows. There were no more words, some raised forearms, some tears. After what felt like an age but was in fact only a couple of minutes of tension, they were on Charlotte’s bed in one another’s arms, sobbing. Strangely, only some ten minutes later, neither of them was any longer perturbed, nor even at all surprised.

## What's This?

Eileen's most viewed work was anonymous. It stayed in place for some years and probably caused a smile or two, though the people who saw it were undoubtedly not aware of its origin. We have already seen what she wrote on Brancusi's *Bird in Space*. She was aware, though she made no reference in her piece, that a learned art historian had been consulted by the Customs Department, who had impounded the work, on the object's merits. They asked him if he thought it was art. His reply was, "If this is art, then I'm a bricklayer." It seems that Eileen decided to take her revenge on the building trade. Her notebooks, as ever, were cryptic. What she wrote reads as if it was intended to be read by her tutor.

"If there's anything I can't stand, it's intolerance," she wrote. "A professor of art - we have a few of those in college! - likened Brancusi's masterpiece, that beautiful, smooth, polished shape, to the work of a bricklayer." Now in fact he probably did no such thing, but we will allow Eileen a certain poetic licence.

"Bricklayers, builders, concrete mixers, welders, they are all the same to me. If we are going to get personal on the worth of what people do, let's consider an example of the building trade to see if it's more or less intelligible than the imagination of an artist.

"I went to Central London last week to look at some sculptures. I have just learned two new words - caryatids and atlantes. Caryatids are women and atlantes are men, and they both hold up buildings. The word caryatid interests me, because the first syllable sounds like 'carry'. I had an idea for a work where four classical caryatids in line would support an object with their raised hands, rather like they

were carrying a coffin above their heads. The object above them would be a giant stickleback (three-spined) and the work's title would be Carry A Tiddler.

"I wanted to do some studies, so I took the tube to King's Cross and then walked down to St. Pancras Church, where there are precisely four large caryatids. My problem is that they are not dynamic enough for my project. They just stand there and take the weight. They are a bit like women, who do the same thing lying down. Their load is on their heads, again like most women, so the trip was not totally successful. Anyway, I sketched them from several different angles and then decided I would play with their arm positions later at home. I crossed the road and set off back to King's Cross.

"And then I passed the new St. Pancras Library and Shaw Theatre. It's a non-descript, semi-brutal piece of concrete that architects and builders alike get the blame for, but the real culprit is probably the accountant who cut the budget. Eyesore is far too soft a word for the vision. So, I am almost walking past the main entrance all huffed up and then I see it, an absolute masterpiece of the construction worker's art.

"It's by the main entrance, just next to the stairs and wheelchair ramp. It's a work in concrete and iron, perhaps by Paolozzi or possibly Epstein. It's far too literal to be a Picasso or a Man Ray. It has no colour, so it's certainly not by one of the later modernists.

"Set into the concrete are two iron railings that meet, welded, about a foot and a half from the wall, forming a triangle, with the wall making the long side. It's just there. It does nothing. It does not move. It's not long enough to chain bicycles to, because you could fix just one bike to it. And the bike would block part of the entrance.

"I stood and looked at it and thought, if this is bricklaying, then I'm an artist. I know it's not made of bricks, but then



who is splitting concrete hairs?

“I waited until after dark. I had already bought a tin of spray paint from one of the hardware shops at the top of Gray’s Inn Road, and I went back to those steps with their artwork to complete my task. I carelessly - deliberately carefully carelessly - spray painted the question, “What’s this?” above the masterpiece. I went back a week later to photograph my work in daylight.”

*What’s This?* proved to be Eileen’s most enduring work, lasting several years. It must also have been quite popular, because it was removed several times by the local council, but each time someone came at night and repainted it. The solution was to remove the ironwork, which just created a scar in the front wall some years later. Eventually, the entire building was demolished to make way for the new British Library. *What’s This?* will be remade in our new gallery. As for *Carry A Tiddler*, there exists no other reference to the work.

## Helen

This was another assignment from Eileen's first term in art college. It was submitted handwritten within the pages of a large-format sketchpad, which I obtained courtesy of the Colbrookes. They had come across it during the final clearance of Marion's home when she was admitted to care. It was in a plastic bag under the stairs and it clearly would not fit into the box they had prepared for Marion. Fearing it would be lost or damaged if it were left loose, they kept it, still in its original Sainsbury's bag. They said it reminded them of Eileen, of whom they were still fond. I am indebted to them, for this one book contained much of the material I have used to reconstruct Eileen's work.

Exactly why Eileen chose to write this piece on unlined drawing paper is a mystery. I suspect that the brief for the task, which was not included, probably specified a mixed media study, with the student's text interspersed with illustration or copies of the chosen artist's work. Eileen, as ever, had her own personal approach.

*Describe the life of your chosen artist and illustrate how the life influenced the art and how the art has influenced you.*

The artist I want to describe is called Helen Wallace. She is not famous, but she is an artist. I think she may not even be known outside of my home area. She was my teacher. She is the reason I decided to become an artist.

Helen Wallace was born on July 10, 1933. I know the date exactly because I still have the cutting from the Wakefield Express. There are no books written about Helen Wallace. One day I will try to correct this. All I know about Helen's early life is that she was born and brought up in Pontefract, which is famous for liquorice. The town is medium sized, neither big nor small, big enough to have most things, small

enough not to have what you want. Like most towns in the West Riding of Yorkshire, it has different sides. I've thought about this long and hard and have not copied this from a book or written what someone else has said. This comes from me and my personal experience. I say this now because it is important for what I want to say. More than anyone else, it was Helen Wallace the person who convinced me I had something to say and Helen Wallace the artist that taught me a language to express it.

Pontefract is a mixed town. It's a complicated place. The town centre is quite big, at least I thought it was until I came to London. Now it looks different. It has an indoor market and a small outdoor market a couple of times a week. The indoor market is exactly what you would expect to find in a West Riding town. It sells a lot of pork pies, bacon, fruit and veg, birthday cards, cheap clothes and everything else you would expect to be cheap. The outdoor market is more expensive than Wakefield and it's a lot smaller. There aren't really any big shops in Pontefract. They have a Marks, a BHS and a Boots, but they are all small.

Pontefract has a racecourse. You see it sometimes on Grandstand on Saturday afternoons, when Peter O'Sullivan does his usual vocal race alongside what the horses are doing in the last furlongs. I mention the races, because they are what make Pontefract that little bit different from the other towns in the area. It's the last one before you leave the mining and industrial areas, where the places become rural and vote Conservative. Pontefract is very much on the edge.

It's known as Ponte, pronounced like the Latin for bridge in the ablative - we did Latin at school, for some reason - and the second half means broken, which is interesting, given that I think it's quite a confused sort of town.

Ponte also makes liquorice of all sorts. The phrase, for me,

means Christmas. I always got a box of them in my stocking and I think I still have all the blue-beaded round ones they ever contained. I like them, but I like to look at them more than I like to eat them. I have a collection going back years in a tin that used to contain Oxo cubes.

Pontefract is also surrounded by pits. There's Glasshoughton, Snydale, Featherstone, Ackton, Knottingley, where there is also a gas works and a brand-new pit. The one at Snydale used to have enormous slagheaps, where there was a contraption that carried buckets of muck up to the top of the heap so it could be tipped. The end of the run had a turning track for the buckets where they went round a semicircle. It was like a giant steel snake, with the tipping part forming its head, and when I was young, I really did think it was a snake. The gas works is like a living black monster. When you drive past, it seems to hiss at you like it's going to pounce, but that's gone now. There are no pits to the south of Pontefract, which is just a vast expanse of fields, real countryside. On the eastern side, before you get to Knottingley, there's Ferrybridge, which has three power stations called A, B and C. A is for arms, because it looks like a giant one-armed bandit. You ought to be able to put a penny in one side, pull one of the chimneys and get something out of the long diagonal pipes that run up the main building. B is for boring and C is just bigger than the others, meaning you can see it for miles.

Also, on the south side of the town there is the middle-class area of big houses with gardens where the professional people live. They call themselves that so they can be something different from the miners, shop assistants, sweet makers, bus drivers and farm workers, who of course are all amateurs. They are amateurs because they don't earn the money. That's for the professionals.

Pontefract also has a castle. It's a famous castle, but there's nothing much left to see. There's a few bits of wall and some mounds and gardens. But it's not every town that had a king killed there. Pontefract did.

But Pontefract also has Baghill. It's on the south side of the town, but it's a place that's a law unto itself. It's the kind of place where middle-class people do not want to be after dark. They might meet someone.

Helen Wallace lived in one of the big houses near to King's School. I went to visit her there several times. It was an enormous house. It had four bedrooms and two bathrooms. The entrance was a porch that was about the same size as our sitting room. It had three rooms on the ground floor and they all seemed to echo. Helen had been an only child, just like me. But Helen's father died in the war. He was a pilot based at Finningley. All she could remember about him was that he was very tall and walked with a stoop. She didn't see a lot of him after the war started. Helen's mother brought her up.

She went to the High School and then art college. Her mother got cancer and died in 1955, and Helen inherited the house, where she lived alone with her artwork. She became a teacher after college and she was my art teacher in Browns School until I left to do my Foundation.

I first met Helen Wallace when I was eleven. She became a kind of goddess. The rest of the teachers always wore dull, formal clothes, ties, suits, blouses, skirts and polished shoes. Helen Wallace always wore bright, vivid colours. She bleached her hair. She was blonde with a parting down the middle. She wore plain, pleated skirts in pale blue, green and sometimes red. She had long sleeved blouses that fit her and had buttoned cuffs, often multicoloured. She had a good figure and wore a lot of makeup, face powder, rouge, lipstick,

eye shadow and liner, none of which we girls were allowed to wear, of course. And I am a woman, so there is no problem in my saying that she had a big bust and always wore those pointed bras that sold themselves with the slogan of lift and separate. She was a big woman, but not fat. When she walked along the school corridor towards you with her flouncy skirt rustling, you felt you had to get out of the way. She was direct, quick rather than fast, determined rather than loud, dominating rather than domineering.

She never had any problems with the kids in her class, but she was never what might be called strict. Her classes were different from the others. In her class she let us talk when we were doing practicals, but if we talked too much all she had to do was look at us and we would be quiet. She would come round the room to see what you were doing, and she would talk about your work like she was interested in it. We usually didn't start anything until she had led a class discussion about the topic, but that didn't happen too often because we often carried on from where we had left off last time. But things like that never happened in any other class at that school.

Sometimes she would demonstrate at the front. She had real style. Whenever she used paint, she put on a big, loose, brown smock that went over her head rather than wrapped around. I've seen pictures of Rembrandt wearing something similar. Even the word, smock, makes me think of her.

Her work was what we would now call the brutalist end of abstract expressionism, though I did not know terms like that for most of the time she taught me. She wanted every artwork to be an expression of her personality, to be an external representation of her inner feelings. I remember her words exactly. "In art it's more important that you know who you are rather than know what you want to paint." She used to lead discussions with the class based on a question. She

would often start with something we had seen on television.

I was young, eleven or twelve, when she gave a class on what later became known as ‘the big freeze’. She came into class and wrote the word COLD on her blackboard, which was very old and pitted. I distinctly remember the chalk hitting a rough spot and breaking. She had to get down on her hands and knees to get the piece that rolled under her desk. She kept talking all the time and didn’t notice all the boys on the other side of the room standing up and trying to look down the front of her blouse.

She asked us to think about the word and say related things that came to mind. She wrote the words around COLD in no particular order. But she would not accept words like snow or icicle or frost. She told us we had to use words describing what we felt. Then she said we had to choose one of the feelings and make it visible in paint. She chose shiver and did a quick demonstration using poster paints. In under five minutes she had painted a brilliant picture, where layer on layer of almost dry paint created a wonderful idea of someone shaking. The moment she described what we should do, I was clear what my picture should show, and I had finished it before the end of the lesson. Miss Wallace came to look at it and she immediately asked me to talk about it. I did.

The painting was a self-portrait. The paper was a vertical sheet of A3 and I placed myself off-centre, standing, unnaturally tall and thin and completely black, apart from my face. I put a hint of a horizon which suggested I was being seen almost from ground level. I told Miss Wallace I was trying to represent shivering, but then it became loneliness and separation, like the idea of a cold shoulder. The idea of coldness came to mean the way other people treated me, which was why I was alone and stretched. She asked me to

repeat what I had said to the class and it made me feel very important.

Miss Wallace created my love of art, because she was so clear that it would become a voice that would express my inner feelings. She often gave me extra classes after school. Because I lived so near the school, I could be home in five minutes, so staying late caused no problems. She regularly let me stay until half past five and told me I could use any materials I wanted, which was a bonus because in that school we had to pay for the things we would use in subjects like art and cookery. She used to do her own work for an hour after school and we would often paint together, try to represent the same ideas and talk about what we had done.

She also gave me classes at weekends. I used to visit her at home on Saturdays and she used to give me tea and sandwiches for lunch. She had a big room upstairs in her house that she used as a studio, so I could leave work out until the next week. I couldn't do that at home. There was never enough space, and my mother didn't like having mess around. So if I did things there, I spent most of my time setting up and clearing away. In Miss Wallace's house, she even had a dedicated bathroom next to her studio which was only used for cleaning brushes and the like. It meant I could use the whole time to paint. I trusted her and she gave me my love of art.

Her own painting, because she never wanted to do anything but paint, was, as I have said, abstract expressionist. She didn't do random things, however. She had no time for Pollack's splashing, dripping or riding bicycles through dabs to spread them. She described her own style as contemplative, and it was very sparse. She hardly used any paint until the end.

She would sit in front of a blank canvas for an hour,



smoking in her smock, just looking at the blank space. She might get up and walk around the room looking at the canvas, which was still blank, from distance, from close up, from arm's length. She would mix paint to get a colour she wanted and then thin it and thin it and thin it, until she had what was almost a wash. She always used acrylic. And then she would get a wide brush, the sort you might use to emulsion a wall, and put a glaze over the entire canvas. It would dry quite fast because she layered it very thin. Then she would change the colour, but not by much, by adding just a touch of something different, and then she would get another big brush, but smaller than the first, and overpaint part of what she had done. Where the lower layer was dry, it would cover, but if there was anything still even slightly wet, the new layer would blend. But she didn't go over the whole canvas, so some areas still had the original wash. I suppose this was a random element in her style. She would then repeat the process many times, but only adding new layers to the canvas selectively, this area but not that, thin here, thicker there, and so on.

She would work on a canvas for many hours, sometimes more than one session, sometimes working on one she had propped up against a wall weeks before because she hadn't been able to decide how to continue. She kept adding layers after adding new paint to her existing mix, which got thicker as time passed. Of course, it also got darker as the tertiary effects dominated. After twenty or thirty applications of overpainting, she would use thick paint, almost like paste straight from the tube and a palette knife to score lines of colour across the surface. The results were brilliant, expressive. They looked like they had been alive and had been attacked, the scouring like open wounds.

She said the final painting had become an expression of

the inner self, the subconscious mind, the part of her personality that ultimately controlled not only what she thought, but how she thought, which itself was both uncontrollable and inaccessible. And it was this that she explored in her work. She told me that if I wanted to be an artist, then I should work at developing a similar idea, an overall approach to my work which would be personal to me, that could underpin everything I did. That's how I came to develop my idea of assembling objects to create stories, stories without start or end or plot. Just stories.

When I left school to do my foundation course, I made sure I went back to visit her. Over the summer after I left, I noticed she had lost some weight. She said something about slimming, but I didn't think she was telling the truth. By October, she had lost more weight and was looking ill. By the start of the next term, she was not at school when I visited one day. I asked where she was and I was told she was in Pontefract Infirmary. I went to visit her in the February, and she was like a skeleton. She died three weeks later. I asked what it was that she had, but nobody could tell me, or perhaps no-one was willing to tell me.

There was a little piece in the Wakefield Express. It was the owner of the school who made the announcement. It said:

Death – Helen Wallace (Miss), 8 July 1933 – 17 February 1970 in Pontefract Infirmary, cause unspecified. Funeral 23 February 10:30, Pontefract Crematorium. No flowers.

I looked at those few words and thought of that upstairs room full of her work. There must have been a hundred canvases and they were all superb. I think the house and its contents were passed to a relative, perhaps an aunt or an uncle. In the years I knew her, Helen Wallace never mentioned anyone else in her family, though there were some photos in the living room. I went to the funeral, but

there were only the undertakers and a couple of my old teachers. There was no-one else. No Family. No friends.

I often think that one day in my rummaging through other people's junk that I will discover one of Helen's paintings and I can rescue it. It seems to me as if both herself as a person and her work has been cast aside, burnt to ash and, for all I know, put in one of those buckets that goes up the muck heap at Snydale pit through the steel snake to be tipped out at the top.

What she taught me was to look within myself and, more importantly, to trust what I found there and then to express those feelings, make them real in art. She also taught me to value the here and now, to let the future look after itself and that our idea of permanence is mere illusion.

There was a comment in a different hand.

*I cannot grade this paper. It does not address the brief you were given. This was designed to be an exercise in Art History, a critical examination of the work of a chosen artist, based on research and published opinions of the artist's work. This piece is autobiographical, cites an artist with no exhibited work and someone who was a teacher, not an artist. You will need to resubmit, Eileen. We can discuss a topic. JD*

Eileen then continued in a large scrawl.

Your class! An artist's only inevitable country is himself, e e cummings. A telegram from Robert Rauschenberg that said, "This is a portrait of Iris Clert if I say it is." Marcel Duchamp's remark that any object can be elevated to the status of art. It seems that what I learnt from Helen for five years was not art. I wonder what it was.

## Martin

Martin Colbrooke was the first contact I made. He proved to be an invaluable source of information on Eileen's family background. In fact, given the near complete lack of traceable relatives of either Tom or Marion McHugh, I admit that the family story would not exist were it not for his reminiscences. It was Martin who also arranged my contact with his parents, whom I was able to meet when I made my second visit to Marion McHugh.

I had decided to remake Eileen's life after the success of *He's on the other line...* and my initial research provided me with no other contact from Crofton, other than Marion, who was by then in care. The New Hall that housed Browns School was demolished some years ago, but the school's registration records are in the public domain and there, throughout the school's existence, are the names of the families who served as caretakers. Birth and death records supplied the rest.

And the name is quite unusual. There was probably just the one family of that name in a village of under ten thousand people, so a search for the surname linked to the place name was always going to produce narrow results. But in the process of researching the area where Eileen lived, I have come to learn something of its nature and culture. And given the socio-economic status of the family and given that I knew he had attended what the British call grammar school, I really had only two possible schools that were likely to have educated the teenage Martin, Normanton and Hemsworth. Searches of Facebook and LinkedIn, alongside alumni records from the relevant years located just one likely candidate, a medic now living in Dubai with contact details listed online. The crucial factor that identified him was his

age and his listing of Crofton as his place of birth. I knew he must have been in the same school year as Eileen, because there were cryptic but decipherable references in her notebooks about copying his mathematics work to submit as her own, because their schools were using the same graded textbook.

But having located my candidate, I thought quite long and hard about how I might approach him, concluding that an email out of the blue, apparently about an ex-girlfriend, some forty years after the event could be misinterpreted. He was listed on his company's site as sixty years old and he was a partner in a private medical practice. He was also apparently happily married with three children of his own and no less than eight grandchildren. His self-description spoke volumes on the pride he clearly took in his family life. Alumni records show he graduated from high school in 1970 with four Advanced Level Certificates and moved on to a place in the University of Leeds School of Medicine. He stayed in Leeds after graduation, working in the Infirmary for a number of years before joining a private clinic in the same city. It seems that the clinic had a number of Middle Eastern clients and by the end of the eighties, he had moved to Dubai to become a partner in what appears to have been a highly successful private clinic, treating mainly expatriates.

I should not have worried about sending that email, which in the end was remarkably simple. I recall I had no title for my task at that stage.

*Dear Martin, My name is Mary Reynolds and I live in New Jersey, USA. I am researching a book on Eileen McHugh, an artist who has suffered neglect and who, in my opinion, deserves greater recognition. Unfortunately, there is a paucity of material about her life and work, and though I have the important notebooks she kept as a student, I*

*currently have little information about her private life in Crofton. I know that Eileen and you were friends in your teens. Would you be willing to share your reminiscences of her? We could communicate via Skype or email, but I am afraid I do not envisage being able to visit Dubai in person. I would of course be extremely grateful if you could help, but I have to declare at the outset that I cannot offer any form of remuneration, since this is a labour of love, rather than profit. Would you let me know if you can help? Mary Reynolds*

I decided not to overuse the contact possibilities - social networks, professional networks, business contact page were all possible - and so sent just one message via the platform I could see Martin used most frequently. I was confident he would reply, but I heard nothing for a week, and then...

“Dear Mary...”

...the email began, formally, calculatedly following my precedent...

“I would be more than happy to share my memories of Eileen. How is she? Have you met her? Is she also in the US? And do you have any contact details? Please do let me know.

“It has been many years since Eileen and I were in any form of contact. The last time we met was quite strange. I remember it well. How could I forget...

“It was in June 1972, after a period of several months when we had not been in touch. We had by then gone our separate ways, I myself to University in Leeds and Eileen to art college in London. We met for just a few minutes and the occasion remains fresh in my mind, because I found it quite an upsetting experience. To be frank, at the time I was terribly shocked, so disturbed I immediately went to her family home up the hill in the Ashdene Estate to see if they knew what the problem might be.

“Eileen and I had met by chance that afternoon, momentarily in Cock Lane. She was walking up towards the bus stop and I was on my way down the hill, having just travelled from Leeds. We saw one another at distance near the bottom of the lane, roughly where there used to be a farm entrance on the right (as far as I saw things) and the junction to the left coming out of Ashdene. She was just crossing the road and I would have been about thirty yards away. I remember calling her name and waving and I also recall that she seemed not to see me. She was walking fast, not running, but clearly rushing. My precise words were, ‘Hi there, long time no see,’ and that was as far as I got. I can state without doubt that I was still smiling and saying repeated hellos as we approached.

“She walked past me almost without pausing. All I got was an expletive spoken in anger. ‘I’m finished with this f.....g place.’ There was a slight pause as she spoke, closer to a shout than anything else, but by then she was already past me. She turned and marched off up the hill, head down, without a backward glance.

“I was baffled and also quite hurt. I thought I had done something. I repeat that we had not seen one another for some time, about a year as I recall, but after we split up, we had always been polite with one another and happy to socialise. There was no acrimony. I went straight to her parents’ house and rang the bell. Her father answered.

“‘If you have come for Eileen, she’s gone,’ he said and closed the door.

“I turned away to leave and the door reopened. It was Marion McHugh this time. ‘Martin, she was here just now. Have you seen her? If you see her, tell her she left her bag. It’s got some of her books inside. She’ll probably need them. Can you take it to her?’

“I thought for a moment. Perhaps I could take the bag and run up to the bus stop at the Cock and Crown. Maybe she might still be there. But then I thought I had better stay out of this. Whatever had happened, it clearly had nothing to do with me, so I thought I had better just leave it, let sleeping dogs lie, despite the fact there were no dogs, and no-one was asleep.

“I remember saying, ‘I just saw her. She was walking towards the Cock and Crown. She’s probably still there. You could drive up there with the bag. You’d be quicker than me.’ As I left, Mrs McHugh closed the door. I walked a few yards back down the hill and then waited to see if Tom would take the car to try and return Eileen’s bag. I waited five minutes or so, but there was no activity whatsoever that afternoon in Weavers Rise. I assumed there must have been some argument and concluded I was better staying out of it. It’s bugged me over the years, because we had been close, Eileen and me. We had been real friends, so that last meeting has stayed with me.”

Re-reading Martin’s message now forces together previously unnoticed pieces of the jigsaw. I subsequently learned from Charlotte that Eileen had planned to stay for just a weekend. She had taken no luggage, having decided to rely for a change of clothes on what she knew was still in the wardrobe at home, as she still called it. All she took with her was a plastic bag containing the sketchbooks and notes she needed to begin the redrafting of her year two final assignment. And she had already made a start while on the train heading north from Kings Cross. The books show a clear fresh start, where she was newly determined to work through her ideas with greater rigour and already displayed a greater focus on communicating her ideas to her teacher. She had decided against hitchhiking for this visit because she



was conscious of how short a time there would be with her parents before the start of the overland trip and so she wanted to avoid any possibility of delay. The question of how her daughter's sketchbooks had come to be in Marion McHugh's personal effects had often occurred to me, but I had found no answer until I reabsorbed Martin's revelation that Eileen had simply forgotten to take her plastic bag when anger cut her visit short. And it was perhaps the guilt at feeling that anger that prompted Marion to keep those same sketchbooks in her box of memories for over forty years.

"I never saw her again. I have to admit that I also never saw either Tom or Marion again. There was no acrimony, but there was a barrier, as much from them as from me. I now realise they just did not want to encounter anything that would remind them of Eileen. To this day, I have no idea whether that was as a result of guilt or lingering hatred. Something serious happened that afternoon. I presume it must have been something to do with her life in London, or money, or the difficulties she was having with her studies. I still have no real idea, but, if you want an opinion, I would guess it was to do with her lifestyle, which had been concerning them for some time. I cannot confirm, because, as I have said, we had no further contact. I had been so close to them in my teens, but further communication between us was just not to be.

"We were both eleven when we first met. She was new to the village, though at the time I did not know that. She was just a first-year pupil in a new intake in our school. I say our school, but of course I did not go to school there myself. She started at Browns, where my parents were caretakers. Our house was in the school grounds, so we lived on site.

"Eileen regularly used to stay late, an hour or more after class, so she was often still around the school when I came

home from my own school. I assumed she was a latchkey kid, that both her parents were still at work, so there was no incentive to go straight home. I was right about that, but, as I soon learned, wrong to ascribe that as the reason for her extra hour at school. We began to greet one another and then talk. Her parents generally did not get in from work until nearly six and she lived only a few minutes away up the hill in the Ashdene Estate. It was well before the end of that first term, perhaps as early as the October, that she told me that she was new to the village and had made no friends. I told her she should come along to the school in the evenings, where a group of us used to congregate. I still remember the smile that the invitation prompted.

“For the purposes of your research, I suggest you might seek out any of the following:

*John Abbott, whose family owned the farm towards the bottom of Cock Lane.*

*Alan and Evelyn Arundel, twins, obviously non-identical whose father was the local bobby. They lived in the police house on The Avenue.*

*Jenny and Anne Croft, identical twins who lived in a bungalow on Church Hill. Their father used to work in Ringway Airport, Manchester. It was very unusual in those days for anyone in the village to work so far away from home. I'm sure someone will still remember the family.*

*Mickey Crabb, who lived in a house on Slack Lane, one of the houses in new estate, where Eileen herself lived. His father was another policeman, though Mickey himself, I think, finished up in prison.*

*Denis Grant whose family lived in the big house at the junction of Doncaster Road and New Road. His parents ran a shop in Wakefield which traded under the family name.*

*Kathleen Spence, who was on Pontefract Road. Her*

*father was a Justice of the Peace. She went to university in Hull.*

*Julie Small, whose family had the fish and chip shop across the road from the Cock and Crown.*

*There was Dave Smith who lived on Doncaster Road. His dad was a baker. He went to Newcastle University to do economics and then became a teacher.*

“We were all about the same age, give or take a year. There were others, but I remember these people were the core of our group. We were quite a mixed bunch. I can offer no more than names, I’m afraid, because the last time I saw any of them was the year I went to college in 1970. We lost touch as soon as we went our separate ways for education, boyfriends, girlfriends and the like. Other blokes joined us when we needed to make up the numbers for football, but the list above was really everyone who used to call themselves the Boathouse Gang. We adopted the name because we used to meet occasionally in an old boathouse at the back of Crofton Dam.

“Eileen was not the only newcomer to the village in our group. I suppose we gelled quite well because most of us had only light roots in that place, so we were always flexible and welcoming. We had to be because the area was changing so fast with all the new building. As an eleven-year-old, Eileen was quite small - she always was small-framed, I suppose - but she was very athletic and remarkably strong. We did a reclamation job on the boathouse - cleared out all the rubbish, made a makeshift roof, cleared the stream next to it. Eileen was always willing to get her hands dirty, to wade into the stream to get old pushchairs or rusty bicycle frames out of the mud. She could also climb trees. She was what we might have called a tomboy until she reached thirteen or so. She impressed us all so much that we had a nickname for her,

which was Nazrat. You will notice that's Tarzan backwards. I apologise for the way we thought in those days. We were young...

"A strong memory is how Eileen was always very conscious of her status, or what she perceived as her lack of it. Most of the group were at grammar schools. There were a few who were at the secondary modern - Julie, for instance, who was always going to graduate into the family business, so had no time for education, and Mickey Crabb, although he probably did not go to school all that often. It's worth remembering that we were from the new part of the village, where most people were owner-occupiers on the new estate. The older part of the village, with the terraced houses and the 'original' working-class population, was up the hill beyond the church. It was an area called the Lump (I am not joking) and the streets there had really imaginative names like First, Second, Third... In that area, there probably was not one family with a child in grammar school. I diverge...

"We were just another group of teenagers. The boys played football, cricket in summer. A couple of the lads went to Air Training Corps in Wakefield once a week and then would come to sit with us in uniform. The girls chatted a lot, went for walks and sometimes went into town together. We even had barbecues because our boathouse had a large stone hearth.

"But I suppose Eileen felt she did not fit in. She was something of a loner. She was not standoffish or snobbish, quite the reverse, in fact. But she was always conscious of going to Browns School, which was a private school and so her experience was always different from anyone else's. The rest of us frankly couldn't have cared less, but she did keep raising the issue.

"It was perhaps made worse for her because when we

weren't playing football or meeting in our den at the back of the dam, we would often meet in the school grounds because my parents were the caretakers. I think she rather liked the status those evenings around the school gave her, because she could become the leader. She knew her way around the building, which strangely I did not, despite living on the premises. I used to go into the school occasionally to find my parents, but generally I only went inside when Eileen led the way. Of course, she was in there eight hours a day, every day. She would invariably make a beeline for the art room, where her work was always on display. She wanted to show us everything she did.

