

Celtic Shorts

A collection of short stories

by Paul Larkin

A note from the author

The stories I've written are fictional. Clearly, like with most fiction, they are inspired by real life events and situations. All of the names mentioned in this book are real. They are in the book for one reason: I love them. No malice is meant to anyone in this book. The exact opposite is intended. If you see an 18+ beside a story then it means that is intended for readers that age or over because of the graphic nature of the situations described. I wrote 11 stories for this book and then tried to widen the spectrum by bringing in some famous people. That's why my 11 are first, because it's the only chance I'll ever get to be picked before them. Similarly a couple of up and coming writers have written stories that you will enjoy. Thank you to everyone in this book. You have all shaped, enhanced and inspired me.

None more so than The Kano Foundation.

Peace and love

Paul Larkin,

April 2016.

For Andy Gordon

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Wider than Trap Six (Edinburgh 1995) 18+

by Paul Larkin

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I wrote for luck, they sent me you.

The clunk behind me told me I was out, free. Aye, if you fucking say so. In films, this would be the part where the screw would gie ye a wry smile and tell you they'd be seeing ye again soon. This isnae a film though, the screw just said "Good luck" tae me.

That wis good ae the boy tae dae that.

I should go tae ma ma's but I'm heading for Strattie's first, get the heid the gither. I'll walk doon there, save the bus fares. They gie you money when you git oot but it's only about a week's brew money, so fuckall really. The premise behind it is tae stoap cunts gitting oot and immediately tanning a post office or brekking intae a hoose. Except aw they dae is git a load ae criminals pished before they have even made it hame and then the vicious circle starts again. Don't fuck about.

It's warm as fuck as I pass fae Stenhouse Road to Gorgie Road. I'd heard inside, oan the Radio likesay, that it had been one ae the warmest July's on record. I'd seen fuck aw of it like but I knew it was warm. Said cunts were fainting at the Tall Ships doon Leith. Widnae be the first time that some cunt has went down efter a few palpitations doon the docks like. I was inside for exactly one year and two months so I'd seen fuck aw ae much bar waws and doors. To be fair, it's only the back ae six and it's awready fucking roasting like. I was tempted tae slip intae a grocers for a bottle ae Red Kola but I want to savour ma thirst so I can let the bevvly trickle down ma throat like money tae the masses in a Marxist system.

I make it tae the boozier, slip in, pit my bag doon and order a bottle ae Becks. It's lukewarm so I tell the cunt behind the bar tae gies a gless wi ice in it. Only in Scotland wid ye need tae beg for a cauld drink. As I walked back tae where my bag wis, a cunt shouted over tae me but I blanked him til ah was in ma seat.

Gunslinger seat as always.

I clocked the boy and hud nae idea who he wis. He says tae me "Ah know you, don't ah?"

Glesgae accent. Could be a ticket.

I telt um ah hud nae idea if he did or he didnae but he pipes up "Ainslie eh? Charlie Ainslie? You panelled the boy outside that club eh?"

The cunt does know me.

"I was across the landing fae ye in The Big Hoose"

Fucking "Big Hoose", what a cunt.

Relief comes over me though, he's a ten a penny scumbag. I nod over to him and ask him if he fancies a beer.

"Naw, I've got to get the train back tae Bishopbriggs, see the Mrs" He rolls his eyes as if it's a chore but I bet he cannie fucking wait tae get back. I widnae be in here if ah hud somewhere like that tae go back tae but *she* only came tae see me once and that wis tae tell me that *she* widnae be coming back. Fine. Except av no seen ma daughter now for over a year. In a funny wey though, the jail would be harder if she *wis* coming tae see me.

Ah pull oot a pen and bit paper that wis in ma bag and get ready. Av been waiting a while for this moment so ah savour it likes. Various things have shaped this moment, aw fae outside, but now am ready to be the fucking Potter now.

Ah pit the paper on the table but some cunt comes in and the air fae the door almost blows the cowie off the table but ah grab it just in time. Ordinarily, ad huv pit the gadgie right on his erse but there's business tae attend tae here. Ah pit a beer mat on the