"Her work was both on the wall and off the wall at the same time. It seemed that soon after joining the school, she formed a close bond with Miss Wallace, who was the art teacher. There was only the one. Miss Wallace clearly thought Eileen was exceptional. A couple of years later we talked with her about Eileen's work and she used words like 'vision', 'perception', 'insight', 'expression', none of which meant a thing to a science student like me. I remember that it was Miss Wallace who made the impression on me. I was about fifteen. Miss Wallace was an absolute 'stunner', as we used to say. Such a shame...

"Eileen made collages out of bits of junk. She would stick orange peel on a card and call it a painting. She would repaint a rusty pushchair and it would be sculpture. She would empty a waste bin, rearrange the contents and call it collage. Often people doing things like that offer reams of explanation or justification, but Eileen never did. She just did it - lots and lots of it. She hardly even wanted to talk about her work until later on, when she wanted to talk about nothing else. We would have been mid-teens when we became closer. We talked a lot about what she was doing and I thought I might

find out more about what motivated her, but I didn't. It was if she was merely trying to leave her mark on things.

"Before we knew it, we were teenagers and our lives seemed to change. Living through it myself, it all seemed gradual and slow. When I saw things happen to my own children, I was surprised at the speed things happened.

"And so the group also changed. Julie was the first to get herself a steady boyfriend, so she disappeared from the scene for a while, until everything fell apart a few months later and she came back into the fold. She was paired up again a few weeks later and declared she was getting married. She was just over sixteen.

"I have to admit here that by the time I was fourteen, I was utterly besotted with Eileen. Obviously, she had changed by then. The hard edges that earned her the nickname Nazrat were still there, but they surfaced less often. She had her hair cut in a mod style and parted it at the side like Twiggy. She was still small, but well-proportioned in all the right places. She suddenly became very feminine and I was smitten.

"I can see now that puberty forced our group apart. Until then, we were always willing to operate as a group, to cooperate in the best sense of that word. But a promise of maturity encouraged us to compete, as if suddenly the selfish logic of our genes imposed its own rules. For the first time in our lives, perhaps, we were simultaneously embarrassed, self-conscious and yet self-promoting. And so, some of us paired off and, usually for no more than a week or two, we did our own separate - or joint - things. We were awash with gossip, wallowing in whispered 'He's going out with her' or 'She's thinking of going steady with him' or just as often 'They've finished'. Emotionally we were on a roller coaster called adolescence. Looking back, it was all completely innocent for the most part, until we reached fifteen or sixteen,

and then it was anything but. One of the twins got pregnant and disappeared for a week or two. A couple from the group came off a motorbike, with the girl quite badly injured.

“And some of the relationships lasted longer than others, but none longer than ours, myself and Eileen. We were going out, which actually meant staying in, for over two years. She got to know my parents very well and likewise for me with Tom and Marion. I went to football matches with Tom and I often went there for Sunday lunch, which was something of a ritual in their house, always with homemade Yorkshire puddings and a joint. That was a piece of meat, by the way! We had not yet reached that stage!

“It was assumed by both sets of parents that we would stay together, but then we passed the official school leaving age, the ripe old age of fifteen, and decisions loomed. We stayed on at school, but it would be our chosen paths, or more accurately their different characters, that would eventually force us apart.

“I had already started A-levels and I had chosen my subjects to enable me to get into medical school. I suppose you could have called me focused. Academically, however, Eileen was nowhere. She wasn’t stupid. And she certainly wasn’t slow. She could apply herself when she wanted, but she seemed unwilling to engage with things on other people’s terms. She wanted everything her way and on her own terms. That makes her sound selfish, but she wasn’t - unfocused would be more accurate. I think she had poor advice. She always was going to do art, but nobody had bothered to convince her that art college had entrance requirements just like other colleges, that to get a grant to do higher education at that time meant securing a place on a recognised course leading to a formal qualification. By the time she realised she would need O-levels at the least, it was

too late. She researched the options only after she reached fifteen and by then the only route open to her was via the technical college.

“The college was in Wakefield, so for the first time in her life, Eileen actually had to get out of bed at a fixed time each day and travel some distance. In Agbrigg, before they moved to Crofton, she attended a primary school that was just a couple of streets from their house and of course in Crofton she lived barely five minutes from Browns. When she started at the tech, she had to be up earlier in the mornings, walk to the bus stop and do the same in reverse in the evenings. In town, the college itself was quite a walk from the bus station. It was all quite a shock to her system. After her first week, she was so tired she could barely stay awake beyond eight o’clock.

“Now I am not blaming the college for the changes in Eileen. Neither am I blaming directly her fellow students, not even that particular group of five or six that rebelled. But still I believe that all involved should share the blame for what happened, myself included. The course was lax and unstructured. It was poorly taught and hardly supervised at all. The students came and went as they pleased. They would start a session of life drawing timetabled for nine sometime before ten and before eleven they were all in the coffee bar, which they did not leave until it was time for lunch. The contrast with my fully-timetabled week to get through four A-levels could not have been starker. I remember trying to persuade her to leave after she had been there a term, because I could see changes for the worse in her work. I can remember being called a boring, predictable scientist as a result. After two years of being close, words like that lodge quite firmly in the memory, so you may quote them, if you wish.



“Eileen began to stay late at college. Of course, she wasn’t actually at college. She said she was finishing work, but I soon realised it was nothing of the sort. She was with a group of students who liked to hang around the town centre. They congregated in a couple of coffee bars in the street behind the Strafford Arms and then later they used to go to a pub ‘early doors’. Especially if the weather was bad, the temptation to sit longer somewhere warm was significant.

“Two things happened that forced us apart. Firstly, I knew she had started a relationship with one of the students in that social group. I knew she was sleeping with him. She was seventeen by then and there was a marked change in the way she responded to me. I can remember her talking of someone called Frank. Now I am not usually a competitive type, but I knew immediately that I was being replaced in her life, and I got quite depressed. It felt like she had made a decision about my future and was implementing it without actually telling me anything. She was strewing clues along a psychological path, like a trail in a paperchase, and it was up to me to pick up the messages and understand them.

“And the second problem was the drugs. She started to smoke dope. She even asked me for money on a couple of occasions and I gave it, until one day I saw her by chance on her way home from college. She was sitting in the bus shelter at the top of Cock Lane, which was the place where you would wait if you were going into town, which of course at that time she wasn’t. I had just come from school - late as it happens after an exam, getting off my bus on the other side of the road, and I asked her why she was waiting for a bus into town. I thought we would be seeing one another that evening. She said something about having to wait a while before she went home. I could smell the dope. I helped her up, but she could barely stand because she was drunk as well.

She got angry and told me to leave her alone. I did.

“We formally split about a week later. I was very sad. Let’s be clear, I was devastated. My mother was ready to go to the McHugh’s. She was angry, thinking it would affect my studies, but I persuaded her not to go. Eileen’s parents were never told the truth about what she was doing. With the benefit of this hindsight, it probably would have been better if my mother had gone that day to see Marion and Tom. It would have alerted them while there was still time to influence Eileen.

“I can honestly say that - at the time - I loved Eileen. While she was fresh, innocent, young and interested, she was magical. But she became bound up with herself, a complete introvert that shouted ‘stay away’ via her behaviour. It has never failed to interest me why so many so-called extroverts raise an outward projection of their personality as a barrier that then protects their desire to be apart. And that is precisely what Eileen was doing. I felt that I could not get near her, and I think her parents were having the same problem. She began to inhabit a world created by those who influenced her, and it led to nothing. She finished at the tech. There was never really any question that she would graduate from the course with her certificate, because there really wasn’t a course to follow. It was a complete rubber-stamping exercise, where you knew you would be passed on to the next stage. But then, I was just a scientist with a closed mind, I suppose...

“Her group of so-called friends from the technical college broke up when they went their different ways and I think they were never in contact again. Eileen was determined to go to college in London, for some reason. It seems that her Frank was only interested in selling her dope, so he simply disappeared when the customer moved her business. I went

to university in Leeds, which meant I could continue to live at home and save on rent, so our lives diverged.

“Despite being ditched by her, I still have very fond memories of those couple of years we were together. I had my first sexual experience with her, and it was, or so she said, her first time as well. There were many times when we were very happy indeed that her parents were never back home before six!

“So that day we met on Cock Lane, the day she had just had her argument with her parents, was another two years on from our parting. We had probably met only once or twice in the meantime, and never alone. Our split was profound. At least it was for Eileen. And, after that day, I had no further contact with her of any kind. I have often wondered what happened to her, but never seriously enough to have tried to look her up. I assume you know where she is and are in contact with her. The tone of your message, however, implies that you have no contact with Eileen herself, which suggests she may not still be with us. Could you please share anything you know with me, if it’s all right with her, of course? I do hope things worked out well for her, but I have to admit a certain pessimism.”

## Imagine no more LSD

This work was the first Eileen did during her second year at college. It was topical, even political, in a way her previous work had not been. Hindsight might suggest prescience, but then that is the presumption of hindsight. Both Charlotte and Linda remember discussing the work, but neither had much to say about it. They both recall how Eileen had come back from her summer break in Yorkshire bristling with ideas, all of which she wanted to discuss, rather than do. It seems that *Imagine no more LSD* did in fact get made, but it went on display in Eileen's space at college for only a few days before she destroyed it. Eileen claimed, they both recall, that it had always been her intention to destroy the work, though neither of her flatmates remember that being part of the concept. She immediately imagined retitling the work *Imagine no more LSD – No more*, but that aspect of the work exists only in anecdotal, apocryphal memories and is not mentioned in the artist's own notes. Those notes, however, are pretty scant so we cannot be sure on this matter. This is what Eileen wrote:

*Imagine there's no money  
Makes me wanna cry  
No furs for Yoko  
Nothing more to buy  
Imagine bombed out countries  
This year we've had a few  
Napalm to kill and die from  
Laos flat, Cambodia too  
Imagine Indo-China living life in peace, you  
You may say I'm a wanker  
But I'm not the only one*

*Nixon too can come and join us  
And the world will be o'er run  
Imagine no possessions  
Because we're all so poor  
No need for pop or popcorn  
A brotherhood of breath  
Imagine all the people, penniless and ill, you  
You may say I'm a wanker  
But I'm not the only one  
As long as I keep my Roller  
My world has space for one*

Both Linda and Charlotte gave descriptions, both short, which differed only in detail. The sculpture comprised a cardboard cutout of John Lennon, hanging horizontal, suspended by cords around the neck and feet, but tilted towards an onlooker, who had to stand on just one side of the work. This was unusual in Eileen's work, since most of her work thus far had assumed that viewpoints would not be fixed. Above the image was to hang an Airfix model of a B52 bomber, painted in psychedelic livery, but with clear USAF markings. On strings secured to the aircraft model at one end and the cardboard cutout at the other, were to hang various coins and banknotes from the currency the United Kingdom had just replaced with its new decimal version. The denominations involved were the ten-shilling note, the half crown, the florin, the shilling, the sixpence, the threepenny bit, the penny, the halfpenny and the farthing. Of course, the old money used to be called LSD, an acronym based on the names of the denominations, pounds, shillings and pence, but based on their Latin names, for some reason. Of course, the pun was deliberate. The fact that Eileen never wrote a reference to it does not suggest that her intention was

anything other than explicit.

Eileen dropped the idea of the farthings quite soon when she found them hard to source. She also dropped the inclusion of the ten-shilling notes, because she could not afford to include them.

“Ten bob was a lot of money then,” Charlotte told me. “We were only paying a fiver a week each for the flat in Muswell Hill. So a few ten bob notes were a week’s rent. She was on the way to becoming a Damien Hirst before he was born, I suppose. Actually, he would have been seven at the time. I wonder what we would think of that skull if it had old pennies attached, rather than diamonds? An interesting question... I wonder what Fabergé would have done with a real egg?”

*Imagine no more LSD – No more*, as I prefer to call it, was a work of its time. It has not existed since early October 1972 and will be one of the first remaking projects to be attempted when the Eileen McHugh Foundation is inaugurated.

## Swiss Women Vote!

This was a piece from Eileen's first year, imagined but never completed during the second term, probably during March 1971. In fact, suffrage in Switzerland to include women had only just become law the previous month, so this particular work is perhaps the first work by Eileen that could be described as deliberately topical.

Eileen left notes and sketches for the work. Unusually, she left quite a collection of notes, but actually no evidence that the work was ever started, though we have a recollection from Linda that it was, at least over a weekend. It is unclear whether any part of the work or even the ideas themselves were ever submitted to her tutor for assessment, though I suspect not.

Linda explained, "It was hard to know where to start. We sat and listened, convinced she was just having a laugh, but we soon realised she was taking herself quite seriously. I suppose it could have been quite funny, had it ever been made. But what gallery is going to exhibit something like that? I mean, in its original conception, it was potentially lethal, because she had the idea of using a real crossbow! We soon persuaded her to change it to a toy, shooting arrows with rubber stickers, but her original idea was that it should be dangerous. I mean..."

"From the perspective of thirty years, I think Eileen could have been described as a cartoonist in three dimensions. *Swiss Women Vote!* was about as strange an idea as I have ever come across. It started in the February, when we were listening to the news on the radio after college, while we were together in the kitchen preparing our meal. I do remember it exactly, because it's not every day you hear a story like that. All three of us listened intently, because it

came as such a surprise. Charlotte had even been there on holiday and still had no idea.

“None of us knew that Swiss women had never - never! - had the vote. And that was nineteen seventy-one, for God’s sake! The news story described how there had been a debate as to whether the law should be changed. We were flabbergasted! We had a laugh trying to imagine exactly what it was they had debated! A couple of days later, Eileen already had her sketches for the work.

“She was going to sculpt a Swiss man. You would know he was Swiss because she had him in lederhosen, complete with braces with a breast-band, shorts, woolly socks, knobbly knees, boots, the lot. None of your stereotypes there! But she was going to make him out of cheese. Sculpted cheese, for God’s sake! I’m serious! He would be sitting in a chair, strapped to it like it was an electric chair, and out of the fly of his shorts would emerge a giant alpenhorn, which would protrude a good ten feet along a mat made of artificial grass. And the whole thing would be painted. I have no idea - and I am sure Eileen had no idea herself - what kind of paint she would use to cover real cheese.

“On his head there was to be a felt hat with a feather, and on top of that she planned to balance an apple with a significant bite already missing. If she had completed the work and patented the image, she would be very rich by now.

“At the end of the grass mat she planned to place her crossbow, with a supply of arrows in an embroidered quiver that was to hang from the stand.

“Next to the crossbow was to be a controller housed in a little booth with a curtain drawn back so you could see inside. Across the top was the instruction, *Swiss Women Vote!* and inside there was a lever on a ratchet that would move the crossbow a little at a time with the options, *Left, Right, Up,*



*Down* - it takes true imagination! One vote, one little movement was the idea. Every hundred votes or so, a button labelled *Fire* was to light up and the next lucky viewer could dispatch the arrow in whatever direction the previous people had elected.

“Eileen was completely serious. She went to Sainsbury’s and spent a fortune on cheese, Emmental, obviously, because it was the only Swiss cheese available in Britain at the time. She stuck the pieces together until she had a block from which she could usefully sculpt a head, and she did just that. It looked really impressive, a realistic Swiss gentleman, sculpted in cheese, full of holes. You don’t easily forget an image like that! She painted it as well using acrylic. Surreal was not the word. I am not sure what the right word might have been, but I do remember being suddenly convinced that the finished work would be thoroughly impressive. But it wouldn’t go in the fridge because it was too big. We had to put it outside the kitchen on the fire escape.

“It stayed there for the weekend, was attacked by something that ate significant parts and the rest went mouldy. And that’s as far as it got, because she couldn’t afford any more cheese.”

Charlotte, as ever, was reluctant to discuss any of Eileen’s work. I realised early on in the remaking of this life that there existed memories associated with some of these pieces, memories that Charlotte would rather not recall. Eventually, I relied heavily on Charlotte’s recollections, but she was always more willing to discuss the events of their shared life, rather than her reactions to them. Eileen’s own sketchbooks did contain some notes on the work, but they are particularly scant. “A Swiss man full of holes, with all the holes full of shit,” she wrote.

## Jazz

*I assemble bits. Bits and pieces. It's what I do. Bits and pieces. Because when we step back and look at life, it's what we live. Bits. Pieces. Jumble. So let's call it life, my work.*

*It was after a night with Mike Osborne that I got the idea. His voice is unique. He makes music of himself. It's Ornette Coleman. It's John Coltrane. It's Judy Garland. But it's him. Harry Miller, bass. Louis Moholo, drums. They are along for the ride but are as often in the driving seat. And the alto sax, the supreme, silly, jagged, lyrical, tender, wandering, meandering, then stuck in a rut, going wild, screaming, breaking. A beauty of random lines. And then all three go for it, the bass line pulping the surface of silence, lashing the noise. Somewhere Over The Rainbow strikes up from nothing. A blast of colour for no reason other than it surrounds you. It jabs through the anarchy and shouts "Listen!" It's a hopeless, lone cry. Moholo is thumping the tom-toms so hard his groundsheet is migrating across the floor. Thank God for earplugs. Osborne again. Does this man ever breathe? He's gone up and down the alto six times and then finished with a top F, sustained, held like a dagger, stabbed. And then he breaks into "If I fall in love, it will be forever".*

*There is no reason. No structure. Logic is anywhere, but not here. There is surely rehearsal, but nothing is ever repeated. Osborne does not rehearse his solos. He goes where the moment takes him. It's jazz like life, controlled by no-one, played by anyone in particular.*

*And then they finished with that stupidly wonderful riff by Chris McGregor, that kwela signature with its hackneyed little phrase and clenched trills. It's Jackson Pollock in sound and finishes by conjuring an empty Coke can out of a*

*dustbin. Perfect. An antidote.*

*North London Poly's functional space spews us out. We wander back towards Holloway Road, but the pub across the road looks rough. We turn right. There's a public toilet in the wall under the bridge and there's no light inside. Random noises, groans and grunts spill out onto the street along with the smell of piss as we pass. Turn right again along Jackson to cross Dunford and Annette to get us back to Hornsey Road. We walk up towards Tollington Road. We can carry on to Finsbury Park and get the W7 home. But there's a pub. We decide on a drink. Lager and lime and bitter with lime. "You put lime in my bitter?" asks the barman. They always do. "That's what I fucking asked for." He doesn't hear what I say because of the noise.*

*There's a ceilidh band. Pubs are for grown-ups like us. The girl doing the ridiculous dancing is probably about twelve. She seems to have rubber legs and a wooden body. And here we are ten minutes off closing time. Disgusting. Then there's a great cheer and bows, followed by the collection. "Up the IRA" it says handwritten on a card sellotaped to the outside of a baked bean tin that still has half its label. It's a British imitation brand, not the one of fifty-seven real Wigan-made American thing. The bell rings for last orders and we have another round before the final peal ends the night. Apart from the drinking up time, and that's needed here because there are blokes at the bar with full pints of Guinness waiting for the lock-in.*

Jazz was without doubt Eileen McHugh's masterpiece. It was the major work featured in her first-year final exhibition. We are lucky to have retained her studies courtesy of the sketchbooks in Marion's personal effects so we can describe it in some detail.

She began work on the project at the start of the third term

of her first year and devoted about eight weeks to it. Now, it's true that she never kept a diary, but the closest she came to doing so was in those weeks when she planned and prepared Jazz. At the start of their course, these Fine Art students had been requested, even required to keep notes and sketches in order to justify everything they produced. Ideas may come from anywhere, the tutors had stressed, but their realisation, their expression, their form must be described, justified, argued, illustrated. And this process should be both evident and demonstrable in the sketchbooks and notebooks each student was duty-bound to maintain. For Jazz, Eileen did follow the regime and she produced work which her tutor of the time praised effusively. Eileen has recorded that the tutor, herself, was a part of the work's inspiration. "Alice looks like a walking junk heap," she wrote in a letter to Marion in March 1971, preserved in the mother's box. "She's like a living Jazz riff."

Alice Childe was, at face value, one of the more conventional of Eileen's teachers. Had she stayed on in the college into Eileen's second year, things may just have worked out differently, but that we will never know. Alice took early retirement at the end of that college year and left a profession to which she had devoted over thirty years of her life. Eileen was thus part of Alice Childe's swansong, her last student group. That she had been a dedicated teacher over the years can be in no doubt. That she was simultaneously anathema to most of her younger colleagues is perhaps even more obvious.

She was in her late fifties by then and was dead some years before the end of the decade, her cancerous lungs testimony to the sixty fags she had smoked each day since her teens. Rothmans, always Rothmans in later years, but it had been Kingsway before that, with occasional and periodic

forays towards Kensitas, though she did start, like most kids, on Woodbines and Weights.

Alice Childe - her married name after being a Smith in her youth - was divorced in the mid-fifties, the decade rather than her age. She was about to turn forty when it became inevitable. She was always unwilling to assign blame, noting regularly whenever the subject of relationships was raised, that she and he had started different and then simply drifted apart. By the end, the gulf between them was such that a formal separation was no more than an admission of a reality that included them by default.

She had met her husband in the early thirties when they were both art students. They both became teachers, but together and independently they retained a conviction that it would be a temporary choice, an option to provide a living while one's true vocation was pursued, a daily grind that was dictated to them until their individual voices emerged. As the years passed, neither wife nor husband ever did realise the dream of achieving the status of professional artist. Though they both produced large volumes of work and did indeed achieve their part goals of mounting exhibitions, sales were at best weak and more usually non-existent. These were war years followed by austerity and rationing, of course, so there was an explanation available.

Ralph was a painter and Alice a sculptor. The family home in Stoke Newington, a cheap London location when they bought, off transport routes and retaining, at least as far as the residents believed, a sense of the village, had enough space to accommodate hers and his studios on a top floor that was only visited for purposes of self-expression. Ralph and Alice, along with their only child, Harold - yes, that is what they called him - occupied the other three floors - yes, three, since the house was one of those common London types from

the nineteenth century that had a lower ground floor, with a separate entrance down a half flight to the right of the porticoed entrance. It was a potentially grand house and may even have been a wealthy abode eighty years earlier, when it was built, but it was shabby by the time the Childes assembled a giant mortgage for that time to enable their purchase. There had been a legacy, also, from Ralph's side. The house was even shabbier when it eventually sold for a no more than modest price at the end of the seventies. The child, Harold, had moved out in the early fifties when he went to university - Oxford, Keble, Physics - and Ralph left into an estranged divorced exile in a flat in Wood Green just two years later. So Alice had the place to herself for over a decade before she became tutor to Eileen McHugh.

We would know nothing of her if it had not been for the vivid and affectionate recollections of her son, Harold Childe, whom I located and contacted via an online professional network. The site revealed him also teaching, but in a university in the north of England. I have to thank him for answering my emails in detail both promptly and conscientiously. His obvious delight in recalling a mother dead for almost forty years was both refreshing and humbling. He also sent a few photos of Alice taken around the time she taught Eileen McHugh. Given she left teaching that year, they are predominantly posed group affairs, but retain a certain feeling of the informality to which the age was trying to aspire. "That my mother had a reputation is beyond doubt," was how Harold began his recollections.

Alice Childe was a small, compact woman. The pictures show her reaching only shoulder height to the average student. She invariably is shown in a dark two-piece suit with fitted skirt and jacket over a white blouse. The neat dress, Harold confirmed, was consistent with his memories. Alice

Childe was a creature of small habit. The shoes will remain undescribed since these photographers generally did not like to include feet. One particular photo, undated and without comment, I can confirm is of that final student group, and Eileen McHugh herself is there, a face from row two poking over the shoulder of others who were clearly more intent on foreground presence than she.

Alice had dark hair, permed, though not the frizz of the time, but set like mid-sixties suburbia, more Toni from a bottle than Woodstock or Afro. A large handbag is prominent throughout, black in these monochromes, but in fact mock crocodile, twin-pearl clasped, clearly stuffed and swinging on a rustic chain from the left forearm, held bent to horizontal across her midriff. And there are glasses, dark-framed, vaguely winged, clearly sometimes worn, otherwise suspended on a cord round her neck, a black strand hanging in noticeable loops on either side of her precisely featured face, lips pursed in a grudging smile. In every shot, however, it is the hands and forearms that are most memorable. She seems to have a ring on every finger and both thumbs, plus several bangles and bracelets on each arm. There are brooches on the jacket as well and dangling earrings, but no necklace. The bag exudes the air of an oft-used purse, often opened, equally often closed with a click one could imagine as determined. One can only imagine what things one might find inside. If the college archives still existed, one might surely expect to find one such photograph for each year of Alice's service, with each batch of students heading into the past more resembling this teacher of sculpture who probably never changed. It was her only job. All those years in the same environment, teaching the same course in the same way. The students' faces clearly changed, but one feels that Alice Childe did not. But then there appeared Eileen

McHugh and one feels that something did change.

“Your student described my mother as a walking trash heap. I think that was rather exaggerated. The trash heap was at home! It is true, however, that she wore a lot of what we now call accessories and carried a potpourri around in that handbag. She would regularly wear twenty rings and ten bracelets, changing the assembly every day, spending absolutely ages each morning selecting and juxtaposing in front of a dressing mirror to create her special collection for the world to see. She had drawers, never mind boxes full of the stuff, and was forever on the lookout for something new. She called them her ‘bits and pieces’ - that really is what she used to call them, indicating, from your message, why there may have developed a special bond between my mother and the particular student you describe - and she bought nearly everything secondhand. Most of the new things came as presents from me or dad. She used to rummage through junk shops and nearly always found something to buy. And in those days, there weren’t strings of charity shops on every high street. The places were fewer in number, often concentrated in certain areas and more like junk shops than smelling of secondhand clothes and books. There were secondhand furniture shops, however, because so many people in London in those days were in flat shares or unfurnished bedsits. It is certainly possible that my mother went ‘bits and pieces’ hunting with the student you are researching.

“I was always in contact with my mother, and my father for that matter, but visited neither of them regularly. We were always on good terms, as were the two of them. The three of us were really quite different, incompatibles brought together by accidents of romance and biology. Now, from the detachment of decades, it’s even amusing to recall the



lack of obvious tensions between us alongside the utter communication failure we shared.

“Both my parents were artists - teachers really, at least from eight in the morning until seven in the evening - but they claimed to be artists the rest of the time. Dad was a painter and mum did sculpture, or ‘bits and pieces’, as dad called them. They were fiercely competitive and appeared to have almost no time for each other’s work, about which there seemed to exist a permanent argument. When I was around, my parents transformed into artists as they went upstairs, only to re-emerge as parents when they came down. As parents, they cooperated without conflict to provide my daily support, three meals, a place to live, material privilege, copious stimulus, homework help and all the attention I demanded. They gave their time to me without question, though perhaps I was quite a self-contained little boy. But when it came to their artistic work, they argued rather than talked. Mum had no time for flat surfaces and dad described mum’s studio as a junk shop. They used to accuse one another of getting in the way, of diverting attention from essential work. We really were three very different people. I was always precise, exact. I planned everything I did. I even used to arrange my food on a plate into neat, separate entities before I would eat it. I never wanted things covered in sauces or gravy. I wanted to see things as discrete entities. And as I grew older, I remember distinctly telling the two of them how they could do things better, more efficiently, more effectively. I must have been insufferable.

“My big and oft-revisited issue with my mother was her smoking. Dad smoked as well, but my mother’s habit was constant. I was in my teens when I started calling them cancer sticks. I was a studious child and I had already read articles linking smoking with the disease, though at the time

the causation was far from accepted. I suppose I was trying to protect her. But at the time my parents probably thought it was just another example of my trying to prove how intellectually superior I considered myself to be. She would often get short-tempered with me and tell me to shut up. And then, always after another fag, she would come back and say sorry, at which point the process would start over again. Families can be strange places. We carried on like that until I went to college. I met my wife there and we married as soon as we graduated. We saw my parents occasionally, but after I left home it was usually by telephone that we communicated. I tended to gravitate much more towards my wife's family, which was much more conventional than my own. And when my parents split up, I immediately began to lose contact with my father, who seemed to withdraw into his own world, self-sufficient and dedicated to his painting. He did survive my mother by a couple of decades, but then he did smoke a lot less than her. I was right all along.

“Yes, she used to wear bangles and bracelets. There was always that particular charm bracelet. It had been my grandmother's. She always wore it, while the rest was pretty variable, as far as I can remember. It's not the sort of thing an academic young boy takes time to notice. But I do remember the early morning routine of getting ready to go out each day. She would be puffing away in front of her mirror for half an hour, self-reconstructing, adding a piece, taking it off, holding her arm out so she could assess the effect. I think she never slept well and was always up and about by six, but ready for work only by half past eight, when she would go out for the bus. I think she did not feel dressed without the charm bracelet, and perhaps, looking back, it was important to her that she wanted to hide it amongst the other things. I did try to ask whether the things that hung from it

had any meaning. Little pewter animals, a cross or two, she was not a believer, a couple of miniature cottages in painted ceramic, the kind you buy in souvenir shops at the seaside, various single letters in both upper and lower case in a variety of metals and finishes - these were just some of the things I remember. She always said that none of the things had any significance or meaning. I did not believe her then and still don't. It was always too important for her.

"Of equal status but not importance was that enormous handbag, stuffed with lord knows what. But always in there was her ashtray. That is one thing she would not be without. It was like a miniature jewel box, a copy, I think, of a Louis Quinze commode. It had a good strong clasp and would not open by accident, even if shaken around inside her bag. This was her 'in transit ashtray'. I'm sure she meant 'in transit' in the sense of between ashtrays. She would never dash a cigarette onto the floor, or even a pavement for that matter. She would never stub one out against something else, but she would use the inside of that box. She travelled everywhere by bus, incidentally, never drove a car in her life. She would also rarely use the tube, only buses, because she could bound up the stairs, light up, unclasp her miniature commode and puff away all the considerable time she spent travelling. The jams in London in those days could be interminable. She did read, though, but almost invariably about art and sculpture. I don't ever remember seeing a novel in her hands. She was genuinely serious about what she did, but always managed to convey an air of frivolity, of dismissing her own vision as worthless, which she herself certainly did not believe. In fact, I would say she had a rather high opinion of herself.

"You suggest she may have developed a special bond with a student called Eileen McHugh in that last year before she retired. I think it's possible, though she never mentioned the

name, as far as I can remember. She rarely referred to any student by name away from college. But from what you have described, this desire to assemble junk into things that have meaning would certainly have appealed to my mother. One source of argument in our house was her regularly toting things up the stairs to her studio, often things she had picked off skips or found in the gutter.

“On the other hand, my dad was the kind of painter who wanted each colour clearly separated on his palette. He was fastidiously neat and clean, at least in his work, and was never the type who would squeeze out a whole tube of paint just to dab it with his brush. In his studio, he wanted everything exact. His art, also, was the diametric opposite of my mother’s. He used to paint animals, especially pets, in minute detail, always working from photographs. He took commissions for pet portraits and did get quite a lot of work, but he never charged a fee that reflected the hours he worked. But in life he was a slob.

“My mother could not have been more different, like a negative image of him. She dressed neatly, fastidiously, and was always polite, clean, neat and tidy in everything she did. But her work was often mucky, cut up, glued together, plastered with wet clay, broken, dirty, messy. She sometimes left things temporarily in the kitchen and he would go mad, but he would never lift a finger to clear things away. It’s distinctly possible this student’s ideas struck a chord with her.

“But it’s also possible that she was being inexcusably cynical. By the time she had reached the final year in her job, she had basically given up. She was ‘fed up to the back teeth,’ she would tell me over the phone and ‘couldn’t wait to get out.’ She was being marginalised by the younger staff. They criticised everything she did and dismissed her ideas to

the extent she had stopped sharing them.”

Harold Childe suggested that his mother’s treatment of Eileen’s Jazz might just have been manipulative, her warped way of highlighting what she saw as the pretentiousness of her younger colleagues. I stress here that Harold never saw the work, probably never discussed it or anything related to the assessment of students with his mother and certainly never met Eileen McHugh. The scenario he describes, however, a professionally disgruntled employee, a long-standing teacher resentful of the upstarts whom she considered worthless, a worn out educator rushing towards an early retirement, is unfortunately consistent with the possibility that Alice used Eileen’s experimental work as a way of making her own statement. I admit it’s a thought I had not entertained until my contact with Harold. All I had was the end of term feedback, preserved in Marion’s box, that said, after “End of year assessment – Sculpture”, *Eileen’s work has surpassed even her own ambitions. Jazz is an expressive work conceived and executed by a perspicacious, conscientious and talented artist. May there be more of the same. Result - Distinction, Alice Childe.* The accompanying signature was a bare mark on the right of the page.

There exist no records of Eileen’s relationship with Alice. Neither Charlotte nor Linda recall anything memorable. Charlotte confirms they did share coffees in the college bar occasionally and that, perhaps several times, Eileen accompanied Alice on an afternoon of rummaging through the secondhand shops in Crouch End. Linda also recalls that Alice was always generous with her cigarettes, often offering them round a whole group of students sharing a coffee break, but according to Harold Childe that would have constituted quite normal behaviour, since she never liked to smoke alone

and always carried a couple of new packs of Rothmans in her bag. Harold, indicating he has understandably always preferred to be called Harry, added that he had nothing more of substance to add, nothing that might relate to Eileen, at any rate.

Eileen's notes for Alice included this reflection on her brief.

"I just want to put two gigs together in my mind. It will help me create a sense of what Jazz needs to express. The first was at the Albion in Holland Park. It's quite an arty place run by the Jazz Centre Society, sponsored by the Institute of Contemporary Arts, and happens in the lower ground front room of an immense house with white pillars framing a massive black door on the side of Holland Park in Kensington. Well, it's more like Notting Hill really, but I bet the people who live upstairs call it Kensington. But we go in via the steps to the left. There's a through room, front to back of the house, which from outside looks a lot bigger than it is. There's a grand piano in the bay and rows of chairs running back to the French windows that let out into the back garden, which is the size of a postage stamp. My parents in Crofton have more outside space than this mansion. I worked out that ten of these houses along this long, curved row are worth about the same as all the property owned by the ten thousand people who now live in Crofton.

"Actually, it's a bit of a dump. You go into a hall and pay your entry ticket. The gig happens on the right. But, straight on, there's a small room, probably the kitchen for the lower ground floor, created when the place was converted into flats, a room stuck on the back of the terrace's toast rack prongs. They have a keg of Worthington E set up there with a gas bottle and a tap, so we can get a pint of draught. The beer is the same price as in student bars. We always arrive

early, buy a half and go straight into the main room so we can get the front middle seats. It's a Friday night venue, which is sometimes a problem because Fridays is also Mike Osborne and Friends in Peanuts near Liverpool Street. But the reason we usually go to the Albion, even though it's further, is the experiment. The particular Friday I want to capture in three dimensions featured a trio, piano, bass and alto, McGregor, Miller and Pukwana.

"Chris McGregor is a pianist. He plays the piano. Pianists do. But Chris McGregor playing the piano can sound more like percussion, so you might not even need a drummer. Like that night. There was no Louis Moholo whirring. Chris McGregor says his piano is his drum. Play piano, hear drum. He uses his hands, of course, but not just the fingers. The palms slap down, crawl sideways across the keys. He uses elbows and forearms. Once I saw him sit on the keyboard during a solo. I think he might have been taking the piss that night. He's Monk. He's Taylor. Sometimes, he's Tyner. But above all else, he's himself, hard, uncompromising, funny, ironic, often so sophisticated he's minimal. He's white. He's also African.

"Harry Miller is coloured. He is not green. Neither is he purple. Certainly not puce. He's coloured because that's what the racist South Africans call him, print on his papers, stamp on his permits. He is not white, not European, but perhaps no-one else calling themselves South African is European either. They are all African. Proud of it, I think. But they are therefore not white, because they are Africans. They might be honorary whites, like the Japanese. I wonder how many people in Japan are aware of such a status. Miller's playing is forceful, but always sympathetic. He listens as well as drives. He takes up ideas and persuades others to join. He looks like the man behind the counter in

the Post Office, small, round-faced, bald-headed, often in a suit. Can this be the same man who plays the bass like his life depends on the sound?

“Dudu Pukwana is black, so we all know who he is. His country does not even regard him a true citizen. Perhaps he is seen as part of a tribe, not a nation, destined for corral into some fenced scrubland to eat stones along with the rest of his kind, despite being born and brought up in urban Port Elizabeth. He probably doesn’t merit documents. He also plays alto. He’s raucous, often outrageous, over the top, sometimes blowing through the horn, biting the reed, as well as sometimes sounding like Johnny Hodges using a chainsaw.

“This South African trio, white, coloured, black, stays free, at least musically. They start with a note or two, a rhythmic phrase repeated, one of McGregor’s township kwela riffs. The others follow and immediately McGregor breaks it up, stretches it, destroys it. Night Poem is always on offer. It can last an hour. Trills can go on quite a long time if you hold them. The alto barks like a dog, the bass squeaks through a string of harmonics. McGregor starts to manhandle his piano. And finally, that stupid little jingle to finish. It’s funny, sardonic, aggressive, mocking and laughable all at the same time. It lasts only about two minutes. We stayed for a drink afterwards and spoke to the musicians. I asked about the last piece and Chris McGregor called it Union Special after the Union of South Africa. It’s meant to be surreal, perverse, inane, laughable and strangely dangerous, because it might be catching, just like the country.

“And then to Saturday, when I heard the second gig I want to put into my Jazz. We emerged from Regent’s Park tube station to leg it into the Inner Circle, where Bedford College has its homely-feeling home. There’s a bloke with a pork-pie



hat and a waistcoat who runs a jazz club in the students' union and tonight he is offering the coup of a Brotherhood of Breath gig.

"The same three from last night are there, of course, and we exchange a nod of recognition while they are setting up. We have planted ourselves on the front row again. But the big band is something different, even though some of the material is the same. If you have sixteen or seventeen pieces, the sound and dynamics change. That goes without saying. But the other dynamics change, there are more possibilities, more combinations. Everything multiplies. We had word of a presence before the concert. Word had gone round that Surman was going to turn up, and, for once, he did. There was Osborne, Skidmore, Mongezi Feza, Beckett, Griffiths. There was Louis Moholo on drums and a cameo from Dave Holland as a second bass, fresh from his outings with Miles Davis. Quite a star...

"The band is never quite in control of where it is heading, despite the fact that they read a lot, because McGregor's arrangements are often extensively scored. It's a managed mayhem. But when they form that semicircle of horns and blow, that's when things get wild and interesting. It was their standard gig, but there was one moment of tension. Surman did come, but he spent most of his time fiddling with a synthesiser. He played one short solo on soprano and then finally took up the baritone. He was standing next to Mike Osborne when the tempo dropped, and the sound froze. Moholo was, uncharacteristically, almost silent, scraping a sizzle cymbal with the end of his stick. McGregor was doing a cross between Monk and Ellington, playing percussive riffs, but spaced out with more silence than sound. Miller was bowing harmonics again, now beyond the finger board, reaching almost as far as the bridge. It was a real lull that

lasted almost a minute. You could see the expressions on the musicians' faces. Will he, won't he? And then Surman made it clear that this was his solo. He played a long low note at the bottom of the baritone, very quietly. It was like this brotherhood was holding its collective breath. Will he, won't he? And then he was into a fast, chromatic scale, finishing right up top, loud, way up in the baritone's stratospheric harmonics. Osborne's eyes were closed. He smiled a little and muttered, "Yeah," before walking away to take a break. The rest of the horns followed. Surman then played solo for ten minutes that went at least to Belgium, where he lives, and back. And then they all came back on stage to finish with Union Special again. So, I have my elements - surprise, unpredictability, individual expression, catchy tunes, recognisable rhythms, trivial nonsense, political statement, joke. And so here is Jazz."

There followed numerous sketches, specifications, different ideas for realising these goals, plans for viewer participation. Here we must concentrate on what she actually exhibited, since the rest was process, which remained incomplete. Yes, she based her ideas on those two gigs, the Friday trio and the Saturday big band, but she also returned to her memory of the Mike Osborne trio in North London Polytechnic, or at least its aftermath.

Of course, we do not know what Jazz looked like. We have no photographs and no contemporary written descriptions, only Eileen's notes. And they are rather scant. Whatever she exhibited, the concept on which it was based went considerably further and it was a combination of space and lack of resources that limited the scale of the work.

She specifies several hundred empty baked bean tins, not all the same brand, and not necessarily the same size. Each tin was to retain its own label, but each one was also

supposed to be fitted with a sticky second label of random size, sometimes small, sometimes obscuring most of what lay below, depending on the slogan to be featured. On these labels would be written various political slogans. Up the IRA was a the starting point, but other ideas were listed, such as Free South Africa, Rebel Smith, Malcolm X For King, Support the VC, Free Love, Dope For All, while Lee Harvey Oswald for Sainthood probably would not have legibly fit on the label.

The tins, of course, were empty. Some had their open ends removed, while others had the lids bent at different angles. Each tin had a hole in its base, through which a string passed to be secured at one end by a knot inside the can.

The cans were to be left in a pile on the floor, so the effect from afar was of a heap of discarded junk, but the long strings were to be gathered together and fed through the ring of a chandelier, deliberately ornate and decorative to provide a reminder of a ruling class, which would hang above the installation. These strings would then be fanned out into a circle extending to a rail that would form the work's boundary. The strings would be tied to the rail. Eileen's idea was that viewers would select a string and pull it, thus raising the can and revealing the slogan on its label and making a noise by hitting other cans on the way up. The viewers would then retie the string so that the can remained suspended at whatever height they chose. Equally, a different viewer could decide to change a can's height or return it to the pile. She also wanted to provide felt-tip pens so people could write their own slogans onto any blank labels that were revealed, if they could reach the can, of course. Thus, she had created a dump of consumer trash that made political statements, a work that could be constantly and randomly changed by its viewers, but whose underlying concept remained intact.

Harold Childe, at the end of his generous reply to my questions relating to his mother's work in the college, notes that there was no photograph of Alice's formal send-off into retirement at the end of that academic year. Charlie Mankiewicz, Eileen's tutor in that fateful second year, however, did refer to there having been a gathering to say goodbye to her, but that it had been a low-key affair, attended by a handful of college staff, mainly administrative. There had been a couple of speeches, apparently, but he could offer no more than that since he did not attend.

## Charlotte

Eileen's first visit to Pinner was much planned. Charlotte told her repeatedly not to worry, that her parents were easy-going, liberated, tolerant, progressive, broad-minded, relaxed and all the other things that were ideologically associated with the aspirational new norms of the previous decade. And, for Pinner, they were even quite politically left wing, having voted Liberal at least once. "Mummy can be a little tense. It depends..." was a phrase Charlotte left hanging as she and Eileen boarded the Metropolitan Line train at Baker Street. It was a Saturday in May, fine, dry and sunny, one of those London spring days when the city seems to buzz with its own homemade celebration of life.

Their intention was to stay overnight, that is, if things went smoothly. And, if things turned rocky, there was always a late train and the night bus.

Charlotte had already mentioned to her parents that she and Eileen were in a relationship, that wonderful generality which, in the right context, means something quite specific. After an initial pause at the other end of the phone call, her father had said, "I see" and then paused again. It was interesting that Charlotte had chosen to break the news to her father rather than her mother. There was a hint of a mouthpiece being covered for a moment and then the voice returning, bright and forthright. "Look, come up for an overnigher next Saturday. We would really like to meet Eileen." Many years later, when I spoke to Charlotte, she recalled that day.

*We'd set off early that morning. It was a Saturday, one of those days when one felt lucky to live in London. The place felt so alive, vibrant, but also relaxed and laid back at the same time. I don't know if it was our state of mind, but I*

*remember we were both very giggly. Both of us were nervous, I think, though we had no way of talking about it, since Eileen really knew nothing of my parents because she had yet to meet them. This would also be the first time we had gone public about our relationship. Of course, Linda and Alan and students at college knew, but they didn't count. But to go as a couple to spend a night in my parents' house was something different, potentially momentous. The relationship, itself, would be different once it was public property. We knew it was significant, but we could neither admit it nor discuss it. It was as if we were prepared to let things happen, to place the knowledge in some imagined public domain to see what the reaction might be. The world would make of it what it wished, and we would at worst passively receive the result. We dealt only with the details. What was my dad like? What was mummy like and how might she react? Is the house big enough for us not to feel watched? Eileen had been full of questions all week. I tried my best to answer them, but in reality, I could barely guess, because this territory was unknown. I knew my parents well enough to know I could not really be certain how they would react. There is often a distance between the theory of stated positions and the reality of reaction. Eileen kept asking the same things and by the Thursday of that week I was getting pissed off. "Wait and see" is what I remember saying over and over again. "It will be all right" usually followed. "Don't worry" and other platitudes were also said, but in truth they were all euphemisms for "I don't know."*

*Anyway, we packed our bags on the Friday night, just a change of underwear, really, and a few things for sketching. We were doing an assignment that needed foliage, and we planned to do some work together in the garden. But our targets were minimal - it was only an overnight trip, after all.*

*We'd be back in the flat by Sunday evening. We checked the weather and that looked perfect, so on the Saturday morning we decided to get away early and combine the trip with a visit to the West End. We took the W7, as usual, to Finsbury Park, but we changed at Euston to the Northern and got out at Tottenham Court Road. We had the idea of browsing the secondhand book shops along Charing Cross Road, which is just what we did. Normally, you don't browse such places looking for something specific, but on that day we were. We had just seen Diane Arbus at the Hayward. We were going to look for books on American photography of a similar style. Secondhand was the only option, because glossies like photography books were especially expensive in those days.*

*The style appealed to Eileen, because it felt like it was a world which only existed during the moment that the shutter opened. Everything before and after would be different, and the moment the shot captured was a random event in time, unique and never to be repeated. She tended to dismiss anything that looked like it had been planned, posed or contrived. But these images felt like they had happened by chance. A moment before, or after, they would not have existed in the same form. They were transitory, ephemeral, exactly like what she was trying to do with her own work.*

*What she also found interesting was the subject matter. In some ways, she was displaying her small town, rather provincial attitudes. For her, many of the people photographed by Diane Arbus were on the scrapheap of life, discarded by the rest of society like so much junk. They were drug addicts, the disabled, down-and-outs, weirdos - her term. I can see now that she was being judgmental, even intolerant, but we didn't think like that back then. In labelling people like this, we weren't trying to exclude them, but in effect we were assuming they were somehow on the outside*

*of what we called 'in'. I suppose she was just trying to describe in general how these people had in some way been rejected by the rest of society, not really thrown away or discarded, but left to their own devices outside of the mainstream. For her, these were lives that could be reassembled into stories like she did with her found objects. We did find some books. I can't remember what they were because, as things turned out, they would not form the most memorable aspect of the day. But I do remember some of the photos. More on that later...*

*We browsed the books for about an hour or so and then Eileen wanted to go to Dobell's. She usually did when she went to the West End, which wasn't often. She never bought anything, because at that time she didn't even have a record player. But she used to ask to hear things in the shop. By then the guy running the place recognised her. We also used to see him sometimes at jazz gigs and he knew she was a fan of the free stuff. He would play anything she asked for - well, let's say a couple of things each time she went there. Eileen used to flip through the records and read the sleeve notes, especially the Blue Note stuff. That Saturday she picked out Coltrane's Meditations and Ornette Coleman's Free Jazz album. I remember it well, because we were just hanging around and listening, reading the occasional sleeve note when we noticed a black guy obviously taking an interest in us.*

*It was strange, one of those ridiculous but memorable moments when you know someone keeps looking at you. But when you try to look back, they turn away, as if embarrassed. We were halfway through the Coltrane. It was in the middle of the big McCoy Tyner solo. And then he spoke. It was the accent that surprised us initially, but then everything was immediately clear. "You were in the front row," he said.*



*There was no introduction, no “hello” or “excuse me.” And the accent was obviously South African, not West Indian, American or even English. It was Dudu Pukwana. We didn’t recognise him, because he was wearing a big woolly hat, pulled down over his forehead, even covering his eyebrows. “You were in the front row,” he repeated. “Last week, in Holland Park.”*

*And indeed, we had been, as usual. It had been a trio, McGregor on piano, Miller on bass and Pukwana on alto. ‘I didn’t recognise you without your sax,’ I remember saying, inanely. He was dressed differently, more like Bob Marley with that striped hat and a bomber jacket. ‘See you again,’ he said as he disappeared behind the counter and into the room at the back. The two of us, I remember, felt like we had just had a meeting with God. But then we realised something. He was obviously in the shop because he had an appointment, possibly with the owner about a recording session, we speculated. But he had arrived after us and had stayed out front obviously because he had recognised us. We suddenly felt like celebrities ourselves. I remember Eileen’s face when I said that. There was almost a delayed reaction, as if she had never once contemplated the idea that someone might have stopped and waited because they had recognised her. She followed the surprise with a smile, saying, “I could get used to the idea.” I recall those words precisely, because Eileen had always been so dismissive of any form of recognition, even to the extent of not wanting to sign any of her work. It was turning out to be a very special day.*

*We carried on walking south and took the Bakerloo from Trafalgar Square and changed to the Metropolitan at Baker Street. It is there, as we boarded the train, I can distinctly remember saying, “Mummy can be a little tense... It depends...”*

*“Depends on what?” asked Eileen. In the north, she had never heard anyone refer to a ‘mother’ as ‘mummy’ beyond the age of six, she told me.*

*“...depends on how much she has had to drink.” I paused, wondering whether I should say more. I did. “She can sometimes get a bit loud and then say things she doesn’t mean. If she does that, then please ignore her. Let my dad deal with things. He can smooth things over. He is very practised at it.”*

*We had talked about my mother during the week. Eileen did know that she drank considerable amounts of gin. My continual shortage of money was a result of my parents regularly running out of money at the end of the month. Eileen had asked me several times how it was that a middle-class girl like me had to squeeze money out of her dad to make up her grant. All I ever said was that they got through a lot of cash as a result of their lifestyle. And then there was the mortgage to pay, as well. Eileen, it always seemed to me, simply assumed that everyone in the south of England ought to be rich. We had talked about the bottle of gin a day habit, but I don’t think Eileen had ever thought about what such a habit might cost, which is strange given the habits we had developed at the time.*

*It’s a long way to Pinner on the Metropolitan, but it’s above ground most of the way. And we had the books we had bought, of course. I said we’d set off early that morning. It must have been really early because we had been to the West End, browsed bookshops, listened to Coltrane in Dobell’s and we still arrived at my parents’ house by one-thirty. I knew the moment we walked in that my words of preparation about my mother had been unnecessary. She had obviously decided to make an effort. She was making sandwiches in the kitchen and dad was watching Grandstand on the tele. They*

*often watched the sport on Saturday afternoons because mummy did horse racing as well. She would often have a flutter. Butterflies do. She hadn't had a drink.*

*"Hello, darling", she said, rushing up and embracing the two of us, one arm each, as we stood side by side just beyond the kitchen door, which had been opened to admit the new spring warmth. "Jerry, they're here," she called in the general direction of the hatch linking the kitchen and dining room and dad appeared just seconds later. He wasn't usually that prompt.*

*"And you must be Eileen," said mum. "I've heard a lot about you."*

*I know it's a cliché, but that is precisely what she said. I remember it vividly because I continued, "I'd never mentioned her to you until last weekend and then all I said was I want to bring my flatmate next Saturday."*

*"Nonsense, darling. We chatted the weekend you moved into the flat, when we came to help you move your things."*

*"I hardly knew her then."*

*"Well you told us she was from the north, from Yorkshire, had a thick accent and made sculptures from junk. Has anything changed? Is there anything else we should know?"*

*Eileen laughed out loud. "I hope there's a bit more to me than that." She did not refer to being called 'thick'.*

*"Jerry, will you listen to that accent... Isn't it just wonderful?"*

*"Well things have changed since then," I said, deciding to go straight in at the deep end. "We're not just sharing a flat now. We are girlfriend and girlfriend."*

*I remember my dad's face. My mother hardly reacted, but uncharacteristically she went quiet. My dad's eyes, however, nearly popped out of his head. He looked at me, at Eileen, and back to me. "You mean..."*

*"If you are going to ask if we have sex together, then the answer is 'yes'." I remember Eileen started to look uncomfortable, as if she expected things to go wrong all along, but possibly not quite so quickly. But my dad was great. Looking back, I think he was surprised more than anything else, surprised at himself, because he suddenly found the idea something of a turn on. It was becoming quite a Saturday. We had been cast as celebrities twice already and we had yet to have lunch. I thought I had already told him over the phone, but he obviously had not understood. That's always the problem with the word 'relationship'.*

*"Splendid," he said. "But don't tell the neighbours..."*

*"I don't know," said my mum. I still have no idea what it was that she didn't know, but I do remember that's what she said. It might have been a way of dismissing my dad. It might just have been something to say because she couldn't think of anything else. "Come inside the two of you. You can put your things in the hall until later. Let's have a drink to celebrate."*

*"Celebrate what?" I asked. Mummy and I did compete.*

*"Do we need an excuse? How about the delights of Sappho, darling? Fuck the bloody neighbours."*

*To say that Eileen was rendered speechless would be an understatement.*

Charlotte and I discussed this day at some length, because she had her own analysis of how Eileen had reacted. For Charlotte, Eileen had simply never before encountered this type of British establishment - the enlightened, liberal middle classes, even if there is a hint of an oxymoron here. Perhaps Eileen had thought that such people only existed in trendy films of the period or were made up by people who wrote for Play For Today. Charlotte then described her mother.

Her name was Luisa. She looked the same age as her

daughter and behaved in exactly the same way. To say they were similar would be an understatement, which is perhaps why they so often clashed. They were almost twins. Luisa was a little thicker on the hips than her daughter and had a suggestion of lines at the corners of mouth and eye, but they shared almost the same stature, were about the same height, and had the same hair and eyes, though Luisa's hair was shorter than her daughter's and secured with a bandana, a knotted red handkerchief, around her forehead. It held the hair in and made her ears stick out, accentuating her apparent youth. Both mother and daughter wore long Indian gauze dresses, albeit different colours, the complicated patterns being predominantly blue for the daughter and grey for the mother. Both wore open, strappy sandals, clearly bought from the same shop on the same family holiday.

Jerry, on the other hand, seemed the model of convention. He looked at least ten years older than his wife, but in fact was the same age. He wore a collared cardigan in green wool and with a zip up the front, grey trousers and a pair of checked carpet slippers, faded brown, unlike the bold grey gingham of his shirt. All this was merely expected by Charlotte, but it was clearly surprising for Eileen. She had already been told that Jerry was a solicitor, just an ordinary one, conveyancing, wills and the like, and that Luisa used to be a teacher. But Charlotte said she remembered how dumbfounded Eileen had been rendered. Later, she told Charlotte she had literally never before encountered a middle-class household like this. Charlotte continued her story.

*To say we all got on like a house on fire would be both understatement and cliché. Mummy stayed off the booze until after the evening meal. I am not going to count the wine we had just after the introductions. In our household, we were*

*not in the habit of calling wine booze, anyway. She spent most of the afternoon either cooking or popping in and out of the lounge to check on the gee-gees, and then we ate. She was simply too tired to have more than a couple of drinks and went to bed before eleven complete with a smile on her face. I never realised at the time, but our revelation that we were in a relationship had given her one up on dad, some ammunition to defend herself against his constant accusations that my lack of academic achievement was all down to her. Now she had a rod to beat him, believing that he had made me too much of daddy's girl to make proper relationships with men. After that, things would get more complicated by the year, but on that day, everything seemed easier than either Eileen or I had expected. Dad stayed up for a while, but then he left the two of us alone, wishing us a good night's sleep as he went upstairs. To this day, I believe I can hear a knowing wink embedded in those words. I really do think he was more than a little turned on at the thought of having two girls in bed together in the next room. The dishwasher was clanking its way through its drying routine and we stayed until it finished so I could switch it off before we went up. I can recall the gist of what we said.*

*"That really went quite well."*

*"I told you there would be no problem."*

*"I doubt my parents would react like that."*

*"How would they react?"*

*"I don't know..." she said. She clearly did but was either unwilling to say or unwilling to admit to herself what she thought. She certainly wasn't telling me. Hindsight is always crystal clear. At the time I thought no more of it and a few minutes later the machine had clicked to the end of its cycle, I had switched everything off and we were in bed.*

*We woke very early that Sunday morning and went for a*

*little walk round the lake in the park. It's pretty well-to-do around there and Eileen, I distinctly remember, kept remarking at the size of all the houses, about how rich everyone was and at how smart and clean everything seemed to be. I remember because I could see nothing of the sort. It was all normal, as far as I was concerned. She also described them as 'separated', another word I distinctly remember. It has stayed with me over the years because that's what my parents did a decade later, when they had already reached the kind of age when you would think they should no longer care. I suppose my dad had had enough. Eileen never again visited their house.*

*But on that bright spring morning, early enough for there still to be a dew, because the overnight sky had stayed clear, we did a circular tour of the area and it felt like one of the best days of my life. We were together now, properly together. And it was I who noticed a plastic bag on top of a skip of builder's rubble. Most of the things in it were bits of wood, bucket loads of broken plaster and cement and a few tile shards. But on top I could see something colourful sticking out of a Safeway bag with knotted handles. I pulled at it and a coiled red wire appeared. We retrieved the bag from the pile, undid the handles and looked inside. There was a couple of old toys in there, a red plastic telephone and a green headset - just a toy - but complete with headphones and a microphone. The telephone was about half size, but the dial still went round, and the handset was still attached via the coiled wire. They had been thrown away, but the toys were intact, undamaged and really quite pretty. Someone had clearly grown out of them.*

*Eileen, of course, could not pass this one by, and immediately decided she was going to do something with this find. When we got back, she spent half an hour or so at the*

*kitchen table arranging and rearranging the telephone and headset. I got my dad's trilby off the hall stand and we put the headset on that. The hat had a band with a little feather on one side. It looked really stupid and we had a good laugh. My dad even tried it on. He had just been out walking the dog and found us in fits of laughter in the kitchen. He really did seem to want to engage with us. For a joke, he stuck the headset on the dog, which we all though was utterly hilarious. Wally was a gentle, placid Dulux dog who didn't seem to mind one bit. In fact, he seemed to enjoy this new toy and just stood there wagging his tail and apparently giving his little barks into the microphone. We were paralytic with laughter.*

*Now remember we had just been at a photography exhibition and had even just been to buy some books. It was the flavour of the moment. I asked my dad if his camera was loaded and he said it was. I rushed into the front room to get it. He always kept it in the same cupboard. By the time I got back, Eileen had put the red telephone on the floor and the dog was inspecting it, still wearing the headset. Then the phone rang. It was absolutely classic. We couldn't have planned it. My mother came into the kitchen and picked up the receiver, the dog started eating the red handset and I took a few quick shots. They had dad, looking serious, mum in the background on the kitchen phone, Eileen next to the dog laughing her head off and Wally wearing a green headset with a red telephone in his mouth.*

*My dad had the film developed and sent me the shots. They were hilarious. Eileen looked wonderful, laughing, relaxed and very beautiful. She looked so completely happy in that picture. Immediately she saw it, she burst into laughter again, just like the whole episode was repeating itself, there and then. She also decided she had to use the*



*picture in her work. She mounted it and put the words 'He's on the other line...' as a caption. I now can't imagine why we found it so funny. I remember she showed it to her mother at the end of term. She thought it was the best photo of Eileen she had ever seen. She kept it.*

## Time

*We had all suddenly woken up to Caspar David Friedrich. I don't know how it all started. We went to the exhibition about a year later, but we felt we had done it already. I can't remember when that was. We didn't buy the catalogue because we couldn't afford it. The college library had some books that gave him a mention, but everything was so focused on what we thought were the standards - Classical, Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque, French, Impressionism and the like, and almost always from an Italian or French perspective - there was very little about German art until Expressionism in the twentieth century, apart from Dürer and Grunewald. So we very much took everything at face value and looked at things with open minds, without presumption. Until then Eileen and I had not seen eye to eye about many things - perhaps most. Eileen had latched onto Linda. I think now she needed a mother figure. At the time I thought she was just being bitchy, trying to shut me out, resentful of the fact we had to share a room. Even though we had it divided down the middle with a pair of side-by-side wardrobes - one opening onto her half and one onto mine - Eileen often used to leave things on the little table at my side, dropped things there as she passed through into her half. When I complained, she would say she was only putting them there for a moment, that she would pick them up when she went past on the way out, but often she put things there and just left them. She definitely did some things deliberately to wind me up. There was once a book on Dada from the college library. She didn't read it. She didn't even look at it, as far as I could see. But she did put it on my bedside table, opened it, stood it up like a tent so the cover was facing my bed. She knew what she was doing. She thought that what I was doing*

*was boring, conventional, uninspired and wanted to shock me out of what she thought was a rut. Well she did that, all right.*

*We used to go to galleries on Sunday afternoons, when they were open from two to five. On a particular dark and rainy day, we went to look at some Friedrichs. The bus seemed to take an age to get down to Finsbury Park and we had to change there. I remember vividly that the bus we got on was ancient and that the windows were so caked with muck we couldn't even see out. Those old buses were an absolute pain. They weren't just slow, they were also noisy, with every gear change causing a loud, almost scraping bang that you could feel through the panelling, and then the engine would get noisier until the gears went bang again. They could only do about twenty miles an hour and stopped every two hundred yards. Travelling was probably how concrete feels when it's being mixed. The conductor was quite a young bloke and he kept walking past us, clicking his ticket machine and asking if we were all right and if we knew where we were going. Linda smiled and was nice to him. I tried to ignore him. Eileen eventually told him to fuck off and then he left us alone.*

*And so we went to the exhibition. The German Romantic Tradition, at least in painting, was new to us. I knew about Beethoven, Schubert, Schiller and the like, but had not previously registered that there was a visual art movement based on the same aesthetic. Linda said that she had never heard of any of them, whereas Eileen said she recognised some of the names, but didn't know anything about their style. We didn't believe her.*

*Now I had been to a Girls' High School and had something of an academic education, but the others had not, so I played teacher and told them what I knew. Linda said*

*she was interested in the compositions and settings, especially the landscapes, but Eileen, of course, immediately latched onto the idea of the individual emotional response to experience. It was right up her street, at least ideologically, except she couldn't find the expression in the paintings themselves, which she thought were old fashioned and stuffy. Until, that is, we reached the sunlit crosses on hilltops.*

*Linda, who had been brought up in a very Christian household, thought the crosses out of place. But Eileen and I were bowled over, Eileen because it symbolised the individual sacrificed for a greater good and me because I thought they looked nice. For weeks afterwards, Eileen and I had crosses, the more dramatically lit the better, in everything we did. I dressed mine up like Gustave Moreau gone Christian, with serpents, flowers, gnomes, nudes, pre-Raph gardens, Beardsley graphics and all kinds of mess. Eileen just put crosses in the middle of sheets of A3 and that was that, until she did Time.*

Linda remembers Eileen's Time. "I thought it was crap, pure crap. But then, I thought everything that Eileen did was crap. After filling a complete sketch block with little coloured crosses, Time was supposed to sum up their combined meaning. Crap. Bullshit. But she did it. She had a bottle opener she brought from home. She insisted, when we moved into the flat, that it should hang on the wall. She said it was one of her favourite things and it reminded her of home. It was brass. The handle part was a naked woman, complete with buttocks and breasts. Her raised arms and bunched hair became the loop of the opener, with her hands clasped at the top. She had found a child's toy - a plastic windmill in lurid red and green mounted on a stick which, if you secured the spinner, became a cross because it had four spokes. She tied the bottle opener to the stick so it looked

like the woman was being crucified and then stuck the whole thing into a plant pot full of soil, with the word 'Grow!' written on the front in green paint. Crap."

For Charlotte, the work formed a kind of new start with Eileen. "I remember her saying how the bottle opener had hardly ever been used. It had usually hung on a hook by the back door in their kitchen and that Eileen liked to touch it on her way out of the house. When I asked her why she had brought it to London, she told me without embarrassment, without hesitation that she liked to stroke the woman's bum. She used that word specifically, not bottom, not rump, but bum. She said she found it strangely reassuring. It was the word and the sentiment that made me listen. Great oak trees from little acorns grow." Given Time, things do grow. And from that day, the day of the Friedrich crosses, Eileen's relationship with Charlotte began to change.

Time was Eileen's first real expression of what she had come to describe as 'Women's' Lib'. It was, obviously, a rather crude comment, if it was a comment at all. Perhaps she was trying to represent a summation of the past rather than a hope for the future. But Eileen's own notebook stated: "She's being crucified as all women have been since the start of time. She is mother, not only mother nature, but also mother to the boy child, to all boy children who threw away history. She is strung up on her own child's plaything and is herself just a tool so that men can access their desires. Like Christ started a religion which grew to dominate human thinking, the sacrifice of this woman, her use as an object, her role as a mother will take root in this pot and, in Time, will grow into a movement that will liberate her and her kind." She probably copied some of the phrases.

## Virus

Eileen McHugh changed direction when she began *Virus*. Until then, she had always maintained that she wanted to create objects that could be deconstructed and remade, so it was her intention though rarely the reality that no element should ever be permanently fixed to another. Her pieces had been largely three-dimensional collages, assemblies of at least potentially moveable objects. Her idea was that each new viewer of a piece could, indeed should change it, so that the works existed for one viewing and one viewing only. She began to conceive of devoting her life to the creation of just one piece which then, changed by each new viewer, could form, literally, an infinite body of work. In many ways, she was ahead of her time.

The opinion comes from Charlie Mankiewicz, who was Eileen's sculpture teacher during that crucial second year in college. I tracked him down quite easily via search engines to a flat in London, Hackney to be precise, where he had lived for over thirty years. He is now nearly eighty years old, still fit and lives alone. His marriage broke up in the eighties, when he had a short-lived fling with a much younger woman. Basically, his wife threw him out. Though they have kept in touch, they have lived apart ever since. Some years after that second year of Eileen's course, he gave up teaching to become a specialist wood carver and he still works every day, producing works that still sell, but not frequently, and certainly not lucratively. In his own estimation, it's a living.

Charlie Mankiewicz is London born and bred. He has never lived anywhere else and in fact has travelled relatively little for someone of his generation. He was born just before the end of the war in East London, near Bow. If his name were not Polish, he might be described as a quintessential

Cockney. He certainly acquired and refined an accent that would qualify him for the label, but he and especially his parents were always conscious of their outsider status, hence their determination to give him an English and specifically a diminutive Christian name. Thus, he was christened Charlie, not Charles.

His father was Polish and a Jew, his mother Polish and a Catholic. They met on a boat from Gdansk at a time when few of their fellows were leaving the country. Both by chance were travelling abroad to seek work and both had contacts in London, but both also had the eventual intention of reaching the United States, though neither had sufficient funds to complete the crossing. Jobs in Britain were promised via their contacts and they were resolved to save so they might fund the remainder of their project.

The opportunities they had were not great, but better than what they had left behind. Ephraim Mankiewicz was from Warsaw and Eva Nowak was from the south, Katowice. They had not known one another before the journey, but their friendship developed on board ship and they exchanged contact details. Ephraim was a tailor and a family member had a cousin who was in business in London. An exchange of letters established credentials and suitability, and an offer of a trial was made, with no promises. Eva had a neighbour who knew someone who had a restaurant in London and Eva could cook. They both enjoyed making things and they were flexible enough to adapt to whatever they found. On board ship, they exchanged what details they had without really thinking they would meet again. They did keep in touch, however, without ever remembering which of the two of them had been the prime mover. They met occasionally as a way of surviving the stress of London's blitz and, in late 1943, they decided to marry, possibly because Charlie was

already on the way. Ephraim gave up his Jewish faith and became a Catholic.

Ephraim and Eva took married life seriously and Charlie had two brothers and a sister before 1950, all of whom enjoyed a poor, but idyllic family life. Both parents died before they reached seventy, but Charlie tells me he is still in daily contact with his siblings, all of whom still live nearby in Whitechapel, Old Ford and Bow. Charlie did thirty-five years as an art teacher and has a comfortable pension. In the late seventies he left the profession to try freelance sculpting but failed to make a living and went back.

Charlie went to a grammar school in the fifties, during which decade both his parents were running their own businesses. Ephraim was a bespoke tailor near Whitechapel and Eva had her own sandwich bar near Liverpool Street Station. Ephraim's nearby competitors and colleagues still regarded him as Jewish, so he was part of a network of similar artisans, an association with more upsides than down, since during busy periods work was often passed from one business to another to ensure orders were met, a practice that kept them all collectively afloat. Trade was far from spectacular but was steady. The real family money maker was Eva's sarnie bar. There was nothing particularly Polish about the food - pie and mash, liver and onions, sarnies, cakes and pastries, even bacon sandwiches which Ephraim did not eat - and it wasn't large, having seating inside for just twelve. But the takeaway trade was enormous, and Eva employed no less than six staff, who operated happily in a ridiculously small space. The tips were good.

Charlie did well at school and his parents assumed he would take over one or perhaps both of the businesses, but his interest in art started early. His brother did take up tailoring but gave up when the sixties declared its preference



for off the peg, whilst his two sisters jointly ran the sarnie bar into the eighties, when they sold out lucratively, the site becoming a doner kebab shop. It's now a gastro pub serving modern vegetarian. Although Eileen McHugh never realised it, she used to pass the very bar that had been owned by her teacher's mother and sisters on those Fridays when she decided to go to the Mike Osborne night at Peanuts.

Tracking down Charlie was not difficult, incidentally, because he still has links with the college and anyway Google does a very good job locating people like him, with that kind of name, in that kind of place and in that kind of business. He remembered Eileen working on Virus.

*She'd just read Alvin Toffler, he told me. Everyone in the year read it, passed one copy around until all of them had finished it. They didn't have any formal discussions. They were art students! But I remember many of them wanted to talk about the book, which made the others curious. They used to sit around at coffee breaks analysing it. I sometimes used to join them. I remember sitting with them one day and pointing out they were passing on the ideas like they had become a virus. Eileen latched onto the word, so I perhaps should take some responsibility for what happened.*

*She had already read the book and we have to remember that in those years people had become obsessed with the idea of resource scarcity. There were television programmes about oil supplies running out in the next decade, about there being no iron ore left and other such nonsense. Now we know it's nonsense, but at the time we were all full of these ideas.*

*In Future Shock, Toffler made the point that planned obsolescence, throw away consumerism and mass production were leading to two inescapable consequences. One was resource scarcity and the other was human and*

*societal disorientation, where values were eroded to meaningless ephemera. Or words to that effect... Eileen took up my description of his ideas as being like a virus and decided to make a work of that name to illustrate the concepts. The idea, of course, also fitted her ideas about her work being passed from one viewer to the next. It all sounds so tenuous now and perhaps it was not much better at the time.*

*I was her tutor and I did point out that the brief she had written, as presented, would probably not stretch to such a work, but she was determined to do it, so I backed her, against my better judgment, it has to be said. I doubt if I would have succeeded if I had tried to stop her. She was a determined type, not at all easy to talk out of an idea, which is why I remember her. It led to a mobile that eventually went down like a ton of bricks with the examining committee.*

*She found a doll, a plastic doll, one of those that made a groaning noise when you turned it upside down. Whether it was supposed to be a groan, a sigh, a fart or the moo of a swallowed cow I cannot say. What I can say is that the item concerned was pretty nondescript. The doll itself was not in bad condition. Perhaps a better choice would have been something broken or beaten up, because that would have added to the meaning. But the one she used she had bought from a junk shop and was probably the first one she found. The idea - inspired by Toffler - was to pick up a discarded piece of rubbish from the street between Crouch End and the college each day for a month. She would fix each one onto the doll, glued or otherwise attached one by one as she found them. It ended up looking like a surreal hedgehog. It was funny rather than serious, something to be laughed at rather than being witty in itself, an object of ridicule rather than a source of humour. She had cigarette ends, plastic forks,*

*lighters, tampon applicators, pieces of cutlery, matchsticks and all kinds of things in place. It was a mess, that was supposed to be a mess and describe a mess. But it remained primarily a mess.*

*She put a screw through the doll's navel, tied a piece of string to it and then hung it from the ceiling. Her idea was that people viewing it should move it, rock it like a baby, so it would make its groaning noise and, under the weight of the trash, some of which was only loosely attached using loose wingnuts and bolts and could therefore move a little, it would settle into a new position for the next viewer. To be frank, it wasn't a bad idea. The problem was that it didn't work all that well. To bring off something like that, you really need to research the materials and the fixings and, crucially, plan where you are going to put things. Even chance sometimes has to be managed. The doll's plastic just wasn't strong enough to support the things she attached. The screw came out of the navel and pulled out a lump of the belly so it couldn't be fixed back easily. Some of the items pulled the plastic into holes. The legs and arms bent under the weight and then some of the junk items fell off because she hadn't really thought about how hard it is to stick lots of different materials together. Add to that the brief, which specified the work had to be something organic... She said the plastic, like a virus, was made from organic chemicals. She was not wrong, but the examiners were not impressed and failed her, which was not common. She was devastated. They told her she could resubmit before the start of the third year and they would consider reinstating her on the course. I got a complete bollocking for allowing her to continue with the idea and she protested that she had already arranged to go travelling over the summer. Your message asked if I remembered her. In all my years of teaching, Eileen was the*

*only outright failure I had. I remember her, all right...*

*An agreement was reached. I told her not to worry, to get the work done and surely it would be passed. She submitted a new idea via me, which was accepted, and she promised to deliver the work, with all associated sketchbooks with evidence of research and sources by the middle of September. Of course, she never did.*

I asked Charlie about how Eileen's work might be viewed today and his response was both illuminating and encouraging.

*She was probably ahead of her time, he said. If you look around at what people are doing nowadays, the big thing that people are dealing with, the big issue of our times is the environment. There are loads of sculptors working on the concept of trash, habitat destruction, climate change and the like. I was at an exhibition recently where a sculptor had made human figures and animals out of plastic bags. Leading into each of the bags was a tube and she had pumps filling and emptying the bags and a random time generator controlling all the air supplies. The shapes came alive. Arms lifted, legs extended, giant insects stood up, antennae sprouted as the plastic bags inflated and then everything went into reverse as they deflated. A plastic cow repeatedly calved and then sucked the calf back in. There were little flashing coloured lights inside some of the transparent bags, positioned at what we might call salient locations. There is nothing reassuring about being confronted with a giant, growing, flashing green ant. All the male animals - including the people - had penises with little red lights at the end, penises that were alternately flaccid and erect. The females all had vulvas that swelled and flashed green.*

*Another exhibition had a plastic model of a blue whale, not life-size for obvious reasons. Inside its transparent body*

*was a collection of all the items of rubbish and plastic waste that had been taken from the stomachs of real whales that had been washed up dead on Canadian beaches.*

*Now Eileen was doing things like this back in the 1970s. She was certainly original and way ahead of her time. I still think it's crap, mind you. There's nothing like working with a living thing like wood.*

I left Charlie Mankiewicz to his carving. We had spent a couple of hours chatting via Facebook and then Skype, and the experience left me feeling not a little depressed. Having spent most of the time discussing Eileen's Virus, he then spent the last fifteen minutes explaining that, although it had been fifty years ahead of its time, he still thought it was an empty idea that perhaps would be better left unexpressed. But on reflection, some days later, I concluded that Charlie had been in a position those years ago where his decision, his opinions and encouragement had determined the direction that Eileen's work had taken.

I was left with the impression that if he had backed her judgment in 1972 and supported her work more strongly in the examiners' meeting, then the piece might not have been failed. He had, after all, just said that he had little time for such ideas and I now think he was not being completely truthful. It had not been the examiners' decision to give a fail, it had been his own recommendation. If he had not taken that position, then Eileen would not have set off on her travels with Charlotte that summer feeling quite so inadequate, so defeated, quite such a failure and so utterly unsure of her future. I accept that the failed project was not the only thing in her thoughts at the time, but it certainly did not help her state of mind. Events might just have turned out differently if Charlie had stuck by her, indeed stuck by his own initial decision to back her stated aim. To hear him now effectively

extolling her achievement, describe it as ahead of its time comes across as arrogant, even callous.

## Tom

Eileen's father, Thomas at the font and Tom thereafter, was at least on the surface a very steady sort. His own father died in the final months of the First World War, not long after Tom's birth. His mother never remarried, a conservative Irish Catholic heritage demanding she devote the rest of her life to her husband's memory. Tom often said he never knew his parents. Obviously he never even met his father, but though his mother lived until after he left school, his memory was of a woman who said little, hardly ever ventured out of the house, did most of her shopping from the vans that made weekly visits to the estate and had no social life he could remember, though she talked regularly with other women, always women, who visited the house to collect their mending.

She and her husband had come to the north of England for work and the war had severed what contacts remained with the old country, as well as ending their marriage. She worked around the house, cleaned, sewed a lot, but not creatively. She knitted Tom's cardigans, pullovers and socks, made his trousers and shirts and darned, endlessly darned in silence. She recycled the material of every garment until the fibres were turning to crystal. Tom used to say that while other children played, he unpicked and rewound wool, sorted it into colours and readied it for his mother's next job. She made a living mending clothes, knitting and making to order and doing laundry in a big boiler over a bottled gas burner they kept in the cellar. She died when Tom was twenty just after he had started seeing Marion, who met her just once, mere weeks before she died, already elderly in her fifties.

Neither Marion nor Tom really knew what problem might have been, Marion because she was new to the family, Tom

because men were not supposed to ask about such things of their mothers. But, on that Sunday when Marion visited to take a special tea she had to bring, having prepared it herself from things she had brought from work, they had arrived just as the McHugh's neighbour arrived home from church. The middle-aged woman looked apologetically at Marion, lifted her right hand to catch Marion's eye and then pointed emphatically at her own lower abdomen before wagging a clear, frowned, silent "No". Marion did go to the funeral, but there was no-one else but her and Tom, a priest and the undertakers.

By then Tom was already clerking for the insurance company that would employ him as a salesman after the war. One thing his mother did accomplish for her son, besides his mending, was his education. He could read and write proficiently before his school teachers addressed the issue and, though he would not aspire to public examination via grammar school, his ability with pen, ink and pencil was obvious to the elderly gent in the three-piece suit with gold watch chain who set the assignment to weed out ineligibles from the plethora who had replied to the advert. His mother had schooled him in arithmetic as well, at least enough to take money and give change, so he was utterly suited to his chosen role of trainee bookkeeper. And so, from fifteen onwards, at a time when millions struggled to find work, his employment was steady and dependable, though hardly lucrative.

Tom and Marion had met at the bus stop soon after Marion had started work in town. At the time, they both worked near the centre and they both needed to start by nine. The obvious bus was the one just before half past eight that terminated at the bus station, from where they could walk, he to Westgate and she to Cross Street, near the junction



between Wood Street and Marygate. The detour that allowed Tom to accompany Marion to the shop's door was minimal and, after a month or two of nodding hello and another of sitting side-by-side upstairs on the bus, if there was a seat, he elected as routine to escort her to the door in the mornings and waited there for her to finish in the evenings to repeat the morning trip in reverse. They were both steady types.

Tom asked Marion if she would marry him and she advised him to ask her parents. Her father's rhyming reply was memorable. "Ee luv, it's up to thee, not me," he had said, or words to that effect. She said, "Yes." Agreement remained a principle without fixed date for a while, since both Tom and Marion thought that Marion's achieving twenty-one might keep things respectable. And then war broke out and Tom joined up. He did see active service, but spent most of the war in communications work, administering and generally pushing paper. It was an experience, however, of which he would never speak. He was normally a man of few words, but on the subject of his wartime experience he remained perennially silent.

They were married in 1944, a year before Tom was demobbed. And that, I'm afraid is just about as much as I know about Tom's early life. I can record for definite that he was devastated by Marion's first miscarriage in 1947 and took a couple of years to recover psychologically. He was overjoyed when Eileen came along in 1952 but was strangely stoical during the illness that Marion suffered after the second miscarriage. It could be argued that she recovered but he did not, that the laconic distance he placed between himself and experience was retained.

A consequence of the depth of his loss, however, was the growing tendency he demonstrated to accede to Eileen's every wish. Though he never showered her with either

money or gifts, he always sided with his daughter whenever any disagreement arose between her and her mother. Marion felt this deeply but matters never became serious because disagreements in the McHugh household were never allowed to be anything other than minor. It may be assumed, however, that Tom was the prime mover in insisting Eileen should take a place in a private school rather than a secondary modern. It seems that he could not cope with even the suggestion that she was not 'something special'. Which is why, when he had to admit that she was really special, Tom's image of his daughter did not merely chip but shattered into unremakeable shards.

Tom was not a bigot and he was not religious, having lost his own habit of church-going when his mother effectively lost her faith. He was, however, intensely moral, correct and respectable and regarded the concept of fairness as a rod to straighten his spine, a rod that would divine right from wrong with complete, confident certainty. He was also a racist. It had been his decision, not Marion's, that the family should move away from Agbrigg when the character of the area changed. If you were out at work all day, you couldn't be sure your family was safe when the area was full of people with dark skins, who spoke languages that sounded like they were perpetually arguing. It was the last straw when one of them took over the running of their corner shop.

He had already been selling insurance for several years to the posh end of Wakefield, a suburb called Sandal on the south side of the city, a suburb with a castle left in ruins by the Civil War, a rugby union club and large, comfortable houses. One of his customers there was a local builder whose fortunes were on the up by the end of the fifties. It was a time when construction projects could still be local and specific. There was a copy of a document from the Land Registry on

the kitchen table when Tom called by to collect a premium of a long-standing life assurance policy for the live-in mother-in-law. An hour later Tom had all but paid the deposit on their plot on Weavers Rise. Finance still had to be sorted, but he was sure that would be a formality, since his insurance company had a preferential mortgage scheme for employees. It would be a struggle, but they could cope. And so they moved, Eileen went to her new school and Tom was gratified that he had sorted things out.

Which is why, those years later, Tom's words, "Get out and don't ever fucking well come back" chased her with such confusion as she strode, crying, past the family car in the drive of that same house.

Tom was not the type to express himself, usually favouring the words of others above his own thoughts. In fact, there were many of these, but he seemed consciously determined to keep them hidden behind a high impenetrable wall made of thin phrases which, though miniscule in themselves bonded to a rigid, crystalline lattice that described his mind. He was an avid watcher of the news on television, always arriving home a few minutes before six o'clock to catch the BBC, as he put it. He would watch again at nine, eagerly reabsorbing essentially the same stories he had heard three hours earlier, issuing an occasional "Well said," or "That's right," interspersed with an occasional "I don't believe it," punctuated by little grunted comments and finger wags. He had already heard most of the content that morning in the eight o'clock news on the Home Service before starting out for work at ten past. He was no slave to his clock, but he was reassured by the normality of doing the same things each day at the same times.

He was always well turned out in a three-piece suit and sturdy, black, toe-capped shoes he shined himself each night

before going to bed at ten. He would read a newspaper for half an hour after tea, usually preferring the evening paper printed in Leeds he brought home from work to any national rag. A special hour was set aside each Saturday morning when, after visiting the vegetable market in Wakefield soon after nine, he used habitually to settle down with a mug of instant coffee made entirely with milk to read the weekly local, the Wakefield Express, concentrating on reports from the parish councils, the columns that detailed events in each nearby village and then he absorbed the detail of births, marriages and deaths. He knew a lot of people in the area, since he had customers throughout the town and its surrounding villages, save for Horbury, which was covered from the Dewsbury office. Unlike his hours at home, when doing business, he tended towards the prolix and voluminous, always apparently infinitely interested in any local gossip his clients might want to share. When doing business, he practised the art of perpetual agreement, where the customer could never be wrong. He would often compensate for this strain when he got home.

Marion still worked on Saturdays and, by virtue of his privilege of having a car, he carried on the well-established routine of running her to work before nine and picking her up at five-thirty, the strict no-parking rules that extended during the decade to cover all of the city centre streets always ignored for the five minutes or so he would need to wait there, according to their well-rehearsed routine. When the McHughes had lived at Agbrigg, they were proud to be like the rest of the people there. And then, gradually, they sensed difference, a change that prompted them to become mortgage owners in Crofton. In their new house on the Ashdene Estate, they felt they had reclaimed their sense of privilege and restored their faith that normality could be preserved.

In their Agbrigg terrace, they had no garden so, when the prospect of twenty square yards both back and front became a reality, he rose to the challenge with an enthusiasm he would never lose. Sunday was gardening day, though in summer he would supplement the weekend with an occasional hour between seven and eight in the evening. He would often work through light rain, protecting himself with a shoulder to floor Pac a Mac, but if the weather intervened prohibitively, he displayed no personal reserves of patience and would spend much of such days ruefully gazing out of the lounge window over a newspaper, muttering, "It's still coming down. Isn't it?"

Tom had no interest in sport, except when his clients wanted to discuss it, and would often use the quiet of Saturday afternoons, when he would have the dining room table to himself, to "Set his stall out", unbuckle his briefcase and complete his paperwork for the previous week's payments, before double-checking his timetable for visits in the coming week. He was lucky his daughter was so self-contained, with her homework, her television and her friends. The music did become a problem after a while, but at least you could turn a radio down.

But the sixties were years of radical transformation for lives of even the socially conservative, such as Tom McHugh. If the fifties had witnessed graduation from bicycle clips to a Standard Eight, then ten years later he was already the proud owner of a Riley Elf, under two years old, two-tone. It might have been a small car, but then there were only the three of them and the mildly exclusive brand name fit well with the acquired status of home ownership. But we must remember that by the end of that decade, Tom was already fifty-two years old, and the thirty years difference in their ages was a veritable gulf that neither father nor daughter

were capable of bridging, especially at a time when change was generally perceived as both rapid and welcome.

We can only speculate at the relationship Tom had with his daughter. We do know he was in the habit of letting her have her own way, of siding with her if disputes arose. But it is also clear that Tom, Marion and Eileen rarely discussed anything other than the basic commonplace of daily life. The parents rarely looked at Eileen's schoolwork, believing, falsely on both counts, that they were not qualified to do so and that having paid for a service then quality would look after itself. They had both become resigned to Eileen's non-academic status and, as she reached puberty, introduced the idea that her future might involve "Meeting someone nice and settling down." As secondary school years came and went, Eileen's increasing interest in art was hardly even noticed by either parent since, "After all, you can't live off art, can you? It'll pass."

Slowly, however, as Eileen approached school-leaving age, she did raise the idea of going to art college. Marion thought there might be a place for her daughter in the shop and Tom was sure there would be opportunities for "Bright, young things," in his own company as a trainee, probably secretarial work. Eileen would have to learn to type and do shorthand, of course. Helen Wallace did once visit her pupil's home, which was up the hill, only minutes away from Browns School to discuss Eileen's preference with her parents. Eileen had been insistent she could help in the process of introducing such foreign ideas into her parents' consciousness. The tactic worked, because Marion and especially Tom had been so impressed with the demeanour, appearance and, most important of all, accent of this middle-class art teacher that they were persuaded, in a single evening over a cup of tea, to support Eileen in whatever she decided,

at least Tom did and then Marion agreed. It was the Colbrookes, Martin's parents, who recalled Marion's much later description of the encounter.

"Marion and Tom knew that Eileen was not much of an academic. Let me rephrase that. She was in a school where her parents were paying to achieve a status they could not attain by other means. Kids in that school were not going to get A-levels and go to university. Most of them got an O-level or two at best, and the parents had to pay all the exam fees on top of what the school was charging. The only route back into state education was to get a transfer to the grammar school. Now that was not impossible. But in the nearly twenty years I was caretaker there, I heard of only a handful of students, maybe five or six, who made that move. And Eileen was not going to be one of them.

"Like most of the parents of Browns students, Tom and Marion had accepted that years before at eleven-plus time. What they, and most of the others did not recognise, was what the consequences might be. Many of the kids had parents who were in business of some kind, so a lot of them were destined to work alongside a father or mother. But this was not the case for the McHughs. They simply reverted to type, which was the most common response, in that they separately envisaged Eileen reliving their own lives.

"Marion was convinced that Eileen would work in a shop. Tom thought she would work in insurance. They thought they could pull strings. But, when push came to shove, they had no idea. We could see, however, that they privately but very obviously saw marriage to our Martin as the ultimate goal. It was the perfect way out, because it made the problem go away by ignoring it. Don't get me wrong. It wasn't a problem. We were supportive as well. Whatever those young people wanted, we would all have backed them.

“Our Martin was a studious sort. I don’t know where he got it from, because neither of us was any good at school. But he had it in his head from around eight years old that he wanted to be a doctor. And the idea simply got stronger. I think it must have been that - what’s his name - Chamberlain, Richard Chamberlain on the tele, Doctor Kildare. It’s one of those programmes we never missed. Along with Popeye. Good job Martin didn’t become a sailor! Doctor Kildare was successful, neat, clean, respectable. I can remember how we used to say to Martin that if he grew up like that then we would have no complaints. Get yourself qualified was our message. Pass your exams, get some letters behind your name, get yourself a job like that, a profession, where people respect you, and pay you a proper wage.

“We never pushed him. We didn’t have to. We used to buy that magazine every week, Knowledge, it was called. In those days, a set of encyclopaedias could cost a year’s pay. This Knowledge built up into an encyclopaedia if you kept them. They used to sell a binder each year, a big arch file where you could keep them. Martin had about five years’ worth and he used to read them cover to cover. There wasn’t a subject he didn’t know. He was full of facts. He read all the time, and he seemed to remember everything he read, which is something I have never been able to do. Which is why, obviously, why I - we - always had to move from one job to another as chances arose. I was never qualified to be a school caretaker, but I became one. I’ve mucked out pigs, humped sacks of coal on a delivery wagon. But as soon as that job at Browns School was ours, I knew that I’d do everything in my power to keep it.

“It was the house, you see. It came with the house. We had to pay rent, of course, but I could make a few bob on the side as well. We did all the cleaning, so I saved money on



the school's budget and the owner turned a blind eye. It saved him a lot of money, because he didn't pay stamps for people he didn't need. It meant that my missus didn't have her own old age pension, but she had years of cash in hand, cash that meant I could save from my pay, money that eventually bought this house for us in Ashdene.

"Martin knew our lives were precarious. He knew we had never got any money. But Martin's way of making sure he did not end up like us was to study. When other parents were forking out for record players, bikes, new clothes and holidays, all he ever wanted was books., and you could get them for free from the library up in Crofton village. We bought him a stethoscope and a thermometer for Christmas when other kids were having football boots, kites, pogo sticks and the like. They were toys, but they worked. And by the time he had done a year or two at grammar school, there was no stopping him. He was an adult by the time he was thirteen, sensible, straight, focused. Eileen was different.

"Don't get me wrong, because she was a lovely girl, bright, full of energy. She was a bit of a tomboy, I remember. They used to call her Nazrat, for some reason. But she soon grew out of that phase. She was never a tearaway. She was never a problem, at least in those days. But she was, let's say, unpredictable. She would take something up and do it to death, and then a week later she had forgotten it and taken up something else.

"Martin took up with her and it seemed like it would last. They seemed very happy together. Eileen was the flighty one and he was the quiet, steady side. And the two of them, as a couple, seemed to gel. They complemented rather than conflicted. As a result, we got to know Marion and Tom quite well. We would meet one another on occasions, usually when Martin and Eileen were around as well, but when they

weren't there, we would always end up talking about them. Apart from small talk, it was the kids that always preoccupied us. But one thing we did talk about, I distinctly remember, was the visit that Helen Wallace made to their house.

"Now I worked in that school over those years and all I can say about her as a person is that I could never quite weigh her up. She was different. She didn't belong with the likes of us. She was very middle-class. She had a big house in Pontefract and always dressed expensively. Now I wouldn't notice names and labels on clothes, at least I wouldn't have then, but my wife always does and it wasn't a daily event, but it was at least weekly when my wife would come to my office at the school's main entrance and say, 'Have you seen what that Miss Wallace has on today? It's a something-or-other two piece.' As I say, I can't remember the names and these days I think my wife can't either. But you will get the flavour of what I mean. Miss Wallace used to strut up and down the corridors as if she owned the place.

"She taught art and that was Eileen's favourite subject. While she was in the school, there was always something of Eileen's on display, because it was Miss Wallace who was responsible for all the displays around school and she clearly regarded Eileen as a potential star. Now I don't know much about art, but I do know what I like, and personally I had no idea what it was she saw in any of it. But then, as I said, I don't know about such things.

"It was Miss Wallace who wanted Eileen to go to art college. Without her, I doubt the McHughs, even Eileen herself, would have considered it. Of course, neither Tom nor Marion had any idea about art, art college or anything else in that field. So Miss Wallace went to visit them, just to explain what was involved, where Eileen might go, what

qualifications she might need and what she would finish up with at the end. Our Martin wasn't there that night, of course, but he did get to hear what happened from all three of them, from Eileen, from Marion and especially from Tom.

"Now I can honestly say I am doing nobody an injustice by saying this. You would never have thought it, but Tom was a bit of a ladies' man. After all, he'd spent years going round to those houses in the middle of the day collecting his insurance premiums and, I reckon, in some of those houses he was inserting more than new entries in passbooks, if you see what I mean. Marion never had the slightest inkling, and I can be sure that neither did Eileen. But I could tell. It was the passing comments he made on the rare occasions we were together. It wasn't often, I can tell you. But we did go to an occasional football game or rugby match. "Bit of all right over there," he'd say to the side with a nod towards a seat a couple of rows away in the stand.

"But after this Miss Wallace visit to the McHughs, some months after, I remember Martin came home one night saying that Tom had been talking to him while he had been hosing down their garden in Weavers Rise. It must have been in the summer. Why would Martin have said anything to me? The answer was that he was a very bright lad. He would forget nothing, and a memory of a conversation I had with his mother from weeks before had lodged in his memory.

"Tom was mowing the lawn and Martin had the hosepipe on the hydrangeas. Tom had just finished and was taking the clippings to the compost when Martin said, 'Your flowers are very good this year, Mr McHugh. How do you get your hydrangeas to go blue?'

"Tom answered his question. Then they talked more about the garden and the colours and they started talking about how Eileen ought to paint what she could see, rather than making

up her art from her imagination. They talked about Eileen, O-levels, which were probably a non-starter, and then Tom had asked Martin what he thought about art college. He really did value Martin's opinion. It was Martin who mentioned Miss Wallace's opinion of Eileen's work and suddenly Tom had started talking about Miss Wallace, saying she was 'something of a stunner', 'a real floozie' and the like. He had certainly been impressed. Then he added, without pause that 'she was worth a bunch of flowers.'

"Now our Martin put two and two together and made about six. It was a few months after the visit to their house, and Tom was obviously still besotted with her.

"During the third term that year, so it must have been the summer, Miss Wallace became convinced someone was stalking her. She became completely paranoid. She lived in a big house and had invited students there at weekends to do extra classes. Personally, I think that was a mistake, but it was her decision and her own time. There was an investigation in school. A number of the senior boys were interviewed by the headmaster to see if they knew anything. One particular boy had been passed by Helen Wallace in the corridor. He had turned round and followed her, making lewd gestures behind her back to make his mates laugh. A teacher, who knew what was going on, saw him and hauled him in front of the head. The lad's parents kicked up a real fuss, saying he was being falsely accused and took him out of the school. There was a particular teacher who was suspended as well. It flared up again after holiday. The accused teacher was suspended again, went to court, and won.

"Unfortunately, I hadn't put two and two together. I poo-pooed what Martin said those weeks earlier during the summer break, thinking it might have been coincidence. But

when it carried on into that next term, I knew it was Tom.

“You see, Miss Wallace generally stayed late, often with Eileen, doing their art. Eileen would always be home by six. But Miss Wallace would spend half an hour or so clearing up, so it was usually around quarter past by the time she got down to the car park. She often had to ask me to re-open the gates at the main entrance to let her out, because I closed them at six, on the dot. So I nearly always saw the evidence. It wasn’t every day, but someone was leaving a bunch of flowers on the bonnet of her car. Once or twice, you laugh and chuck them away. But if it goes on for weeks and then months, then it’s different. Also, however, there were notes saying things like, ‘I’ll call you’ or ‘Heard your voice last night’ or, more seriously, ‘Just say call round and give me one.’ I saw them all. She showed me to make sure she would be believed. At that time, there was nobody else around but me.

“It could have been Tom, arriving home from work a few minutes early and stopping off at the school. Nobody drove in through the main entrance, of that I am sure. I knew the McHugh’s car and it was never in the school grounds. But there was a footpath by the beck that ran between the school and the estate. The boundary fence was always just a line of posts, because the school never had money for that kind of thing. The beck was no more than a trickle and a grown man could just step over it. From where he could have parked to the staff car park was probably only twenty yards. He could be in and out in under half a minute. And if seen by anyone, he could always have said he was picking up Eileen, on the way up the hill. That was the ‘how’, but it’s no more than a theory.

“On the other hand, the ‘what’ was completely real. She was also getting anonymous calls at home. The phone would

ring and there would be silence at the other end, or sometimes heavy breathing. The staff were briefed about what was happening. We were told that Miss Wallace had changed her number and gone ex-directory. We assumed that would solve the problem, but the calls continued as before. And the flowers kept arriving. Her number was now only known to those people to whom she had specifically given it and, of course, Eileen was one of them, because she still needed to ring to arrange her visits to Pontefract. I'm afraid, looking back, Martin's two plus two did make six. But I said nothing to anyone, until today.

"The problem eventually did just go away. When Eileen left school, the calls continued for a while and then Miss Wallace changed her number again and everything stopped. But not before it had an enormous effect on her. She got ill, took time off, lost weight. And we know what happened.

"And it was a hard time over at the McHughs as well. Eileen and Martin fell out, Eileen started going off the rails. Then, a couple of years later, after Eileen had gone to London, Tom got his cancer diagnosis, lung cancer he had. A couple of years later they had the bust up with Eileen and then, when Eileen had her accident, I think it was the last straw for Marion."

"We kept in contact for years after that, as you know, but she was never the same again. It was very sad."

We know that the Colbrookes supported Marion throughout those years, right up to her admission to the care home. Marion never learned to drive, so it had been the Colbrookes who took her to Pinderfields Hospital in Wakefield to visit Tom. It was they who helped to nurse him at home in those few weeks before he died at the end of the seventies. And it was the Colbrookes who helped to clear Marion's home, who carefully sifted through her possessions

to find anything and everything she had kept that might relate to Eileen, her lost daughter, and created that mixed collection of papers, letters, books and objects that the home lodged in Marion's name, the same box I later inherited.

The link connecting Tom McHugh with Helen Wallace is published here for the first time. The Colbrookes told me they had never mentioned this theory to anyone, their motive always being to protect Marion from further pressure. With her death, however, there seemed to be no need to guard the secret. They did answer my specific question.

"She died of starvation. She stopped eating. We could see it at the time. She lost weight. She looked ill. She took time off school and didn't visit. All the head received were doctor's notes saying that her weight loss was under investigation and that she was on a course of medication that made it impossible for her to work. She was on tranquilisers, or something for depression. There was a rumour that it might be schizophrenia, lithium. But when the school eventually closed, there was still one staff member who had been around at that time. This was fifteen years later, of course, but she told me without hesitation that Helen Wallace had starved herself to death. She simply stopped eating. She lost weight. She lost more weight, and then she stopped drinking as well, and was dead two weeks later.

"As far as I know, the McHughs did not keep any contact with Miss Wallace or the school after Eileen left. And during those intervening years, we kept a certain amount of contact with them. But Tom was poorly, and what we did was practical rather than social, until Tom died, and then we started to visit Marion again and, eventually, as you know, moved to a house nearby. We never even mentioned Helen Wallace's name and certainly never once even hinted at what we suspected. With Marion, it was always a bit like walking

on eggshells. There were other things we couldn't talk about as well, such as Eileen, or what had happened that day our Martin met her on Cock Lane.

"To this day, we don't know why they had their bust up, but we have our suspicions. Tom was not a flexible man. He had fixed ideas about most things, and he was certainly not a liberal thinker. Paradoxically, given what we have just said, he was especially strict in his views on sex, which was for a man and a woman in marriage. At least that was the public view.

"They had their big bust up at the end of Eileen's second year in London. The neighbours heard the noise. Tom was very, very angry, but they had no memory of hearing Marion's voice at all. The shouting came and went for an hour. They heard doors slammed, things being smashed. They were ready to call the police, they said.

"It seems that Eileen was going on holiday for the summer with her friend. It also seems she had failed her course. But what the neighbours remembered being repeated many times was 'girlfriend', specifically, 'girlfriend'. They also remember Tom shouting repeatedly, 'Gillette blade'. They knew what it meant. Tom was taunting Eileen with his fifties slang. 'My daughter's a Gillette blade,' is what they heard, many times."



## Don

They set off as planned. For Charlotte, of course, there was no reason not to, apart from her unstated fear that Eileen would not resubmit her second-year exhibition and might drop out of college. She had considered the options, though without consulting her lover. Things had moved too quickly for them, but decisions had to be made. Cancelling the whole trip would potentially cause the greater problem, she concluded independently, in that it could add claustrophobia to the pervading sense of failure. They must be together, of course, of that she was sure. Eileen would certainly need support and her support, being informed, possibly practical, might just be better than anything she might get from her parents or friends in the north of England. These people were not sculptors, after all, and not even artists. So, either they stayed together in London and take the loss of what they had already spent, or they made the trip as planned. Had Charlotte known of Eileen's father's outburst, she would certainly have persuaded her partner that they should stay, but she did not, so they set off.

Three months away is what they had planned, and it had been more than three months in the planning. It was probably not enough time to do the whole trip, at least not overland, and certainly not enough to do the return the same way. Charlotte's father had been generous in the extreme, promising to pay for a return flight - an expensive one-way ticket, no less - for both of them from anywhere they might finish. "You're only young once," he had said to them on a visit to Pinner during the Easter break from college, an Easter break when Eileen told her parents she had decided to 'stay down' to 'get some work done'. An outsider might have argued that the distraction caused by planning their trip in the

third term of their second year was the reason why Charlotte was read the riot act by her tutor and indeed why Eileen's work was failed.

Earlier in the year, they had considered several options, the easiest of which was the Magic Bus, which advertised in their college and, it seemed, throughout student venues across London. It was becoming commonplace, almost harder to find someone who had not done it! They read what was available, planned and smoked.

There were alternatives, but these were harder to locate, the only standard quality they displayed being that they were not standardised. These needed extra time, and probably more smokes.

Sunday had become their gallery day and now it doubled as a planning day. Mondays to Fridays involved at least one studio session and one formal art history class at college, plus unlimited hours of life drawing and art history, ceramics workshop and art history, or even sculpture and art history. At least that's how they perceived it.

Their teacher for art history was, of course, John Daly, so they kept him at arm's length by making sure they attended his classes. Skip one and he might just ask to see you 'for a word', though the word in question might just be 'fuck'. There was a register system in place, a voluntary act of signing in when a student attended a session. Mickey Mouse, Karl Marx, Jesus Christ, John Wayne, Elvis Presley, The Beatles and Leroy were regulars, but the college was small, and faces would be missed if they were not present. There was no way of skipping a class and not being noticed. Also, after all the practical sessions, you had to clean up, clean yourself and eat, so during the week there was no time for anything but college and an occasional visit to the pub. Followed by a smoke, of course.

Saturdays were maintenance days, hours devoted to washing, cleaning, food shopping and finishing off work left over from the week. A visit to the laundrette along the parade took up most of a Saturday morning, for instance, and they had decided not to pool their washing because they wore different fabrics and colours and anyway, they wanted to retain at least some independence. It was also a good time to read the books recommended in art history, since there was nothing else they could do there, certainly not smoke. Some people were trusting enough to leave their things in the machine and come back later, but not Linda, nor Charlotte, nor Eileen.

Food shopping was at the supermarket, again only a walk away. Linda and Alan bought their own supplies, or at least Linda did, while Eileen and Charlotte shopped together. They had the fridge subdivided, one shelf for Eileen and Charlotte, one for Linda and Alan, with the salad drawer containing bags from the shop, name-scrawled in felt-tip. Linda had made a couple of elasticated, colour-coded cloth tags to identify milk bottles, fruit juice, salad cream jars and anything else whose ownership might be confused. Shopping was thus much more than a process of acquisition and implied each time a lengthy period of joint kitchen management.

So, Sunday was their gallery day, but the venues did not open until two o'clock and they closed at five, so Sunday mornings remained a blank space. There were markets. There was Speaker's Corner. There were walks in Ally Pally or, better, rambles through Highgate Cemetery, the old part of which was like an overgrown city of myth in its own right. In retrospect there is something poetic about starting the day with a joint and then going to visit the tomb of Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

The galleries were all free and therefore repeatable, luckily so, since they were so big, they could only be absorbed a couple of rooms at a time. They went regularly to the National, the Tate, the V&A, but not the Wallace Collection, which cost a fortune to visit, and was also boring. Others changed their exhibitions, such as the Hayward, the Royal Academy, the new little Serpentine in Kensington Gardens, but most of these had special shows, retrospectives and the like, where the material was judged essential but entrance fees were astronomic, except, of course, at the Serpentine, which was free but took only a minute or two to visit.

But from Crouch End or Muswell Hill, the excursion usually involved bus and tube to the West End as a starter, whether by Victoria from Finsbury Park or a smelly Northern from Highgate. There was always the number fourteen bus, of course, but that could take ages. With their trip in mind, they took to starting Sunday mornings at the Aldwych and Kingsway where there assembled an informal market in secondhand camper vans. It was not a purchase they sought, of course, but they had noticed by chance one cold day in February that some vehicles were selling transport, not themselves.

It was an era when it seemed that all young Australians, even those with limited finances, needed to make an extended visit to Europe as part of a coming of age ceremony. Many travelled overland, but not many did the trip in both directions, so there was a market for seats in transport headed this way or that, like mini Magic Buses, in what were usually VW camper vans, often painted in the bizarre psychedelic livery of the day. They were lifestyle adverts as much as buses and the journeys offered were a good deal more expensive than the regular services, if regular

is a word that could ever have been applied to them, but six people could bed down in the van and there would be no need for hostels. In theory, there might be greater flexibility of destination as well as fewer bed bugs.

Their first visits to that semicircle of variegated vans were no more than exploratory. There were lots of people to ask, but the questions were not yet formed. After a few meanders through this hippie enclave, their idea started to solidify, and they started asking real questions of the owners. There were people in college who had done such trips in what later were called gap years and their particular advice was sought, absorbed and filed. Eileen and Charlotte's window for the trip was quite precise. They had to be on the road by the third week of June and back before the end of September. Some told them that was a waste of an opportunity to do it well, while others told them their three months would be ample time. They were not quite sure whom to believe.

They were agreed they did not want to stop in Europe, though Eileen had never been outside her own country, so she was thinking blind. Her lover's family had taken regular driving holidays on the Continent, exploring France, northern Spain, Austria and Italy as far south as Rome. Eileen simply took Charlotte's word that they should bypass the boring bits and head as quickly as possible for the mysterious, spiritual and by then fashionable East, always capitalised in honour of Herman Hesse's personal journey via title. Initially, Charlotte had assessed Eileen's agreement as being based on judgment similar to her own, but the idea was soon contradicted by Eileen's need to apply for her first passport.

One day, a salmon pink van with a white roof, painted by hand in domestic gloss probably to seal in the rust, fit their brief. Two Australian couples, both heterosexual, were

offering the remaining two places on board at a fixed rate up front plus a share of petrol, food and any other expenses incurred en route. It took the two girls a week with pen and paper to cost things and they concluded they would save overall by doing things this way. Also, if they happened upon somewhere interesting, they could decide to stay longer if the others agreed, and they seemed amenable people. Of course, they did not want to go all the way to Adelaide - who would? - and negotiated a price based on flying back from Bangkok. The van would have four drivers - excluding themselves, of course - and there was every possibility they could stick to their timetable.

Now apart from Charlotte, I have not traced anyone else who did the trip. The Australian couples were clearly older than Charlotte and Eileen, and contacting has proved to be very difficult indeed. And, in the event, they didn't get on, so none of them would probably want to speak with me, even if any of them were still alive. As it turned out, the others had done it all before, seemed to have done everything it was possible for a life to do, and had already been everywhere, except Indonesia and planned to spend time without the van in Sumatra, Java and Kalimantan, before returning to Singapore to take a flight home, which was South Australia. They planned to sell the van in Bangkok to a group going the other way. It all seemed fine, so utterly credible, until the reality immediately dipped below the girls' expectation.

India had been their initial goal. They believed they had created the idea themselves. It was only later that Charlotte came to realise they were merely following what commercial interests had prescribed for their generation. And they did see something of India. They also saw something of Europe prior to Istanbul, saw something of Turkey's interior expanse and very little of Syria's emptiness. They paused a little in

Afghanistan, but the sight of every man on the street carrying an automatic weapon and an ammunition belt was not anyone's idea of a holiday or one particular person's idea of a welcome. They did pause to take photos of the scenery. They had read and religiously observed advice that cameras should not be pointed at Muslims. Kathmandu lived up to expectations for the whole day they spent there, likewise Benares. They drove to Calcutta and expected to pass through, but unexpectedly they paused. For Eileen and Charlotte, a whole two days out of the van and away from the others who frankly were not on the same wavelength as the two students came as a relief, but it proved to be short-lived.

The main driver, the guy they had dealt with outside the entrance to the BBC in Aldwych, a rather conventional rugby-playing type, certainly not a hippie, who didn't even smoke, returned to the roadside restaurant where the rest of the travellers were taking rice and discussing the taste of mustard oil that pervaded their fish curry. He returned after what the others clearly recognised as an unscheduled absence. From the moment they had set off, the timings had ruled their journey. This leg takes this amount of time. Here we change drivers. There we need a ferry and they only go every four hours. But here in Calcutta, when asked what Graham was doing during those hours of absence, the other three Aussies merely shrugged their shoulders and said "Dunno," which was unusual, because thus far they had only rarely agreed. And when he did appear at the roadside, emerging from a Bajaj and paying the driver, he immediately turned to the assembled group and announced, "Done." Charlotte can remember the relief that registered on the other three Aussie faces, a strength of feeling that was matched in reverse by the confusion felt by the two girls.

“Done what?” Charlotte can remember asking.

“He’s sold the van,” was the reply from Dawn, the apparently clueless, gangling girlfriend of Jim, the other passenger couple. Charlotte remembers vividly how she was unable to react, believing their journey had been agreed as far as Bangkok.

Charlotte also remembers Graham, the main driver and owner, filling that silence with words of wisdom. “I’ve had a good offer. It makes sense. There’s a van full of people who want to go the other way. They have just come up through Burma by bus and they say it’s now impassable for people like us. We’d be stopped. Turned back. Perhaps even have the van impounded. Visas are being cancelled. And most of the country is off-limits. We would have to speed through from one end to the other.”

“So how would that be a change from what we have done until now?”

The observation was ignored. “Lady...” She had learned already that this was Graham’s choice of address when he wanted to patronise. “...you’re coming the raw prawn. What we agreed at the start was possible when we set off. Things change. The van stops here. There are flights to Bangkok and they are quite cheap - a lot cheaper than getting stuck in Burma without transport.”

“Couldn’t we go another way?” The question came from Eileen. The others shrugged.

“Lady, there’s a war on. We can do a sightseeing tour of Laos and North Vietnam if you don’t mind staying there for the rest of your life, which, chances are, won’t be very long.” He smiled. “Or, if you fancy, we can go into China via Tibet but *a*, you would never get past the border and *b*, the mountains tend to be quite high, too high for the van. Fancy pushing us over a mountain pass at fifteen thousand feet at



ten below zero? That thing would never get up the foothills now, let alone the passes. And then we would have the small problem of negotiating our way into and out of China, cultural revolution and all. We have to stop here.”

They parted less than amicably at the end of that day with feelings still suppressed and, forty-eight hours later, Charlotte and Eileen were touching down in Bangkok. Charlotte remembers Eileen’s joke had cleared the air. They were already in their descent to the airport when Eileen stood up, handed Charlotte the pen she had been using to fill in her customs declaration and said, “Would you do me a favour? Would you please write Praktika Super TL SLR across my bum?” She had to shout to be heard above the four turbo props of their already ancient DC4.

Charlotte remembers the momentary confusion that was immediately cleared when Eileen pointed at the strip of paper with ‘Customs Declaration’ printed across the top, a paper she held out in her left hand. The thumb was indicating a particular line, multiply translated, halfway down. Charlotte read, “List items of value on back side.”

It was to be the first of many such experiences over the next few days, when proto-English became real comedy. There was a menu with ‘chicken in spit’. There was a Royal Palace Official Guide where the audience room was described as ‘This is where the King sits on the Thorne.’ Charlotte explained the sudden release from two weeks in the VW camper van. Being cooped up with four mildly hostile companions had left them both tense and irritable. The silly moments gave temporary relief to their frustration, but this would be destined to resurface later, when there would be no distraction from its disappointment.

Bangkok’s temples, palaces, spelling errors, smelly squid on bicycles, fiery food, thrumming tuktuks, it all seemed like

a release. The diesel fumes, unburnt two-stroke, heat, humidity, traffic jams and overcrowding worked the other way. There were certainly a lot of Americans around. Though they saw no uniforms, the demeanour, the crew cuts, the false camaraderie that established groups and set their members visibly apart from one another, all these elements reeked of conscripts on R and R. And these groups were always concentrated wherever there was sleaze, such as Patpong, where Eileen for the first time in her life saw humans effectively traded like so much consumer junk. For her, this was potentially inspirational, but in reality, it was all proving to be hardly the spiritual quest, the mysterious East they had sought. But the expected self-realisation was certainly being achieved, though not in the quality they had imagined.

Charlotte recalls the day in detail.

We were sitting in a restaurant. We were sharing a bowl of noodles and a plate of chicken with bamboo shoots on rice. I can remember it well. The food was so utterly delicious we both took photographs of the table. I still have the picture. We must have been near the floating market, because you can see the klong in the background. We had a couple of bottles of Singha as well, and we were feeling more relaxed than we had been since we started out. "So what next?" Eileen asked. "We have only two months left and we have seen nothing yet."

"There's two options, darling," I said. "North or south. South is islands, lying in the sun, snorkelling, hippies. North is also hippies, but more temples, mountains and elephants."

"Elephants," Eileen replied without pause. So we took the bus to Chiang Mai. It really was very easy. I don't remember why we thought getting on and off a bus would be any harder in Thailand than anywhere else. You bought a ticket, got on

at one end of the trip and off at the other. The bus might have been a little less luxurious than at home, but the long-distance buses in UK at the time were not that comfortable. At least the one in Thailand ran on time, had a toilet on board and some refreshments served by a young woman in uniform, and so that was four up on rich UK services for a start.

But we both suffered a certain unspoken disappointment when we arrived in Chang Mai. "Eight hundred years of history and not a single old building in sight," Eileen shouted above the rasping tuktuk that took us to our hostel. Things soon got worse. We had booked a place from a kiosk in the bus station and we chose only on price. The man who made the call told us "Very popular with hippies," meaning, I suppose, I know where you are coming from.

The tuktuk dropped us on a square with nondescript concrete buildings, mixed low rise to six storeys, obviously built piecemeal at different times. They had shop fronts on the ground floor, all open at the front, containing a veritable town centre, restaurants, bars, general stores, clothes shops, workshops. The only thing that was uniform about the place was the dirt. The entrance to our hostel, Happy Valley - I can still remember that sign and the name - was a dirty staircase leading up straight from the street, without a door. On one side was a metalworking business where half a dozen men were grinding, welding, beating, hammering. The noise was deafening, but not so loud as to drown the whistles they all offered in our direction as we paid our driver. Eileen and I seemed to have caused real mirth. I suppose we both did have fair hair.

But what was overpowering was the smell. Old oil, petrol, diesel, burning grease, paraffin mixed with smoke, cigarettes and soldering, plus that persistent rancid smell you get when

a car's brakes burn, all this mixed with fumes from the road, a dirty gutter, a leaky drain, a rubbish dump over the road, burnt cooking oil from the café next door in thirty-five degree humid and motionless air. I think you get the olfactory picture...

And if it was far from salubrious to the right, on our left the building at first sight seemed presentable but closed. Unlike the rest of the street, the frontage was bricked up, with small windows let into the walls that enclosed what was clearly designed to be an open front. It had a visible concrete skeleton and the light bricks that had been used to fill in the gaps were unrendered, the apparently randomly applied mortar between them spilling out in places, non-existent in others where you could see right through the wall. A building site, we said to one another. But we were wrong. We looked again. The wooden doors had been varnished. They actually looked in quite good condition. We walked towards what was clearly the main entrance, half-thinking it might be the ground floor manifestation of our hotel. But after five paces or so we could clearly see that beside the door was a glass-fronted noticeboard. On display were several photos of attractive young women, all smiling, all professionally posed. They all had captions, clearly their names, but had a comment printed in Thai underneath. "It's a knocking shop," I remember Eileen saying, as we turned back to the grubby staircase. It didn't get better when we arrived on the first floor, where we found the place had already been knocked!

We were greeted by a little old man in a dirty tee shirt with designer holes and a pair of ragged shorts that he had probably worn since the age of six. He greeted us, laid his cigarette onto an ashtray overflowing with dogends and paused to cough up a great gob of phlegm into a bucket by his chair. He clearly knew who we were. Probably the bloke

at the bus station kiosk had described us over the phone. He stood, said no more, and beckoned us to follow him. We went up other flights of stairs, which might have been swept sometime in the nineteenth century, until we reached the top floor, where a door that bore no evidence of a lock let into a large space with a dozen bunk beds, six lots, two high, lining the walls. He showed us in, but it was quite hard to imagine where we might put our feet. The place was full of backpacks, bags, half-eaten meals, beer bottles - the floor seemed to be carpeted with bottle tops, dirty clothing and people, none of whom bothered to get up when we appeared. The place reeked of piss and dope. The man thrust a piece of paper into my hand. On it was written a figure. He rubbed together his finger and thumb. I told him we had paid the man in the bus station. He shrugged and pointed at the paper, saying, "Cash."

We did not hang around. We simply picked up our bags and left. We only had hand luggage and we knew the way out. We were already in the street when the owner had only made it down two flights. He was shouting after us, but we were not waiting. We walked around the knocking shop to the main road on the other side and found a restaurant, where we decided to have a beer and work out what to do.

Now I admit I was not aware of how hard Eileen was finding things. She was not good at expressing emotion. She had seemed relaxed, but this experience was clearly a last straw and things suddenly came to the surface. We sat in the restaurant with our beers, dragged our bags under the table and before we had taken a sip, Eileen burst into tears. Of course, I knew she had been under strain because of her failed course, but I knew nothing about the split with her parents. In fact, I knew nothing of that until I read your message. It's strange how one revelation can so easily

reinterpret painful memories that have been assumed understood for forty years.

The restaurant owner came over to us. He wasn't the slightest bit interested in our welfare. He started shouting at us, despite the fact we had yet to exchange a single word. He was immediately very angry indeed and he started to pull my arm to make me stand. When I pushed back, he tried to pull our bags from under the table. He clearly wanted rid of us. I could hear him say hippie this, hippie that. I had Eileen hysterical in front of me. I had an incandescent restaurateur trying to evict us, apparently by force of sound and we had nowhere to stay on our increasingly disastrous trip. At that precise moment, I was not coping.

From nowhere, perhaps he had been sitting there when we came in, a man appeared and said something to the owner, who immediately started to calm down. It was an American voice, but the language was not English. First impressions were of another hippie, the sort who might raise a hand in a Buddhist mudra with a quick 'Peace, brother' alongside, despite the fact we were both women. His shaven head sported a stupid little tuft of hair. But to say we were thankful for this weirdo's intervention is understatement. A few minutes later we were sharing a beer, chatting, relaxed and calm again, despite the continued mutterings of the owner.

I can remember Don's words like it was yesterday. "He's had trouble with western traveller types recently, and there's a lot of them about. He's had people high as kites in here and smoking dope like they are at home. He can go to jail if the police decide to notice. Some of these people are very arrogant. They behave as if they own the place. There were people in here last night, about half a dozen of them. They were arguing. One of them threw up over there and the rest started a fight. When the lady started crying," he said,

nodding towards Eileen, “the owner thought you were about to have an altercation.” It was his use of this word that makes me remember everything so clearly. It was such an unexpected word. Argument, fight, row, all possible, but the last time I had an altercation, as far as I know, I was on a motorway, I think.

He was American. I had already been well trained by my dad in how to distinguish between Americans and Canadians and this guy had already said the key word, ‘about’, and there was no trace of Scottish ‘oo’ sound. He was American. It was not a surprise. We had met lots of Americans already in Thailand, though not many who could speak Thai, let alone fluently. But he didn’t use Thai all the time when he spoke to the restaurant owner. There was a distinct change in the tone. I think it may have been Mandarin. He also did not look like a traveller. If anything, he looked like a Buddhist monk. He was tanned, quite dark, actually, and the shaved head had a dark stubble shadow, showing he would be bald if his hair grew. It was topped by a ridiculous little tuft that stood up like a little erect you-know-what at the back of his scalp. He had baggy trousers with orange and white stripes and a loose cheesecloth shirt. He had a necklace that looked like threaded dog’s teeth and a couple of crass bracelets. It was a Hollywood stereotype from a road movie in flesh and blood.

Charlotte’s recollections continued at some length. We chatted for several hours via Skype and, though I did record everything, I will not include her story verbatim. She spoke as much about her current situation as much as the past. She also wanted me to explain in detail the nature and scope of my biography of Eileen. I had the distinct impression that she became the one who might be gathering information, rather than providing it.

Charlotte is now, apparently, living in a pleasant village

in the Cotswolds, west of London, as she described it. She is married to a financier who works in the city. When I asked which city, she laughed and said the one with the capital letter. She is active in politics and short-listed in the selection of a parliamentary candidate for a constituency in the north of England but has no illusions that she would ever be elected there. It took time to refocus our discussion on Thailand and the nineteen-seventies. She insisted on asking her raft of questions. What she did reveal, however, confirmed that the experience was still fresh in her memory and came with intricate detail, so I will paraphrase.

Eileen finished her beer and then unexpectedly burst into tears again. Don, who had already introduced himself, listened to Charlotte's brief summary of how they had arrived here amid a sense of disappointment and disillusion. She described the long bus journey from Bangkok, the disgusting hostel, the days travelling non-stop cooped up in a van with Australians, how their intention of finding art, culture and experience contrasted with the reality of cheap tat, plastic bags, tourism, trauma and sleaze. He was a good listener and was willing to give them time. Charlotte also mentioned that Eileen did have regular bouts of emotion at certain times of the month. It was not unusual, and it would pass. And it did. She settled down, but both she and Charlotte still wore their disappointment as a translucent mask.

Don stayed and talked. The girls finished their beers, but he drank iced tea. He ordered another round, saying amid protest that he would pay the bill. They could not decide if he was genuine, but he did appear to have grown sincerely and thoroughly interested in them, their experience at college, their expectation when they set off. He said eventually that their story was far from uncommon, that disillusion was often the destination of the hippie trail. He



did not understand why people travelled halfway across the world to ‘find themselves’. The trick for that was looking in the right place, he joked. People were often chasing something intangible, but also something they could neither articulate nor define. If you don’t know what you’re looking for, you don’t know when you’ve found it. “It usually starts and ends with dope,” he said, “not that a smoke is a bad thing, but it’s not a replacement for life.”

Charlotte remembers their talking for an hour or more. They became relaxed and Eileen was back to her usual, ebullient self. Charlotte added poignantly, “At the time it didn’t register, but looking back I can now see that Eileen had already changed.”

Of course, to this point in the story of Eileen’s journey through life, I have had to rely heavily on material from Charlotte, so what has been described is often her personal view of events. From here, however, I can draw on several sources, so what follows is an amalgam and distillation of several memories.

The travellers and their new friend, Don, took a rickshaw. He had already decided to offer them a place to stay well before he raised the issue of where they might go next. At best, Eileen and Charlotte had privately thought he might be able to advise on somewhere reasonable, somewhere clean, somewhere that came with a recommendation and a reassurance from him.

But when he announced he had a spare room where they could stay, there seemed to be no need to consult, since both travellers agreed simultaneously and without a second thought. He told them his place was just a short ride in a tuktuk from the restaurant. He said they should get their things together and by the time they had reached the street he would have transport ready. They had already learned that

Don was very precise and, though apparently laid back and easy going, also very efficient and very economical with his words. He delivered what he promised, and the ride took under five minutes, including traffic lights and roundabouts, or traffic circles as their host strangely called them. With three on board plus two bags on their laps, they would not have wanted it to be further.

As the rattle of the tuktuk faded, the girls needed a moment or two to readjust the handles and straps on their bags. After shouldering their packs, they needed four or five paces to clear the hedge that surrounded the house before the open gateway gave them a first sight of their accommodation. Their shared gasp was audible when they saw the reality.

It was not a big house. And neither could they see anything overtly impressive. But it was beautiful. Amidst a whispered chorus of ‘gorgeous’ and ‘wonderful’, the group approached this timber house standing on pillars a foot from the ground. There were slatted walls left and right, each with one window, but straight ahead there was an almost square, covered patio with an open wooden railing in front. Three steps rose from the end of this short driveway to the patio level and behind they could see a living room, not large but spacious, which currently had its shuttered walls folded back, both in front and at the rear, so they could see right through to the back garden. A fan above a central low table rotated slowly. All around the house there were flowering bushes of the types they had seen throughout the country, but whose names were still unknown. There were occasional and gentle sounds of cooking coming from somewhere, but the associated smells were everywhere and nothing less than divine.

For the first time in weeks they heard birdsong. They

could hear the buzzing of insects. A cat upped from a cushion on the patio and sped away as they mounted the first step. There was an array of bamboo furniture before them, with throw cushions in Thai fabrics. Compared to where they had been in the previous weeks, and also compared to their flat above a shop in Muswell Hill, this looked and felt like paradise. It probably was, I thought, so I located and bought the house some years ago.

Don indicated they should turn to the left. A few steps took them to an unlocked door, which Don pushed open. The inside was dark because the shutters were closed, but as the darkness faded from their vision, they saw a pair of beds - real beds! - with draped mosquito nets hanging from wide wooden rings plus sparse but exquisite pieces of carved wood furniture, a chair, a table, a dresser, a cupboard. Don asked them if it would be all right for them, prompting the two travellers to burst into almost uncontrolled laughter which, in retrospect, was mutually felt relief. Of course, it's fine. It's beautiful.

Charlotte recollects that Don switched languages again and called out, directing his voice towards the back of the house. And this was clearly yet another language, quite different in its tones from anything they had yet heard from him. Newly and unnecessarily worried, Charlotte dared to ask how much he wanted for the room and she vividly remembers Don's reaction of incredulity. "You are my guests," he said, indicating what might have been taken as mild offense. "You can stay as long as you want, right up to your return to Bangkok for your flight home, if you want. The rules are simple. No loud music. Nothing! No parties. No inviting other travellers. Otherwise it's your house." Despite his laidback appearance and clearly intentional choice of hippie persona, Charlotte recalls how, both at the

time and still today, precision and clarity were Don's hallmarks.

It was at that moment they were joined by the woman they assumed was the cook. They were astonished at how small she was. She had a round face, almost perfectly round, whose skin was unexpectedly dark. She was dressed in what they assumed to be a local traditional costume, though at that stage they remained perfectly ignorant of whose tradition it might be. It was certainly like nothing else they had seen in Thailand, even in the 'traditional dancing' show they had paid through the nose to experience in a Bangkok hotel. Everything about her dress was dark, an ambiguous shade of green, blue and grey in a fabric that seemed to shimmer as she turned, apparently changing colour as she moved. Baggy trousers were held tight at the ankles by bangles. A loose tunic with patterned trim was held at the waist by a broad band and a scarf which covered every hair on her head was decorated with hanging charms, coins, bobbles of fabric and strips of geometrically patterned cloth, clearly embroidered. It was too much for the girls to take in and they spent a considerable time staring before a self-conscious embarrassment diverted their gaze.

"This is Hli," said Don, before issuing several sentences in that same language they could not even hear, let alone understand. They thought, after a few days hearing Thai that at least they could now tell when words started or finished, but this was something different, where they could not even hear a cadence or a pause. Hli gave a little smile, just a hint of recognition crossing an otherwise unchanging ambiguity of expression. Her manner was equally formal, with none of the effusive smiles, bows and prayer-like handclasps they now had come to expect. The girls heard Don's pronunciation of their names mentioned several times in his

apparent monologue, strange points of recognition embedded in a torrent of incomprehension. They decided to introduce themselves.

“Eileen,” said Eileen, offering a hand, which was not taken.

“Charlotte,” said Charlotte, bowing, a gesture that was not acknowledged.

“Eileen and Charlotte,” repeated Don, as if there had been confusion which, of course, there had.

Don’s clipped American vowels rather shortened Charlotte’s name, making her sound like a small onion, more shallot than shar. But it was Eileen’s name that was the greater variant, that had caused the problem. The British girls had put their stress on the first syllable, whereas the American placed it on the second, making the name sound level and long.

Hli repeatedly tried to say Eileen, but it came out the same as Hli, aspirated and mimicking Don’s lengthened ending.

“I lean,” said Eileen, standing at a silly angle. It was a joke, but no-one got it.

Don was in the middle of what sounded like a conversation with Hli when the little boy appeared from the living room. He was a toddler, but steady enough on his feet to rush towards Hli and grab her leg with a determined hug.

The two girls’ collective response was clearly drawn from reflex. They both donned a broad smile and uttered a succession of phrases, such as, “Hello. Sweet thing. Lovely boy. What’s your name?” They clearly wanted to pamper the child, but Hli picked him up when he instinctively moved to hide behind his mother, before audaciously trying to peep out to laugh at his audience. Hli stuck out a hip and perched the boy there, wrapping her left arm around him.

“This is Touhue,” said Don. “Touhue...” he repeated,

slowly. The little boy smiled at him, yelped and waved an arm in the direction of the American face that approached, eyes playfully wide. He then stood beside the child and turned to face the girls. Don lifted the little boy's arm towards them in an unsuccessful attempt to point. "Charlotte... Eileen..."

"Hli," said the boy, causing Hli to burst into laughter, which was the first sound she had made. She turned to the side and whispered a few words into the boy's ear. He was attentive, interested and wonderfully calm. She then spoke louder in what seemed to the girls like an admonitory, almost angry, assertive tone. Then she gave the lad's hair a ruffle with her free hand, set him down and, with a little push in the back, directed him back into the main room. All four of them watched in silence as the boy meandered through the room and then down the stairs at the other side into the garden at the rear.

"His name again," asked Eileen, wondering why at first sight she had assumed he was a boy.

"Touhue," answered Don. "Let's eat."

## Hli

Without Hli, Eileen McHugh would have been completely forgotten. It was her memories from Thailand that started the process of enquiry. Over the years, detail by detail, her recollections, minimal though still vivid, have enabled lost scenes to be reimagined and, through their assembly, Eileen's life has been remade. The process has been far from easy, because at times Hli is reticent to the point of obstruction. The last thing she wants to do is recall a past that offers neither solace nor comfort, both of which lie squarely in the completely preferable present. It is also hard to delve into what has become a rejected past with a person one has come to know so well, since the examination must inevitably unearth much pain. It is always easier to search within a stranger.

She has no birthdate, though one is listed on the papers that formally allowed her to stay in the United States. She does not know her age but will often quote a credible figure that might vary from day to day. She assumes she was born in the late fifties and she has only a general idea of the place. Perhaps her birth was never recorded. Perhaps her family were already on the move. Perhaps they were already displaced. Perhaps they were already refugees. Perhaps they were imprisoned... She has no idea and neither, she says, does she want to know. Here and now is all that matters to Hli.

She was told by others that she was born in Laos and that she spent her infant years there. She has never known the names of her parents but will make up likely ones if pressed by an official. What is certain is that now she has no memories whatsoever of any life before the great trek she made with people she called mother and father when they

fled the war. They were not a family and they were not alone. At the time, Hli walked, walked more and walked some more again. For how long she walked, she cannot remember. She knows not where she walked from, or how long it took, but she does know where they settled, because that is the point her memory starts to improve. The journey she made could have been the journey of her people, except that for many of them it was an escape that never began.

She assumes she left Laos when she was five, six or seven years old. She might have been eight. She herself says she does not recall much, and those who accompanied her always refused to provide any detail. In reality, she only ever asked a few times, since reactions to her questions were often hostile, even violent. Even a collective history, when it might be incriminating, like a sleeping dog, is best left undisturbed. She waves her hand to preclude any discussion of that era, not only because she has no memories of it, but also because it remains contentious and painful. “Buy a book,” she says, “and that is the story.” I did, but not a whole book. Sometimes in personal histories detail is provided by a general experience.

It is likely that the journey she recalls took place in the early to mid-sixties when the war in Laos intensified. We perhaps forget that it was not only Vietnam that saw conflict in those years. And the consequences were severe, complicating relationships and changing lives. Hli never went to school, of any sort, never learned to read or write until some years after she arrived in the States, when she also took classes in English, of which she already knew a little. By then, this would have been her fourth language, having used one variety of Hmong at home, another with the village in which she eventually settled and Thai with people she came to call friends. Her introduction to English, when it



came, was life-changing.

What I had never known until I began the interviews focusing on this life of Eileen McHugh was that the people Hli had always referred to as her parents were in fact anything but mother and father. She herself has known that all along, but until recently had never shared it with anyone.

Her own family was killed. At least that is what she was told. She does not know where or when it happened. The woman she learned to call her mother told her the truth in an angry fit when, again, the child asked if she might go to school with the other children in the village. Hli can remember the words verbatim and, when recalled, without prompting, she automatically applies the tone, impatience and volume with which they were delivered at the time. “Understand this. We could have left you to die. For us, it would have been easier. Your father knew what he was doing. We all did. Your father was killed. Your mother was killed. Your little brother was killed. All of them, except you. I don’t know how you survived. We brought you with us. We have raised you. But the deal is that you work. You earn your keep. You do as we say. Understand!” And that is as far as Hli will go. Effectively she was a domestic slave and in return she got food and shelter, and no more.

She kept the house clean and the garden neat. She planted, weeded and harvested vegetables. She tended the fruit trees. She planted rice and other crops. She dug the soil and scared birds. She cleaned, mopped and swept the slatted bamboo floors each day. She milled grain, ground spices, cooked, washed and ironed. She collected firewood, kindled the fires, swept up and scattered the ashes. There was plenty to keep her busy without recourse to schooling.

They had no appliances in the house. Hli is unclear when they first started using electricity, but even when it came,

they used it only for light and had no washing machine, iron, stove or kettle, or anything else we label labour-saving. An iron was a heavy metal box with a turned wooden handle filled with smouldering charcoal. Grinding was done with stones smoothed for the purpose, and grain was milled between these heavy grinding stones, while pulses and spices were pounded in a mortar hollowed out from a tree trunk and pestle smoothed from a branch.

Water had to be drawn from streams and carried up the hill. She used a variety of containers, depending on how strong she felt and the domestic needs that day. There was a long pole with buckets on either end. There was a collection of plastic containers used originally for diesel, probably ten litres each, which she describes lashing to the same poles four at a time, two in front and two behind. But not every day needed forty litres of drawn water. Washing was usually done in the stream, it being easier for the clothes to go to the water. With determined and repeated wringing, the wet ones would be little more than a comfortable burden to carry home. The problem with water is that it does not get lighter as you walk, whereas drying clothes do. Carried water does get lighter if you spill some, of course, but then that leads to a beating from she-you-call-mother and another trip to the stream.

Cooking was on a wood fire or charcoal burner. They had their own stock of grain and vegetables. Meat and other things had to come from a shop, but Hli never went there and never dealt with money. Relations with anyone outside the home were the realm of she-you-called-mother and he-you-called-father, and both would warn Hli against social contact. These-you-call-parents were not around, obviously, when their servant went to the stream, worked in the fields and pruned the trees, so their admonitions of restraint

satisfied their own desire for control, but did not affect Hli's social life, which was as normal as it could be, without school. Though in this community she was not the only girl who stayed at home, the denial of inclusion merely heightened her sense of being an outsider.

In the late sixties she can recall the one occasion when she visited somewhere outside her village and its immediate environs. They went to Chiang Mai to see a doctor because she had cut her foot on a sharp stone on the path back from the stream. It needed some stitches and a bandage, and she was told not to stand or put weight on it for a week. It was during that week, she recalls, that there was a first show of blood from elsewhere in her body.

When she was smaller, she simply did not know that these people whom she called mother and father were strangers. A child takes reality for granted. She knew their names, but when the woman-she-called-mother revealed they had always been strangers, the name seemed to change when it was spoken. It could no longer be taken for granted and Hli was encouraged to regard her domestic slavery as privilege, without which life itself would dissolve. She knew they spoke the same dialect as herself, for obvious reasons, but it was different from others of what she was told were her own people, who were from the place where they now lived. She was an insider in the culture of her own home, where she was a slave, but always an isolated outsider when she left the house that enslaved her.

She also knew that questions were not welcome. She learned early on that even an implied question might lead to a beating, so she learned to put up, shut up and get on with whatever she was told to do. Other people came and went. There were regular visitors to the house, some of whom she recognised and sometimes even greeted. But the pattern was

always the same. The people-she-called-parents and the visitors would disappear behind a closed door. She would knock after a few minutes and serve tea, be admitted, set down her tray and then leave, closing the door quietly, always quietly behind her. The meetings could go on for hours but were usually short. The door would occasionally open and the words, "Hli, tea," would be shouted by the woman-she-called-mother. She would comply, knocking before opening the door. She was never tempted to listen. She asked no questions. She was always busy.

Hli is remarkable in that she will to this day offer no criticism of anyone. War killed her family. She was forced to flee for her own life. She crossed a border to a foreign place where she was never accepted. She was kept a virtual prisoner until her teens and carried out what was effectively forced labour every day of her youth. And yet, if asked to deliver judgment on this, her experience, her response is always a mere shrug, never any words, that says, "That's life." And she still calls them mother and father, by the way, but never uses their names.

Speculation is always dangerous because it is usually wrong. But I sense that Hli has also concluded that this couple had originally lived in the same village as her original family. And the events that killed her family had probably devastated the whole community. These-you-call-parents probably lost their own family, or indeed the families, for she does not know for sure that the people who saved her were in fact married. It could be that her adopted mother and father had survived partial destruction of their households as well herself. They had probably moved as a group. She has vague memories of a group of refugees, as she now calls them, but nothing is clear. What is clear to Hli is that without those two people she would not have survived and for that she

remains grateful to them. The least she could do to repay their sacrifice was to work. And so, she did.

But like all human beings, there comes a time when the individual emerges from dependency. There develops a need, not just a desire, to obey a force that separates, that demands the exploration of a personal path. Hli admits to having experienced these changes in herself in her early teens. Obviously, the onset of puberty changes our minds as well as our bodies but, until then, Hli had merely accepted her daily lot, completed her tasks, did as she was told. But then a hint of rebellion appeared. She would dawdle a while, not deliver the tea immediately when ordered by those people behind the closed door. Now they could wait until she had finished what she had been doing. And then there were other teenagers who would stop by the house for a chat. She would meet them on the road and sometimes walk through the village with them, but always returning promptly whenever she heard her name called from the house she called home. And then there was Don.

Hli and her adopted parents had lived there for a while, maybe a year or two, when a new face - and not the first white one - began to appear at the house. Don would arrive on a motorbike, not a luxury, shining advertisement on which an old man in America might hallucinate rejuvenation at the weekend, but a small two-stroke, beaten and battered, smelly, smoky and noisy. He came every week, sometimes twice, his approach announced by the groaning drone of his bike as it snaked through the mud of the unmade road up to the village. Hli used to feel a certain excitement when this foreigner came and would stop her chores to watch him arrive, switch off his engine and dismount in front of the house. He always seemed to wear the same clothes, Hli remembers, as if it might be a uniform. Always there was a

baseball cap, which he never took off, a tee shirt, jeans and flip-flops. The cap had Yankees written across the front and there was a brown label on his behind with the words Levi Strauss. The tee shirt was memorable for the teenager, because it had a strange sign, which she thought might have something to do with the white man's religion. She remembered it so well that sometime later she researched its origins and found, to her confusion, that it meant ban-the-bomb. It was a sentiment with which she agreed, wishing it might have applied to those that fell on her family in Laos. Soon afterwards, of course, she would become familiar with that and other hippie symbols, because in those years they were much in evidence in northern Thailand.

But the American who came to the village to visit the people Hli called parents was no hippie. For a start, he spoke the language and understood the culture, not only in the village, but also the national culture. Hli often saw him greeting and speaking with other men who came to the meetings and they were all Thai. The sound was a distinctly American version of whatever he spoke, but he was understood, and he understood others. But her parents reacted differently towards him. There was no banter, no overt greeting and no small talk. He arrived. They shared sawasdee and then shook hands with hello, cultures consciously crossing. Then they went behind that closed door and talked, but when Don came, there was none of the noisy, animated din that often seeped through the thin bamboo walls. Meetings with Don were often quiet and usually short. He would take tea but would rarely stay to eat and was usually not invited.

He had been coming to the house for a year or so, perhaps longer, when Hli remembers his asking about her. She did not herself speak and she remembers he specifically asked

about her as a 'daughter'. She was afraid to tell the truth and went along with whatever her parents-in-name-only said. She told him she was sixteen, which she might have been. To this day Hli remembers blushing that day and rushing away into the kitchen to hide her embarrassed laughter. She had lived the life of a near recluse, but she had sufficient contact with people her own age to be fully aware of how the world worked, though none of these boys had ever tried to touch her.

Don started bringing her presents. There was something strange about this and her parents-in-name-only were uncomfortable but had no language that could express their wish he should stop. He brought her pieces of cloth, trinkets from the market, sometimes sweets and drinks. At first, she thought he was just another customer for whatever it was that these regular meetings traded, whatever it was that these regular visitors took away in plastic bags, but Don only ever brought things. He never took anything away, which made him even stranger in Hli's eyes.

One day, when she heard the distant pop-pop of his bike, she felt both panic and elation. She remembers the day well, because she was alone in the house. Her parents had told her they were both going to Chiang Mai, which was unusual but not particularly special, and would be away all day. Surely, they would not have arranged a meeting with the American knowing they would be away in town. Mid-morning Don arrived with a parcel for her, which remained with its string tie undisturbed until over an hour after Hli had lost her virginity. He started coming more often, coinciding with her parents' more frequent absence and Hli developed a traffic light system for him - clothes drying in front of the house when the parents were out. She was pregnant less than three months later.

Obviously, there were as yet no outward signs, but Hli's mother-in-name-only knew the score. In a small house, where washing was done by hand and almost always by the maid, Hli, there had to be a place where things could accumulate. It was only a few weeks later when Hli was sorting through the soiled cloths that she noticed how her mother-in-name-only was taking extra careful note. That afternoon, Hli deliberately cut her finger while her mother was in the other room and then set about bloodying the cloth she had previously tucked into her waistband. This, once convincingly smeared, she added to the wash pile. Later that day, mother-in-name-only grabbed her by the forearms and stared at her. She drew up Hli's left hand and inspected the knotted strip that was still tied around her forefinger. "You cut your hand," Hli remembers her saying. It was far from a question. It was equally far from observation. "You cannot hide," said her mother-in-name-only, words that conveyed judgment as well as reality. "The extra mouth should be fed by its father."

Under five minutes later, still dry-eyed from the shock, Hli for the first time in her life had money in her hands as mother-in-name-only thrust a whole ten baht into her palm. "Get the bus to Chiang Mai. Ask in the bars opposite the main entrance for American Don. They will tell you what to do." And, just ten minutes later, with her things wrapped in a cloth she knotted across her shoulders, she was walking, now tearful, down the hill towards the main road. She had never before been alone so far from the house.

The bus took over two hours, stopping, it seemed, at almost every house along the way. It was crowded. There were people standing, jammed along the aisle, some carrying several bags, women with giant sacks of fruit, rice vegetables, cardboard boxes stuffed with trussed live



chickens, but next to Hli there was an empty seat onto the very end of which, occasionally, someone might perch, keeping a safe distance. No-one wanted to sit next to a Hmong. She had learned several new facts of life recently, but this caused a pain she could not have anticipated, a new kind of rejection for a girl whose life had been repeatedly rejected.

Alone in the town she had visited barely a handful of times, Chiang Mai seemed bewildering, noisy, dirty, crowded and dangerous, because the bicycles and tuk-tuks seemed to head wherever and whenever they wished. She was not used to looking for traffic, to getting out of the way, or even negotiating a path through a crowd. The main entrance to the bus station was easy to find, because there was only one, and a line of bars opposite had signs in Chinese as well as Thai. A man at the till, himself Chinese, refused even to acknowledge her question, refused apparently even to acknowledge her existence, but a woman sitting near the open front of the restaurant heard what she had asked and pointed to a bicycle rickshaw, spoke to the driver from where she sat and told Hli to give him one baht. It took ten minutes to make a couple of right turns and enter a long, quiet road with tall trees. The driver stopped at a gate and pointed.

There was a small garden with bougainvillea and small bushes in front of a low wooden house with a large roofed patio in front. There were steps up to the veranda and doors to rooms on the other three sides. Don's tee shirt and jeans were drying on a rack. She called his name and he appeared in the doorway to her left. She pointed at her belly and said one of the few English words she had already absorbed, "Baby." It was only then that she suffered a moment of doubt, because the man standing before her, she realised, was only vaguely familiar. This man was dressed like a monk, in

robes, flowing baggy trousers and sandals. He had a shaved head with a strange little ponytail of dark brown hair at the crown, held absurdly upright by a tight elastic band. It was Don, all right, but this was the first time she had seen him without his hat.

## **Don't ride a bike in flip-flops**

Art's ultimate beauty is that it's a mirror to life. But it's a mirror that only makes sense when it displays what we imagine for ourselves, inside ourselves. All we see is what we find there. If we don't look, there is nothing, we see nothing, and we keep our lives at a safe arm's length from experience, unengaged. Our senses receive their inputs whatever we do. It's called being alive. But seeing is not looking, hearing is not listening, touching is not feeling. The blind cannot see, the deaf cannot hear and perhaps the unconscious cannot feel, perhaps. But to be the unresponsive recipients of our senses is not living - that happens only when we discriminate between minimal arm's length existence and conscious experience. The human problem is always time. Everything we do, even the things we do not do, consume it at the same rate. Since we now use 'going forward' to mean 'in the future', we seem to deny that 'going backwards' does not change the relentless progress or the direction of time.

We also know that if we 'take time', or 'give time' or 'spend time', as if it were capital we might consume at a rate we might decide, we do more than see, hear or touch: we look, listen and feel. An everyday object, studied, drawn, felt in the fingers is uniquely significant, newly important, never to be experienced again in this way, for time progresses, and changes. A view absorbed reveals elements we never realised we could see. Thus enshrined, our lives have been changed. We can never see, hear or touch these things the same way again, once we have looked, listened or felt.

Travel does this for us, if we travel with our senses open to new experience. Repetition of the expected promotes only expected results. It is the personal comfort zone, mental, rather than physical, that provides the border that travel must

cross. And if we stay within the confines of an expected experience, we have been nowhere. And this is why, when we do travel, our senses are newly alert. We notice more, though we see with the same eyes for the same length of time. We look at things in new light, and thus time stretches as we absorb, interpret and understand what we feel.

And so it was that our artist, Eileen, experienced for the first time the changed mental state that comes with new self-awareness. In her case it was prompted by her first real experience of travel, which happened to be northern Thailand in nineteen seventy-two. It could have been anywhere and at any time, but for Eileen it was then and there that she first sensed those crucial perceived changes in the self. But then none of us in isolation knows whom we are, so we project our inner feelings outwards and ascribe sensation to the changed surroundings that have challenged.

For all concerned, those few weeks were life changing. For Eileen, the change would be fundamental, Charlotte would experience true adulthood for perhaps the first time and Hli would newly confirm that nothing much ever changes. And Don? Well, Don would change too, but no-one except Don would read how. Don was on the journey as well and, if anything, he was the driver. And little Touhue? Well, he was being taken along for the ride, perhaps like the rest of us, as an eager passenger.

Eileen's goal in art was to assemble. Objects have histories. They come with origins and have their own stories. Joined or juxtaposed they create conflict or counterpoint. Their differing associations demand we accommodate, choose, cope, cooperate or reject. To remain neutral is to avoid engagement, to allow our personal vulnerabilities to preclude participation. This is precisely why it can be so easy for viewers to dismiss abstraction, for the challenge of

engagement it poses is capable of exposing how weakly we are bound to our world and just how proximate are the limits of our own psychological comfort.

So, piecing together this holiday month is hard because, for the first time in this remade life, we have multiple actors who felt, and still feel, perhaps, differently about what happened. These people shared the same events, but reacted differently, responded individually, extracted contrasting, competing and even conflicting experience. Like Eileen's sculpture, I assemble these strands, juxtapose them and attempt interpretation. So, Eileen, Charlotte, Hli and Don mingle into a confusion of memory. I, Mary Reynolds, am not there, of course, because I remained as yet unnamed by any of them.

"Don't ride the bike in flip-flops."

"You do."

"That's different."

There followed a diatribe from Eileen. Men. Always know best. Make up rules as they go along... Rules for women. Not for men.

"You could always take the bus."

"That takes hours."

He shrugged. What did he care? It was a favour anyway.

"Why doesn't Hli come as well?"

"You can't get three on a bike."

"You can around here. I see it every day. She could go on the bus."

"That takes hours. You can't ride the bike in flip-flops."

Communication had become something similar to table tennis. It happened at speed but seemed to have little consequence. And then the next rally would start, indistinguishable at face value from what had gone before. Eileen and Don would repeat the ritual each time either

suggested another trip to the north.

Both Eileen and Charlotte seemed to be living emotionally heightened realities, but realities that were diverging. Charlotte had become interested in history and Buddhism. She had been tramping the streets, noting and sketching architectural features, classifying chedis by their stylistic origin, Thai, Khmer, Sri Lankan, Burmese and reading everything she could find about the rise and fall of empires, dynasties, kingdoms and religions. She had paid for a guide to take her to Wat Phra That Doi Suptep, not expecting much more than a good view and a tourist shop. Pundit, the twenty-three-year-old student whom she employed, was gentle, learned and patient. He was also quite attractive, Charlotte concluded, as much as ten seconds after their first meeting. He made that experience special and she had spent all day asking questions, noting answers, engaging in conversation and gradually becoming more comfortable in the company of this young man.

The temple itself surpassed all expectations. The great gilded stepped stupa was so far over the top of her preconceptions that she was unable to relate to it in any other way than the way it demanded, as itself. She learned about prayer wheels, about the differences between Theravada and Mahayana, all of which she wrote down in full, longhand. Her sketchbooks were starting to overflow, and she had already bought more. Two weeks into her stay, she had already amassed enough ideas and material to see her through her third year at college.

She spent hours sketching the stupas around town. Her particular favourites were the Burmese, precisely because they were so plain. They were even more interesting when ruined, their collapsed walls exposing the plain earth infill, as if accumulated history, being the planet itself, had started

to leak out of fractured human pretence.

Though Eileen liked to visit temples and historical sites, she was generally happy with a single experience of each, never really seeing the point, given they had photos, of the return trips that Charlotte insisted were essential. She preferred to watch people, to note and list aspects of culture, especially those that contrasted with her expectations. This extended to artefact, textiles, pottery, kitchen utensils, food, furniture and, above all, shops devoted to tourist tat, all of which she found captivating.

The cultural aspect of her interest was immediately heightened when Don took her for the first time to visit to a Hmong village, just a day or two after they had met in the café near the bus station. She exposed a whole roll of film, which would cost a fortune to develop and print. What she did not do, which both she and Charlotte knew she had to do, was be systematic, academic, to sketch, to develop an argument, to construct an analysis via research, example and application that could become a work to resubmit for her failed course before the end of September. Her style was forever flirtatious, picking up ideas, tossing them around and then moving on. Exploration for Eileen was breadth of experience, whereas for Charlotte it was depth.

Both of them took up yoga, which began to occupy quite a lot of time, and then more still of each day. And both of them made trips to the required tourist sites - orchid farms, umbrella makers, leather shops, potteries, sari shops. They both bought local textiles and dressed accordingly, except when they wandered through the town, where they found reaction to Western women in Thai dress was less than favourable. But around the house they dressed local and, with a little help from Hli, learned without words how to do things the right way, how to secure a sash, how to make a

headdress, how to choose complementary garments. And thus, the two women began to diverge on this, their shared trip. For the first time since leaving London, they began to spend some time alone, pursuing their individual priorities.

They found and shared their elephants, of course, but these disappointed. The choreography was predictable, the experience clearly a repeated tourist show. Once you had understood the difference between a pusher and piler, there was not much more than a posed photo of a ride that did not happen.

What was different was a visit to the villages north of there, villages of the kind where Hli had lived, Don told them. Charlotte was captivated, but once was enough. Eileen wanted to go every day, but Don advised against it. What he did offer was a pillion ride to the area when he went there to meet people, though he would drop her at a pre-arranged place and then come back later to pick her up. It was fine with him, as long as she didn't mind waiting until he was finished. They designated a meeting place and a time, by a small wooden shop overflowing with plastic buckets, sacks of rice, spices, tins of sardines, cigarettes and Coca-Cola, exactly the kind of place where Eileen could spend time if he was late.

"People are basically trusting, but if you go there too often, they start to think you want something."

"But I would not be going there like a tourist."

"You are a tourist."

"So, what is it that makes what you do different?"

"I speak the language. And I have been going there for a while. They know me. I am involved in community relations."

"Like an anthropologist." Eileen mouthed the word without really knowing what it meant. Don did not respond



in any way.

He was still visiting the area regularly. He still had work to do. If Eileen were to go with him, she should not try to interact with anyone with whom he himself might meet. He would drop her off a good ten minutes ride back towards the main road and pick her up when he came down. She should stay near the road, if possible, and he would sound the bike's horn when he returned.

"Will I hear it?"

"It's pretty quiet up there. You'll hear."

He would go alone to his destination, but he knew a guide or two in other villages, people who would take her walking in the forest, along the dykes between rice paddies and even through the village to meet and greet. Many of the locals were used to similar experience in the area he had in mind and many people there had some English. She guessed correctly he was describing a tourist village experience, or words to that effect. The guides charged a fee and each time she offered a few extra coins. It was staged, but it was all new.

"If they ask you how you came there, just say you are staying with Don."

"Don?"

"Just Don. And don't ride the bike in flip-flops."

"You do."

"That's different."

It became a ritual, a joke they played out each time Eileen hitched a lift. A couple of times he had explained how he was used to the terrain, that he knew what he was doing, that he had the bike to hold on to. Passengers could finish anywhere if they came off. He would probably be able to cling onto the bike. Anyway, if I get injured that's my problem. If you get injured, then you miss your bus to Bangkok and your flight.

Wear shoes on the bike. Wear trousers and cover your arms. And always put on the helmet. Skin is precious and there is no freedom with a head injury, no liberation with broken bones, he said.

And, of course, they smoked. All three of them smoked, and regularly. Hli did not join them in the evenings. Don said that she liked to get Touhue to bed and then leave him to sleep undisturbed. And that always happened better when she slept alongside the little boy.

Don was generous. He seemed to have an unlimited supply of weed, hash, dope, shit or whatever was the currently cool way of labelling it. He would never take any money and, indeed, insisted they should never try to buy the stuff around town. The chances were, he told them, that the guy you were dealing with would be a policeman. One day he would sell to you. Another he would shop you. There were lots of people around taking advantage of the travellers and there seemed to be an unending supply of naïve suckers who took the bait.

Eileen and Charlotte used to joke with one another, holding up their hands and saying "Peace, brother," whenever he simply shrugged and stayed silent at their offers to share costs. Don would never participate in any of their jokes, but he also said nothing to discourage them. Throughout, he remained separate, slightly aloof, slightly parental in his dealings with the girls, who clearly were at least ten years younger than him.

He came and went. He spent most of the day away from the house. He would offer a lift to Eileen - no flip-flops! - at most twice a week and never mentioned what he was doing during the rest of each day, or where he went after dropping her off for her village visit. They did try to ask questions. It was not that he avoided answering, more that he seemed not

to acknowledge that any question had been asked. He was capable of projecting a persona that declared itself above examination, as if he were merely part of the landscape, a feature that was undeniably real and experienced, but whose presence became mere assumption, intangible. He spoke few words and offered nothing of himself beyond the public face he shared with everyone. He remained generous with his accommodation, food, beer and dope, but, of course, it was Hli who did the work.

Hli cooked. Hli cleaned. Hli shopped. Hli made all the beds and did all the washing. She ironed, swept, did the garden. She looked after her son, but rarely played with him, at least not in the way Eileen and Charlotte would have expected a Western mother to have done. They themselves had spent many hours with the little boy, but neither of them had truly mastered the tones of his name, so they had taken to calling him Tony and he soon started to respond to that name as well as his own. In fact, Tony became the big hit of the holiday, the aspect they could share on equal and similar terms. The words ‘gender stereotype’ would probably not have crossed their lips in that era, and they would have vehemently rejected any accusation they were mothering the boy, but language was no barrier to what they did and all involved took comfort. He was soon learning more English words, but he never mastered ‘Eileen’. It stubbornly remained ‘Hli’.

The travellers had debated whether Don and Hli were a couple. But then, Hli looked so young... They had been there over a week by then and they were still not sure. Hli always went to bed very early, as soon as an evening meal was ready. She and Tony seemed to eat in at the back of the house and at different times, never with them. By dark, they had already disappeared into the rooms in the rear extension of the house,

which looked like it might have been added as an afterthought. It certainly had been built after the rest of the house which was otherwise symmetrical. There was an outside door, but Hli and Tony always accessed the space using an internal corridor that led from the rear of the main living area. There was a door that could close off the whole extension and it was thus used every night. When it was open, it revealed three doors, which the girls assumed were two separate small rooms and another bathroom. Don stated from day one that this was definitively Hli's area and that they should respect her space by not going through the doorway. This they did. And never once did Hli invite them in there.

Don tended to sit with them for a smoke in the evenings, but by then, after eating, they were usually out front, on the covered patio and the girls' room and bathroom were accessed from there. Don would retire into a room on the other side of the patio, but the girls had noticed after a couple of nights that he generally stayed up after they had gone to bed and that his room's light stayed on until late. They also peeped inside one day and saw there was a bed in the room but noticed also there was a door linking that room to the back extension, so he could access that rear corridor without coming back through the patio and living room. He had been evasive when they asked if Hli was his wife. All he would say is that he had offered Hli and Touhue a place to stay when Hli was having family problems. He did not answer when asked if the problems arose because of the birth of the child. "Hli lives here," was as far as he would go. Don would not be drawn. Hli could speak no English, they assumed, and little Tony was too young to be concerned with such things.

A chat about their experience thus far, their luck, their interests, their futures, led Eileen and Charlotte, one

afternoon, to spend half an hour talking about Don, who at the time was away 'making visits'. They both remarked how little he said. He was thoroughly knowledgeable when it came to facts about culture, history, language, in fact anything, except himself and people close to him. On these things he remained close to silent.

Their frustration at not being able to communicate with Hli was shared and both of them expressed some surprise that she claimed to have no English whatsoever, despite sharing a house with Don. But then Don seemed to speak Thai and Hmong fluently, so perhaps there had never been any need for Hli to learn a language she would never use outside the house. They still were disposed to the idea she was a full-time maid or housekeeper, but sometimes her behaviour, especially some of her exchanges with Don in whatever language they were speaking, suggested she might occupy a status above servant. It was a matter of interest, but not one of preoccupation.

"Don't ride a bike in flip-flops."

"Why doesn't Hli come up to the villages with you?"

"Because there's only room for two on the bike."

"But if I wasn't here, would she come with you?"

"No."

"Why?"

"She is not from the area where I take you. She comes from a place much further up."

"But does she go there?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Because she lives here."

It was like repeatedly going round the same roundabout not being able to read the signs. There was no arguing with the analysis and there was to be no further discussion. Don

had a way of bringing exchanges to a definitive close. This is where you are. This is how things are done. That is how things are going to stay. End of argument. What went before is none of your business and Hli's privacy must be respected. Eileen and Charlotte both assumed there had to be some kind of family tension, some risk to her security if she returned to her home area, but they never had more than their own invention as evidence.

After two weeks, Charlotte was meeting regularly with Pundit and she had even attended a seminar in the university at his suggestion. It focused on an eclectic discussion of how Buddhism might facilitate world peace. Charlotte was effusive about the day, but Eileen wasn't listening when she spoke.

Eileen thought she might make a sculpture out of a Hmong headdress, sewing in anything she might find along the edge of the cloth, possibly to illustrate a history of the people. She started work and even asked Hli to look at it. The reaction was clear. Hli thought she was an idiot. She was even slightly offended that this Western woman should make something that was of her culture and then try to change it. She could not express the idea in words, of course, but there was no need for words when she started removing all the items that Eileen had carefully included to create her work. Hli tut-tutted and shook her head as each one came away.

They spent more time playing with Touhue-Tony. Neither Eileen nor Charlotte made any comment about his Eurasian features, probably because they were unused to noticing such distinctions. Hli's dark skin was mentioned once or twice, but then Eileen pointed out that the people she had met out of town had very variable skin colour, probably depending on how much time they spent in the sun. Eileen had seen some people working in the fields who were almost black.

She had asked her guide and he said they were from the same village as the other people she had seen, but these people worked outside all day. They concluded that Hli had previously worked in the fields. Tony, on the other hand, spent almost all of his time in shade, so his skin was pale.

A *modus operandi* had developed. Habits had begun to solidify. Charlotte always went to bed earlier than either Eileen or Don, at least a couple of hours, usually more, after Hli and Tony had disappeared. They smoked and talked, or perhaps it could be said they smoked, and Eileen talked. Don nodded occasionally, provided fact, but would not be drawn on anything. Eileen did ask him what kind of work he was doing. He mentioned the word research, and then the word academic, but gave no detail.

And then Charlotte and Eileen had their argument.

“What college work have you done?”

“Still thinking.”

“You’re going to fail again.”

“I have an idea.”

“Tell me.”

“You’ll see.”

In what we have met thus far, Hli has been a recipient of others’ thought. But at the time she was very much an active, if quiet, participant in events. The two girls had by then assumed that Don and Hli were a couple, but still they had no definitive confirmation on which to base this opinion. Of course, the girls were out for much of the day, so they only saw Hli for an hour or two before she retired as soon as night fell. But even when they stayed in for a morning or afternoon, they still had little contact with Hli, who was forever busy with domestic jobs. Don would neither confirm nor deny. Don would not even be drawn. He did make it clear that such detail should not really concern them.

“It depends on what you mean,” was Don’s much-used answer, which he always left hanging, and they did not pursue.

Hli gave Charlotte cooking lessons, mainly during the hours that Eileen was away with Don on their visits to the north. She did try on several occasions to communicate with her about things other than the ingredients and utensils they were handling, but Hli would never be drawn, even into sign language and still they shared no verbal common ground.

“She was very interested,” Hli said of Charlotte, many years later. “She wanted to learn everything about the food, the culture, the religion. I could do the food. Eileen was different. She could not concentrate. She said she was interested in everything, but it did not last. She could not apply herself. She would do things for a few minutes and then move on to something else. I tried to show her how to make a Hmong headscarf, but she did not want to learn. She always wanted to change things before she had learned what they should be. I tried to say, ‘It’s like this’, but she would just do things the way she wanted.”

Almost before they had noticed the passing of days, they had just a week left, and Charlotte knew Eileen had done nothing towards her resubmission. Hli remembers their argument that night, not only because it woke her up and caused her to leave her room in the dark, but because she also had insufficient English to understand what was being said and she was genuinely concerned that someone was about to start a fight. Charlotte does remember the gist.

“We had a massive row. Eileen was high on dope. She was incoherent. She seemed to be spending more of her time like that by then. We’d been smoking and we went to bed. But I had not had much. I was all too aware of what was happening. I am not sure Eileen was. I went to bed before



her. And then she came in. Beer. Dope. Too much. I woke up when she closed the door. I told her she was making things harder for herself. I demanded she show me her sketchbooks. She had told me over dinner that very evening how well she was getting on with her ideas and I said I wanted to see the evidence. She almost threw a couple of books at me and I had a look. And, as I thought, she had nothing of any substance. We went through the whole thing - should have stayed in London, should have done the work before we left, should have done the work in the term instead of planning the trip. Eileen blamed the tutor, saying he had no idea what she was trying to do. It was a real row. When Hli appeared at the door I was so embarrassed I got up and went to sit outside on the patio. Leave her to stew, is what I kept saying to myself. I then got bitten to death by mosquitoes. The bites turned into sores. Took me weeks to get rid of the scabs and blotches.

It was the next day that the real bombshell came. Eileen disappeared after breakfast without speaking to me. She went off alone and I did not see her for the rest of the day. I went out in the afternoon. I came back and, when Don said he was going for a nap, I did the same. It was around five when Eileen came into the room saying she was looking for her camera. She picked it up and immediately left. I followed her. And there was her work. *Don't ride a bike in flip-flops*, she called it. She was already taking pictures when I first saw it. She took another five shots before I spoke.

It was Don's shining new Honda, parked in the drive. There was a notice stuck across the handlebars saying, "Do not touch." All the way round the tread of both tyres she had stuck - I really mean stuck - a line of old flip-flops, multicoloured, all facing the same way. I suppose it was funny. It was the bike that was wearing the flip-flops. Don

came out to see what was causing the commotion. He was absolutely livid. “What the fuck...”, I remember he began, but was unable to say any more for a couple of minutes. “How did you stick them on?”

“They’ll come off.”

“Too right they will.”

“Not until I’ve finished.”

“And when might that be?”

The bike had an electric start, which was not universal in those days. The key was in the ignition and she flicked it. To this day, I don’t know what she was trying to do, trying to prove. Somehow, when she had lifted the bike and pushed it around to get at the tyres, she must have clicked it into gear. It lurched forward with Eileen holding the handlebar, which twisted to the left because she didn’t move as the bike lurched. It stalled, of course, but she tried to hold on as it overbalanced. She fell with the bike on top of her.

“You stupid...”

Half the flip-flops had already come off. The others were well and truly stuck. Hli burst into laughter and went back to her room, clearly amused but also embarrassed. Then Eileen screamed.

“My foot’s bleeding.”

She had cut her bloody foot. It wasn’t a bad cut, but it bled. Cuts do. I called her an idiot. We found some cloth and wrapped it round her left ankle and foot. It bled quite a bit and she had to limp up to the chair on the patio. She sat with her leg up on a stool. Don spent the next couple of hours scraping glue off his tyres.

We had a major heart to heart. We sat there, just the two of us, with Don along the drive, probably within hearing range. We had to work out how we could get out of this mess. I made her promise to do some serious work towards

her resubmission, starting the next morning and I also offered to help. It was clearly painful for her, emotionally as well as physically. It was also perhaps the first time in my life I had a real disagreement with another adult, one that was not teacher-pupil, parent-child, something where a major difference between equals had to be addressed and solved.

The next morning, I found her back with Hli resurrecting the idea of making a Hmong headdress as a sculpture. It was off the wall. Eileen made some drawings and she said she would go out collecting materials to include. She set off, but immediately came back, saying her foot felt uncomfortable. The next day she worked around the house and said she had made good progress, at least with the sketches. We went to bed after the usual evening smoke and chat, and I felt the air had cleared a little. Don said there had been no lasting damage to the bike and that we should forget the whole thing.

Before morning, however, Eileen woke me saying her foot was throbbing. I suggested she bathe it in warm water, which she did. By morning, not only the foot, but also her lower leg as far as the knee had turned red and looked swollen.

We showed Don. "You've got blood poisoning. You'll have to get it treated. Don't ride a bike in flip-flops." No-one found it funny this time.

"We have to travel back to Bangkok the day after next".

Don shrugged. "We'll see."

We did see. The hospital admitted her. For twenty-four hours, she was delirious. I spoke to her, but all she said was nonsense.

"She can't travel," Don said.

For a day there was little improvement. On the third morning, she seemed more like herself, but her leg was still swollen, painful and red. They said the antibiotics would

need another three or four days to bring the infection under control. She was not in any danger, Don told me. It would heal but needed more time. He went on to say that it needed to heal, otherwise she might lose the leg. I told him he had a strange idea of danger, or possibly an even stranger concept of safety.

Some days earlier I had already bought our bus tickets for Bangkok and I had the same agent get our air tickets, so I was all tooled up and ready to go. We had no more money left. I could not get any refund because I had bought the cheapest tickets and they were non-transferable. My dad had sent the money I had asked for and it had covered the tickets, but we had literally nothing left.

I remember that last visit to see her. I am still not sure to this day whether it was the delirium returning or whether it was all true.

“We have to be on the bus this afternoon.”

She was strangely silent. Then she looked at me long and hard, straight in the eye, which was unusual for Eileen. It was as if she was preparing herself for an experience she was about to savour. “I’ve slept with Don,” she said. “More than once.”

I was speechless. I grew up that day. I had never before really understood what adults were talking about when they spoke of trust. That day I learned. I had never before understood the word betrayal. Now I did. I said nothing. I couldn’t. I didn’t shout. I didn’t cry. I just left.

I went back to the house, packed and spent a couple of hours back in the same café we used on the day we arrived. I did not see Don. I did not see Hli. I never said goodbye to Tony. I bought a postcard in the bus station, addressed it McHugh, Weaver’s Rise, Crofton, West Yorkshire and wrote, “There has been an accident with a motorbike. Eileen

will not make it. Her artistic life is probably over.”

I meant Eileen could not travel and would therefore fail her course. I probably wasn't thinking clearly. I understand now that it was read differently when it arrived through the McHugh's front door, after most of the street had already seen it. I couldn't remember the house number.

## Tony

My name is Tony. You have met me already, but you may not associate the toddler in northern Thailand with the owner of a string of New Jersey care homes that is me. It's not a long story, but it did take over thirty years to develop and, though it might have happened faster, it didn't. The other thing you need to know about me at the start is that it was I who wrote this book, though I am not its author. There is a difference, you see, between thought and action. The writing is in the thought, while the physical placement of ink on paper, of fingers on keyboard is mere transcription, though as you will appreciate I did far more than merely copy dictation.

Tony is perhaps not enough of an introduction. People feel happier if they have a surname. Well, you can have it - Appelbaum. At last that is what it says on my personal documentation, my passport, my bills and my company's name. If I am dealing with people from our community, I usually use my mother's name and I know, because I put all of these words on paper, that I have kept that to myself throughout. Mary Reynolds, if that is what we currently call her, never knew it, though she met my mother on many occasions, in fact close to every day and intimately for over fifteen years, though she would surely not remember any of those encounters. What she may have felt is an eternal unknown.

Appelbaum fulfils its purpose. Confusion would abound if I regularly had to use that other surname, but thankfully it remains unmentioned most of the time, because there are very few members of our community hereabouts. So, Tony Appelbaum it is.

Mary should not have survived. She should have been

killed by the original trauma, but she wasn't. She should have died during her initial hospitalisation, but she didn't. She certainly should not have lived through, or even had to live through that journey, but she did. She should not have lived all those years. But she breathed. And not only did she breathe - on occasions with assistance, it has to be said - she even managed to recover some movement in her hands and enough speech to identify herself, though with enduring difficulty and complete misunderstanding. I say speech and movement, but, as you will see, such words may be my own extrapolation.

The title, *Eileen McHugh – a life remade by Mary Reynolds*, incidentally, came from me. She would never have used Mary Reynolds as the name for the writer, for she never knew that name. I chose it because that is the only name I ever called its author for the two decades or so that I knew her. Habits are hard to break. I never knew her as anything else.

Indeed, when my pop, by mistake, in a rare moment when he lost concentration, first mentioned that name, Eileen McHugh, I thought he was describing someone he knew as a child. It was my mom who, only after much prompting and even threats, admitted she recognised the name and provided a few, though minimal details. She is still afraid to talk. Mary Reynolds herself did not even recognise her own name, because she had been comatose when it was invented by those who facilitated her travel, people that certainly I and, I think also my mom, never even met. We have no idea who they were and, rest assured, we never will.

But I have still not finished my introduction. Tony, Tony Appelbaum, is my name and I am grateful for the opportunities my dad provided. I live in New Jersey, an hour or so from Manhattan - that's all! - in leafy suburbia in a

spread-out town of parking lots, malls, office complexes, open spaces, small apartment blocks and endless rows of neat houses with open plan gardens. A comfy suburbia surrounds. The town centre seems to have more churches than people and as many different denominations. None of them attract me, of course, because I am not and never have been a Christian, which rather sets me apart hereabouts, so it is something I never advertise. Over the years my separateness from the local mainstream has proved more of an advantage than a hindrance. Many questions I could never have answered have simply never been asked because, like most of my compatriots, we became part of a collective memory loss, confined to an internalised space that was kept locked, and judged best left undisturbed. If someone looks quizzically at my features when I tell them my name, all I have to say is, "My pop was a GI," and the subject invariably changes. It's not wholly accurate, but it captures the spirit.

As I have already said, I am in business. I own four large care homes with eighty-five residents, as many staff and many millions of turnover. I am not trying to show off, but I also have a substantial family home in its own grounds that I share with my wife, three kids and my mom, a private plane, several cars, a boat for summer weekends at the coast and a substantial investment portfolio. My mom is Hli, whom you have already met. Apart from college field work, I have never lived apart from my mom, but my pop, well he's another story. I would say I never knew him, though I met him many times. But I owe him everything, though it was my mom who started the business, almost by default. Unfortunately, this story only makes sense if told backwards. This is where I stand today at the end of over two decades of investment and expansion after I took over ownership and management of my mom's business.



Mom has been in this business from the start, all the time she has lived in the US. I arrived only after college, though I lived in it before then. I did a business degree and then an MBA, which is around par for my generation. It was hardly Ivy League, but then New York has more than one university and I went to two of them.

In earlier years, I attended a private school in the city, first a prep school and then the associated high, travelling in and out each day by train, like a commuter, a habit I continued throughout my college years, so I could always live at home with my mom. Pop was happier if I stayed out of the mainstream, away from people who might ask questions or get too involved with the family background. If you pay for things you can get precisely what you want. It's a philosophy I have applied to the services we offer in our residences.

Even during my school and college years, home was pretty extensive, with more than enough room for the two of us, my pop, when he stayed over, and a separate wing for Mary, who was with us through into the nineties. That was the deal, part of the agreement that brought us here and we have had no complaints. Everything we have, everything we have become we owe to Mary. She has effectively provided for us throughout. Well, ultimately it was my pop, of course, but he always wanted Mary to have the very best care, the best money could buy, and the best my mom could provide.

When I started college, my mom assumed it would not be long before I left the fold, so she took in another resident. It started as a favour, requested by another member of our community. There are not many of us here and so it is very hard to find anyone who speaks the language. And when people get older, they find it ever harder to operate in a second language that was learned during their adult life. They tend to revert to what they absorbed as a child,

especially if their short-term memory starts to fade. My mom could hardly say no. We had plenty of space and the favour in question came with a legacy that provided guaranteed funding while the old lady lived. It was an arrangement that provided a model for our future. She lived for several years with us and when she died mom felt she needed something to keep herself occupied and took in someone else to occupy the vacated space. I was in college at the time and I suggested mom register as a proper business to make sure we got the tax advantages. I spoke to my pop and he agreed. He obviously saw an opportunity to get me started in something that would sustain me after I graduated.

Money, you see, has never been a problem. We have gone up and down in the world like everyone else, but we have never lived the wrong side of privilege. With my pop's money, we bought another property and I took over a business that has since grown steadily and profitably. Mary, who was with us from the beginning, still lived in the same facility that was set aside for her back in the seventies, a room in our original house, which now forms the smallest of my company's four sites. Mom and I still visit regularly. There is a grave in the grounds

It was my pop who gave me a head start. Of that I am clear. I owe him literally everything. But it was not via money that he had the greatest influence on my life. Of course, I owe him my very existence, but after that he gave me a start in the English language.

But the original donation was not enough. I do remember those years when I was new to the world, the years we lived in Thailand. I do recall that my pop was what you might call 'around', but also that he was also away much of the time. The person who really gave me the language that has been my passport to a life was Mary Reynolds, who at the time I

called Mary McHugh, who in fact was really called Eileen. Confused? Well I wasn't. I was simply privileged. I had two moms, an Asian mom who cooked, washed, ironed for me and gave me Hmong and Thai, and an European one who taught me English, read to me, and, one-to-one, delivered what was probably the best pre-school education in history. When I arrived in the US and started school, I could speak, read and write more fluently in English than anyone else in the class, despite the Yorkshire accent. If I am totally honest, I don't remember much of those times, but I do vividly remember the patient, caring and funny woman who educated me.

During those years in Thailand, my pop did not live with us full time. It was often only three or four days each week. But, unless he was out of the house on business, he did spend most of the day with me, and so most of the day with Mary. We were like a family of three, Mary, Don and I, while my mom worked elsewhere in the house. My pop told me years later that he had always wanted a son and it seemed that I qualified. At that time, he was just my pop and he and I communicated in English. I spoke Hmong with my mom, of course, but as soon as my pop appeared, he always insisted I speak only English to him, which I did, always practising each day what Mary had taught me. The result was always a smile and a hug, coupled with almost a celebration of my achievement, which is why I remember those days so clearly and with uncomplicated affection. And it was Mary's teaching that gave me that bond with my pop. I also learned Thai, because there were other kids nearby.

We left our home in Chiang Mai suddenly, after the attack. On that next morning, my pop said we had to go. It was a day I can still remember in enough detail to relive it, because it is still the only time when I ever heard my mom

shout in anger, but all my pop did was repeat that we had to go. There was not even time to say goodbyes.

My mom has told me the story many times. She repeats herself these days. And it's the only part of my childhood that she is willing to relate. The rest stays blank. On that particular day, there were to be no questions and no discussion. We were leaving. We had to move, and quickly. We had nothing to pack, neither possessions nor papers, so we were ready to leave before even my pop could set the process in motion. We were ready, as instructed and we moved out of our house. I don't know where we went in the interim, but we had to wait there a week before word came, and then things moved at breakneck speed. We travelled south and, for the first time, I saw a city. These days, if I ask, my pop explains how there was paperwork to sort out, and also Mary could not be moved immediately. We had lived for some years with dad in that wooden house in Chiang Mai. I was very small, but I still remember the garden where I played, the warm sun, the rain that fell like a dam-burst, the smell of the earth, the colour of the flowers. It was a paradise of childhood and Mary McHugh was at its centre.

Mary treated each day like a school day. My mom would do breakfast in the kitchen, but I simply could not wait to finish, so I could find out what Mary had planned. We would look at plants in the garden, draw them, paint them. She would take me for walks, pointing out objects, naming them, collecting them. And then back at home we would build castles and make-believe houses and towns from whatever we found. She would teach me the names of things and show me how to write the words. We had a game of sticky labels, where I would write the words, and she would stick them onto the wrong objects. I would then have to peel them off and reattach them, so they matched. It sounds stupid, I know,

but when you find a dirty old shoe labelled ice cream and Mary looking like she was about to lick it, you can begin to imagine what fun we had. And all the time, Mary maintained her smiling, caring, reassuring manner that I later called maternal. Mary was teaching me in a way that made learning and living a constant joy.

At the time she was a young woman with lots of energy and she gave me most of it, alongside almost constant attention, so much that I wonder whether she did anything else apart from look after me during those years. My mom rarely speaks of those times. I have to admit that my mom rarely speaks at all. She has had the kind of life where today is all that matters. She says she has lived that way all her life and now has neither the energy nor the inclination to change. As for those years in Chiang Mai, her mantra is that she spent so much of her time working she can remember nothing, other than the chores she did each day. My mom does not change.

And then, suddenly again, we left Thailand. Mary was in hospital and my pop was in poor shape as well, but still mobile. We had to wait a few days to get our papers in order and it is only since I began this book that I came to realise how my pop arranged things. And then we left for Bangkok, mom and I, a few days before my pop and Mary.

For me personally it proved no problem once I had grown used to the idea. For me it was just an adventure, where I would meet more people who spoke like my pop and Mary. I was already being brought up as an American kid, albeit one who spoke Hmong much of the time and Thai to his friends, and English with a weird Yorkshire accent. Suddenly, I was heading off to the States, but I trusted my pop and I can specifically remember his taking me on one side, looking me straight in the eye and saying that in fact I

was coming home. But it was still somewhere I had never been. It's easy to confuse a child, but for a child it's also easy to learn something new, to adapt, to change. Things were different for mom. But my pop said she shouldn't worry. He said things would work out, that she would soon get used to things being different and that we would always be provided for. He kept his word. As for my mom, even after four decades in the States, she still speaks to me exclusively in Hmong.

It was not long before we had a routine. I went to school, mom cared for Mary, my pop came to visit each week, often more than once, and took me out for dinner every Friday in New York City to places like P J Clarke's on Columbus Avenue, where it seemed that every table was occupied by estranged dads with their divorced children. He clearly wanted time with me away from my mom. To this day, I don't really know why he insisted we go there, but I think he was just checking up on things, being the pop he could not be the rest of the time. He made sure I did my schoolwork, checked my books, read my teachers' comments, made sure I was not getting into mischief. I think he also wanted time away from his own family home, wherever that was. At that time, I had no idea where he lived, but he obviously wanted time alone with me. It was his way of keeping a certain distance. I think, as well, he wanted me to get used to being with and amongst other Americans, which the confines of home could not achieve. When he drove me home, he would say a quick hello to my mom, and he would always look in on Mary, but there was never any change.

Pop was brilliant when it came to answering questions I had about my schoolwork. He was a great teacher, never just telling me something, but always sending me away equipped to find things out for myself. He was a bright guy. I never

knew until just over ten years ago that he had a PhD in South-East Asian Studies from Harvard. When I learned that, things made much more sense, even became obvious. On the other hand, my pop was silent if I asked anything about that previous life in Thailand. He would just say, “Ask your mom.”

My mom, Hli, was originally from Laos. She and her family had to move. It was wartime and there really was no option. They settled in northern Thailand near people who spoke the same, or at least a similar language, but they were always outsiders there. I have a couple of pictures of my mom, taken just after they arrived in Thailand. I think they were taken by my pop, but I am not sure, and my mom says she can’t remember. But she can. She still doesn’t speak of those times. She tries hard not to remember them and now completely identifies with her American citizenship, despite the constant challenge of speaking English.

But in the photos, I see a young woman dressed in a costume I now call tribal, for some reason. It’s hard to think that very small and beautiful young woman, not smiling, looking surprised but confident, proud, even resentful of the attention, under an elaborate headdress, is the same woman with whom I have shared a house for over forty years. Her skin was surely darker then.

I try not to ask questions because they are usually only answered with a silence that can last days, but over the years I have learned enough to piece together what happened. My mom was part of a group who had collaborated with the Americans. They hadn’t fought, but they had been facilitators and informers. When the war approached, they had to move. They were refugees but were settled near to people ethnically similar to themselves and I am sure that my pop was part of the reception committee, but he has never

said so in as many words. He was already in the area when mom's family arrived, and my pop even found some work for them. At least that is how mom describes it.

Mom was perhaps eight or nine when they settled in Thailand and so was not aware of what her parents were doing when my pop recruited them to help with his projects, or perhaps they were already recruited and all my pop did was take over their management.

Their collaboration lasted a few years, I am not sure how many, and mom remains confused when it comes to calendars, dates, years. But I am now clear that her problems began when I appeared, or at least when my existence was announced. I was born in nineteen-seventy and it seemed that my very existence began a gradual breakdown of trust between my mom's family and my pop, though the final split did not happen until some years later. Her life became difficult, largely because I existed, but the break came when my pop's friends turned on him.

My pop - let's call him Don Reynolds, because that's what he called himself at the time - was already in business, if that is the correct word, in the area when my mom's family, if that is the correct word, arrived. I think he had been there for some time, but I don't know, and he's not telling. I will leave the nature of his business to a collective imagination that must picture an American with a PhD in South-East Asian Studies, speaking the language, in northern Thailand, near the borders with Burma and Laos in the second half of the nineteen-sixties. It will come as no surprise that mom's parents - unusually for the Hmong she was an only, or maybe an only surviving child - were killed before they left Laos. The people she called parents were in fact just fellow refugees At least that's what she tells me. And that, for her, justifies her being here, now an American citizen. I don't



think she has ever admitted, even to herself, what actually happened. Perhaps she suffers from a convenient memory loss, or perhaps it was so traumatic that lack of memory is a form of self-protection.

Her foster parents were people whom I don't remember, though mom says I did meet them. But they were obviously outsiders who had arrived new to an area where they were effectively foreigners. They had a track record. They were absorbed into supporting whatever my pop was doing and let's admit that it was far from charity. They settled north of Chiang Rai. I suppose their continued collaboration was part of their resettlement, though I doubt they were anything less than willing participants in whatever was being organised by my pop. Clearly, the language was crucial, and the ethnicity was a bonus. In the end, however, it was probably their identity that caused their problems. They were ethnically part of the area, but their allegiance was elsewhere and thus eventually resented.

Don Reynolds, as they knew him, would often stay over with them in that early period. That, at least, my mom will admit to. Had he not stayed over, I doubt I would have existed. But my mom getting pregnant by an American, who was obviously supposed to stay a couple links further along the chain, made the relationships all too obvious. I speculate that people made it quite clear to my grandparents, who in fact were no such thing, that they were no longer welcome in the area. Mom tells me that they had been so shocked to learn that she was going to have Don's baby, they threatened their own vengeance against him. And maybe, they eventually extracted just that. They probably disowned her, a fact she could never admit until I began researching this book.

After the end of the war, things had to change. Prior to then, the business my pop was doing was semi-official. The

contact lines were clear and protected. But after the war, it was as if the systems became privatised, and suddenly there was competition. New alliances had to be forged and I suppose for a while there was confusion about exactly whom could be trusted.

Because of their history of dealing with my pop, my mom's parents were made scapegoats by their fellows and fled for their own safety. Or perhaps my mom's story that they were murdered is to be believed. She would have been fifteen or sixteen when I arrived and I certainly cannot remember anything about them, so they must have already made themselves scarce by the time I was three or four. All I can recall is living in town with my mom and Don. I always assumed that happened because my mom had no means of supporting herself and me if we stayed in the village. I am not sure when I realised that Don was my pop. I presume my mom told me, but I always called him Don, just Don. It's not surprising that he wanted his family to live with him, but it still surprises me that he never let me call him pop until we got to the States. And that was the same house, of course, where I met Mary.

She did a lot to help me. My mom was always around, but it was Mary who helped with my schoolwork, helped my pop teach me English and she stepped in to defend me when I got problems from the other kids. There was a group who used to call me 'that American kid', or 'half-breed' or other things that were crude, rather than insulting. They used to threaten to beat me up, though they never did. Whether it was because I was different or whether it was still something to do with the connections my so-called grandparents had soured, I still have no idea. I was bullied and that's what I can remember. It was Mary who took those thugs on one side and told them to stop. It was Mary who went round to their houses and

shouted at their parents. My mom was always too afraid to speak up, except if things happened close to home. She never went to my school, for instance. If there was a meeting with my parents, it was Don Reynolds and Mary who went there. It didn't happen often, because I was so young when I left Thailand, but it certainly happened. There were some people at school who thought Mary might be my mother, which made them even more confused about my identity, given what I looked like.

Mary used to play with me, play in a way that my mom did not and still does not understand. I have done enough social sciences to understand the term enculturation and it was that activity that happened by default when Mary spent time with me. I would not say that Mary almost became a mother to me, but I would also not wince disagreement if someone else said it on my behalf. She bought me presents. She taught me English when my pop wasn't there. I took her for granted, the highest respect any person can offer.

Looking back, I am amazed how my mom coped. She was and still is thankful to be alive. Perhaps it's as simple as that. Whenever fate throws a challenge, whatever that might be, you sidestep, and when it's passed, you get on with your life. And that is what mom has done. She does not complain. I always knew that my pop and her were not actually married - legally married, at least - and it never crossed my mind that Mary was actually my pop's wife. Well, we now know that she was, and at the same time she was not.

We have a legal document, at least it's legal in Thailand, stating that Don Reynolds, a US citizen with what was later acknowledged to be fake identity, and Mary McHugh, a British citizen, with a passport number I will not quote, emergency contact address Thomas and Marion McHugh of Weavers Rise, Crofton, Wakefield, West Yorkshire, UK

were married in Thailand in May 1978. It came along with the papers that my pop obtained for her, alongside those he secured for myself and mom, after we arrived in the US, all stored in a file mom has preserved for all these years. Our status was easy. We were refugees and there were already facilities to cope with our situation. My pop used his contacts to get the processing done quickly.

Eileen Mary McHugh, however, I realised only many years later, was Don Reynolds' problem. She was British. She was a burden, both in body and truth. Potentially, she could blow the whole business if her story came out. The easy solution was that Don Reynolds should marry her. Then she could enter as a citizen, already married to a serving member of the armed forces. Now that is what I call intelligence.

It was when I started high school that I really wanted to ask questions. Names, identities and places to live had all been variable in my childhood, but suddenly I felt my feet were firmly on the ground. I was ready to become a teenager. But the name on my school report was one I did not even recognise. I was quite happy to be called Appelbaum. I just wanted to know where it came from. And so, on one of those estranged dad nights in P J Clarke's, over a burger and coke, I simply asked, "Why is my name Appelbaum?" Now I appreciate it's not a line overused to the point of cliché, but my pop's reaction was a muted sigh, as if to say, "Not that old chestnut again, my son." And the answer was fairly simple. His name was Appelbaum. Revelation! And he had formally adopted me. Now that was a revelation. Mom knew, apparently. I didn't. It was all to do with inheritance, which he did not expect to kick in anytime soon.

Don told me enough that night for most things to make sense. Don Reynolds was the username of Adam

Appelbaum, applicable only on active service in South-East Asia. Back in the US, to protect his own, our and Don Reynolds' identity, he simply became the person he had been before he joined up. He was married. He had met and married Sophie, who had borne him twins, girls, while they were both graduate students. He accepted a commission to work in a trade delegation in Thailand and one thing, cliché again, had led to another.

Pop was always older than he looked. He gave me copies of old photos. There were even some of his wedding photos and if you flicked through, you could see the twins grow up as if in time lapse. There were photos of him at school, with his parents, and family and with the girlfriend that was to become his wife. I have never had anything to do with any of his family, never met any of them socially, was never introduced. In fact, the first time I ever met anyone from that side was at the reading of dad's will. Sophie died some years ago, so the two girls - they were already nearly fifty! - were the only other people invited. They were friendly at first, but soon their hostility became explicit. They were even more angry when the attorney read details. I thought they might even kill him. If you don't like the message, shoot the messenger.

I know my pop had already been estranged from his wife before he went to Vietnam. I dare say he wasn't much of a father for the twins. I think it may even have been his joining up that caused the marital problems, especially since he was recruited in Thailand, without ever consulting Sophie, who was still at home in the US.

They went high school together in Connecticut. The Appelbaums were a large and successful Jewish family, the father a partner in a Wall Street brokerage. Pop did open up occasionally, over our burgers, in P. J. Clarke's, but, though

his manner always seemed to communicate facts, in the end he revealed little of substance. Pop mentioned family details several times, but to this day I don't know how many brothers or sisters he had. I have seen photos of two of each, but there may have been others. I did ask, but he never gave a simple answer. He liked to keep the different parts of his life as separate as he could. His name was Adam, of that I am sure, except when he was called Don, which was all of my childhood.

He was born in 1940. The will and death certificate provided the basic information and minimal research has provided a little more. The family were New England aristocracy. Sophie, whom he eventually married, was from a similar, wealthy family, not only in the same line of business but also partners in the same brokerage. Adam and Sophie saw a lot of one another as children, went to the same high school and both were adopted by Harvard.

Sophie did law. Adam was more independently minded and did his Southeast Asian Studies. They married a year into Adam's PhD and the twins were born a year later. There was no shortage of money, of course, but both of them seemed to behave like many privileged sorts, in that they liked to appear personally frugal, despite driving in Ferraris to and from their mansions. They took family life in their stride alongside their studies with the help of a full-time nanny and home help. They did do their own cooking. Orthodox Jews usually do. And it was clear that both Sophie and Adam were headed straight for the family business, different families, same business.

So why Southeast Asian Studies? My dad's choice of degree always interested me. A brokerage firm always needs a supply of lawyers, so Sophie's specialism was of direct use. Pop did eventually explain. There had been a plan. The

company had planned to go into Hong Kong, Singapore and Bangkok. And this was only the early sixties. They were really ahead of the game. The problem was that no-one had really sounded out Sophie and she got cold feet. She threw a wobbler and the project was delayed. I don't know the details, but it is highly likely, let's say it was in character, for it to have coincided with my dad committing an indiscretion or two. It might just have been Sophie asserting her control.

To this day I don't know what caused their split, but I do know that a rift developed, and they separated after just three years of marriage. Pop had only just completed his doctorate and the twins were just two. That was not the last they saw of him, but he was certainly not around very often for them after then. My pop did go to Thailand and spent some time visiting other places in the region. He was still based in Bangkok when the firm decided not to open its Asian office and soon after dad joined up for service in the military. Exactly how or why it happened, he will not say. The region was, of course, at war, but he wasn't drafted. He volunteered. It is possible that he was selected, or made an offer, perhaps one he could not refuse.

He did some active service in South Vietnam and he was wounded, though not seriously. He did need a few weeks in a military hospital in Thailand, but I believe he was there for training, because he was then recruited into a different kind of service.

And now the other end of the story, the part that began with our arrival in the States in 1978. Pop went back into the family firm, opened business in Asia, made a fortune in emerging markets, spotted new investment opportunities before others and made an even bigger fortune in dot coms. He lost most of that in the late nineties, made another killing in the noughties and lost again in the crash. Then he had a

stroke and died a decade into the century.

It was at the reading of the will that I first met the twins. They knew I existed, but they had never expressed any desire to meet. I had asked my pop to let me meet them, but that had been many years before and he was reluctant, so I did not pursue. To say they were angry at what unfolded at that meeting with the attorney would be understatement.

Pop's logic was simple. He had two families, so his estate would split down the middle, one half each. The daughters had assumed it would be three ways at least, one third for each child. Sophie had died some years before, so there was no-one else, as far as they were concerned. But my pop's thinking was to provide support for my mom and Mary, of whom the girls probably had no knowledge. But my pop knew he could trust me. Whoever he had been living with over those decades - because it certainly had not been Sophie, my mom and certainly not Mary - was obviously provided for by some legacy of which we knew nothing. We did not even know if such a person existed. Rest assured, however, she did, and there is no need to assume it was only one. But there were certainly no more children, because he would have adopted them, just as he had done with me.

My pop was no saint. He had married Sophie and then made himself scarce, leaving behind twin daughters. Who knows what he got up to in Saigon or Bangkok? He fathered me via a fifteen-year-old called Hli, whom he never married. And crucially for Eileen McHugh's story, he married the woman we call called Mary to facilitate a journey to the US when she was already pregnant by him.

He was a man who achieved much success, but who also cultured enemies. It was some of those enemies who broke into the house in Chiang Mai in 1978. The war was over. Whatever business he was still doing was covered by the new



rules of the practice, which meant there were no rules and the older ways of doing things no longer applied. Don Reynolds had never really appreciated that, and there were already new actors, new markets and different ways of doing things.

Those new methods, that night, involved baseball bats. They did not come to my room. They did not visit my mom next door. We heard the noise, but we were too afraid to go out until well after the shots were fired and everything went quiet. The lights on the porch were on, so we could see everything immediately. There were four bodies lying between the furniture. All were shot. There was blood, a lot of blood. Mary had been in that front room and the door was ajar. Pop was slumped on the threshold. He held his left hand to his face. He was bleeding. He was trying to stand, but his left leg was at a ridiculous angle. He had a gun in his right hand. I remember his dropping it when I pulled at his arm to help him stand. I can still hear his screams.

The attackers had clearly thought that baseball bats coupled with surprise would be enough to do the job and do it quietly, at least quietly enough not to wake the neighbours. But in the dark, they had started their attack on the only person in the bed that night and they had laid in big time with their beating.

What they did not know was that their intended target, my pop, Don, as he was to them, was at the back of the house in bed with my mom. They had clearly staked out the place for a while and noticed that, most nights, Don slept at the front with Mary. But he did not do that every night, my mom saw to that. This was one of the other nights.

He had heard the commotion and waited, too long as things turned out, to be sure exactly where the noise was coming from, and indeed that it was coming from with our house. My pop took his gun from the bedside table, ran

through the house and started shooting. He was taking blows, but, as he had been trained, he emptied the magazine in quick fire. He shot all four of them and then finished them off with a second clip. He had a cut on his head which would later scar, and he would lose his left eye, but the broken leg was just a hairline fracture and healed quickly.

Mary, who had been asleep in the front room, however, had taken the combined blows of all four men. She was unconscious and in a real mess. She had been beaten around the head and one of dad's bullets had gone through an attacker and was lodged somewhere inside her. Now the occasional gunshot in Chiang Mai is hardly likely to raise alarm, but several in succession might just be a gunfight, which were not uncommon in those days, but would always attract attention. The place was crowded with police just minutes later. And, by the time they had made a call or two, they had decided they clearly knew my dad and knew him well.

It took a few weeks. There was travel, hospital, more travel, more hospital. We finished in a military hospital in the south of the country. Mom and I had no idea what was happening. We were just taken along. Pop was mending, his facial stitches removed, but still in pain. Mary McHugh was in a coma. She never did regain consciousness. She had a brain haemorrhage and the bullet had penetrated her spine. She had no movement but was alive. She was also on a British passport alongside a tourist visa that was years out of date.

Mom and I became refugees. We were processed, if that be the right word, and we joined a group of people who spoke similar languages to our own. We arrived in the US, lived in a camp for a few weeks and then were picked up by my pop, whom I still called Don, and the rest is history.

Don and Mary had a more complicated journey. Cover was needed, because of that passport. A pre-dated marriage certificate was obtained. Mary McHugh was now Mary Reynolds and that forged paper allowed her to travel as the wife of a serving US military officer, so the Thai authorities needed no further arrangements for an immigrant on an overstayed tourist visa. Mom and I were refugees. Things would work out. But Mary's status could have caused problems for everyone concerned.

Married to Don, she was his problem and he had already cleared the solutions. It was crucial that she should exit Thailand with paperwork completed. Any trail would then lead somewhere cold. It was only when I sifted through Marion McHugh's box of personal effects that I realised the extent of the cover when I held what seemed to be a letter that had originated in Indonesia, sent from Medan. It was in its own packet and had been opened. Uncharacteristically, the letter was typed. No other document from Eileen in the box had even a hint of being near a typewriter and she had not tried to communicate with her mother for at least two years prior to that date, if the evidence within the box was at all comprehensive. But then this was something of its era, something a person of my age might not even recognise. It was a telegram. And that is why it was typed, and that is also why it had been opened and, presumably, read. One must assume that if letters had arrived, then Marion would have saved them, otherwise why should she have kept this one, which did not even have Eileen's handwriting on the envelope? There were no other letters from Eileen to her parents after she left home that tumultuous afternoon in June.

*Dear Mom Just a note stop Now left Thailand stop Came here on a boat that gave us a free passage stop Finding solace in Buddhism and meditation Stop Used the word us*

*because we got married Stop Nice guy Stop American Mary*

Perhaps life may have been different if Marion had tried to follow up that contact. I could see immediately that it was bogus, a convenient way of laying a false trail where you could avoid using handwriting. It was even signed Mary. It is inconceivable that Eileen would have sent a telegram to her mother and not signed it with her own name. It must have sounded distinctly odd.

But Marion McHugh did not respond, and she did nothing more than store the message in her box or wherever she kept it prior to Martin's parents finding it. One must assume that it was her husband who demanded she ignore the message, but no-one can now be sure. In any case, if she had tried to make contact, Eileen's medical condition would not have been any different. And, of course, by then Tom McHugh was himself terminally ill. It would have been a trying time. As for my pop, his scar did fade over the years, but it stayed completely noticeable for the rest of his life, though the glass eye and the surgery did restore much of his appearance.

He and Mary left Thailand on a military aircraft. They passed through no passport checks, filled in no forms. There were no US personnel to be seen. The officers were all Thai, but they knew what protocol to follow. Inside the aircraft there were no comfortable seats, just benches along the side, plus an area devoted to intensive medical care. Such planes had been in daily use until the end of the war, but this one probably had to be rejuvenated from retirement especially for this trip, hence the delay.

Mary was loaded into the compartment, pulled up a ramp to the rear. At this point my pop's recollections, alongside snippets of words from Mary, herself, can provide no detail. She was unconscious, he slept. They arrived. She was isolated and treated, he went into debriefing and

rehabilitation.

I would not have recognised Mary. It was my mom who told me who it was. I had not seen her since before the night of the attack. From where I was looking, those weeks later when I made my first visit to see her, I could see the bed and the equipment, but lying in it was just an anonymous bulge with wires and tubes attached.

I don't know where we went. The trip from the camp where we were temporarily held was not long and we certainly did not travel very far. We drove for a while and then arrived at a facility, the word kept being used, where we entered through a barrier and had our papers checked several times. Eventually we were admitted to a hospital ward that had just a dozen or so beds and just one patient. It was as warm in there as the tropics we had left but had a smell of formalin that was quite unlike our garden in Chiang Mai, the last place I had seen Mary, just a few weeks before. Pop was there. He told us not to worry, that he would sort everything out.

I remember that my mom burst into tears. It was the only time in my life when I remember her showing any emotion. To this day, I am not sure why. It could have been because he was there. It could have been the disruption to our lives. It could also have been sadness at Mary's condition. He said something to her and she started to look better. But Mary was in a coma. A machine made noises at her bedside. That was it. We went back to our camp. In a taxi.

It was a few more days before my pop came with a car and a driver. He was still wearing a patch over his eye, so he could not drive himself. But he arrived in a taxi. Now I realise that this is all important. This was not a military vehicle. We were already legal. We drove a while and then we arrived at what my pop said was our new home.

Mom could not believe the place. It was a house beyond her imaginings. She was bewildered at first, but it is amazing how quickly disbelief can become commonplace and, after a month or so, she was starting to behave as if we had lived there all our lives. Materially she became an American housewife and began to amass all the consumer trappings she could assemble. She said Don had told her not to worry about money, that he had opened a bank account for her and had made sure there would be a regular credit each month. Mom had been brought up in poor communities in Laos and Thailand, and she must have thought she had risen to some kind of material heaven.

And then Mary arrived. The bed looked the same to me, but there were fewer machines, wires and tubes. She had her own floor of the house and dad explained that was part of the deal. Mary also had twenty-four-hour nursing, not active, just basic care, with a turn for the patient whenever two nurses were on site at a shift change. Mary was never alone. And neither was my mom in her newly adopted but expected role as lead carer for this comatose patient.

We saw her whenever we wanted, but we were told not to stay more than fifteen minutes in her room. After a year, things relaxed a little when my mom started to help more and took on some of the jobs the nurses had done until then. The nurses then only visited a couple of times a day and most of the care was delivered by mom. Mary's condition had clearly stabilised and it had become obvious that she would not recover. By the early eighties, she was having just supervisory visits once a week and my mom was doing everything else. I had already started high school and already knew my dad was actually called Adam Appelbaum. So, what's in a name? The answer is the history of entire lives.

My mom, you see, could never really manage English

without a confusing accent, just as Mary never seemed to be able to hear Hmong or Thai. She was always trying to read the letters and not hear them. This had its own effect on me because my name is Touhue, which Mary could not say. Her lips would not go round the sound, and so it came out as Tony, which she then pronounced her own way. And I have been Tony ever since.

In reverse, I suffered a similar problem, but for different reasons. Personally, I have absolutely no recollection of this, but my pop did eventually confirm that the woman I still called Mary had indeed first been introduced to me as Eileen. Apparently, I did try to say the name. My pop says they spent some weeks trying to get the pronunciation right, but that I just couldn't do it

And it was important in our house in Chiang Mai. If I used a name, basically I had three options. In those days, I never used mom or pop, and certainly not mother or father, and certainly not in Thai, which was after all a foreign language for both of them. So, I used their names, Don, Hli and Eileen. Don poses no problems, apart from the fact that it wasn't his name! In Hmong, Hli is a long vowel with a quiet, aspirated start. Pronounced by an American, from whom I was learning, after all, Eileen is a long vowel with a quiet start and a near silent end. At the time, all I could say was the vowel and, my pop told me, it used to cause much hilarious confusion. I would call out the name, and each time both my mom and Eileen would appear, because the names had the same sound.

"Eileen thought it was funny, and for a while so did your mom. But soon, your mom got impatient if she had to stop her work to come running to the front, only to find you had not called her. I remember Eileen saying, 'From now on, call me Mary. It's my middle name.' Then she set about teaching

you her new name and because the vowel was quite different, there was no more confusion. Soon, we all started calling her Mary, Mary McHugh.”

“And that became Reynolds after you married her.”

He shrugged. “That’s what it said on the paper. But that was much later. She never knew that name.” And then he gave me Eileen’s passport, which he had kept for over thirty years. It had never been officially cancelled. And so I had a name and an identity, complete with a parents’ address I could contact.

What’s in a name? That night it felt like my own identity had become part of that changed name. The woman I had always called Mary, sick, paralysed, comatose most of the time, had been a second mother to me and, until then, I had never known her name.

And two years before she died of complications associated with morbid obesity - diabetes, organ failure, necrosis - she started to show signs of eye movement and an ability to respond to sound.

I spent huge sums of money on technology, the latest sensors, state of the art interfaces, and set about trying to teach her to communicate via letters displayed on a computer screen. I needed, of course, something known to calibrate the system. It had to be something known, something definite. I wrote M-A-R-Y in giant letters on a card and held it front of her whenever I thought I could see even a hint of an opened eye. I repeated, “Look at the letters of your name. M-A-R-Y. Your name. M-A-R-Y.” And it worked, or rather it didn’t. I gave up after several months of dedicated effort when I sat by her bed day after day, repeating, “Mary, look at the M. Mary, look at the A. Can you do that. Mary try this. Mary try that.”

And one afternoon, just once, only days before she passed



away and before I knew her real name, I was convinced she had responded. The cursor moved here and there. It stopped, started, stopped, started several times. I did a reset. Then the word she spelled out was E-I-L-E and that was all she ever managed. I thought they were random letters. What's in a name?

## Foundation

Indeed, what's in the name? I suspected at the start of this remaking of Eileen McHugh that contacting people across the internet via messages signed Tony Appelbaum might not elicit the kind of response I desired. What I needed were details, personal reflections, reminiscences. Unfortunately, my own name was easily searchable and would, of course, be linked to my business, which has its own website. Given the age group of my intended contacts, I figured that a cold contact from a care home owner might not be received kindly. I could have used my mom's name, but then that would have looked very foreign to most people who might have known Eileen. It would never have been trusted. Mary Reynolds was the perfect solution to my problem because she never existed, except as an entry on a fake Thai marriage certificate. She may have become a US citizen, but she had no passport, tax number, driving license, bank account or anything else that might be traced.

But what she does have now, because I established them, are accounts in social media, complete with fake photos and biography. In addition, she now has a following of friends who all knew Eileen, before she adopted Mary. She also has, in her own name, the virally successful *He's on the other line...* with all the associated earning potential for ad placement. Both recognition and success can come in many forms, all unpredictable, but possibly not random.

The only people I met personally during this entire project were the Colbrookes in Crofton, and that was for just for a morning, and Marion McHugh in her care home. Marion had no idea to whom she might be speaking, and the staff raised no questions when I produced her daughter's passport as proof of my links to the family. The Colbrookes told me of

the existence of Marion's document box and the care home was glad to find a home for it, as it had languished at the back of a cupboard for all the time its owner had been a resident.

And so, I now conclude this attempt to remake the life and work of an artist, Eileen McHugh, sculptor. What I have assembled is far from complete, just a set of snapshots, reminiscences, the found objects of Eileen's life, remade in the form they themselves have adopted. Reconstruction of her work is yet to begin. You see, Tony Appelbaum is about to take an early retirement, hence the purchase of that wooden house in Chiang Mai, which will be my vacation home. I already have a buyer for the business and the sale will be lucrative. That original house purchased by my pop is not part of the deal, however. That I will retain for my mom, in the first instance, and for the memory of Eileen McHugh, also known as Mary Reynolds, for whom the property was originally bought by my pop. The room where she lay for over fifteen years will itself become a signature work in her style, and, when everything is ready to start, my mom will move in with my family to make way for the museum. The new name will be the Eileen McHugh Foundation, the McHugh for short. I hope in a few years it will be as common to hear someone say, "I'm going to the McHugh in New Jersey", as "I am going to the Whitney in New York" or "the Courtauld in London". I have an architect, who has already begun the plans, and now I have identified a team of sculptors to remake those works by Eileen for which we have sufficient detail. There will be about twenty large works on display. And there will be one more item, which will complete the collection.

Eileen lived for eleven years in Agbrigg, a suburb of Wakefield in the United Kingdom. She had eight years in Crofton, a village a few minutes' drive down the road. She

had two years in London and then five in Thailand, undocumented and untraceable years because she was living on an expired tourist visa and was in almost exclusive contact with Don, my mom and a little boy called Tony. The only people with detailed memories of that time are my pop, who is dead, and my mom, who is still reluctant to mention that period of her life, let alone discuss it. As for little Tony, well, he has told you everything he can remember.

Then she lived here, in this house in New Jersey, tended each day by my mom for over fifteen years. Whether she lived during that time, only she could tell you, but she had no words, no movement, no consciousness, except for those moments when perhaps autosuggestion convinced me she might have responded.

This is clearly the right place for the McHugh. It was and remains her home and will remain so for eternity. And in the spirit of Eileen's work, there will be one extra piece, a homage to her life and the values she cherished.

Pop told me that Eileen used to sleep in an old tee shirt of his, the one that had the nuclear disarmament logo on the front. She was wearing it on the night of the attack. Peace, Brother will be a big work. It will occupy a whole room. It will be an empty bed with a copy of the tee shirt lying crumpled on the mattress. The machines that helped keep Eileen alive as Mary, the heart monitor, the glucose bottle on its stand, the catheter, the oxygen cylinders and mask she needed from time to time, they will surround the bed. They will all be operational. Suspended above the bed, with two adjustable strings on each, will be four baseball bats, each draped with sprigs of purple Thai orchids. Visitors will adjust the strings to raise or lower the weapons.

Outside in the garden, I plan to build a small mausoleum around Eileen's grave. This will be fixed in stone. There are

some things that cannot be changed. It will bear her names, born Eileen McHugh, died Mary Reynolds, and I will put 1952 – underneath, untermiated, because her work will live on.

Without the internet and social media, Eileen McHugh's life could not have been remade. And without the same resource, the McHugh will never open its doors. The artist who saw no recognition now needs your efforts to render her vision permanent. Please, seek out the author's website and make your donation to the McHugh.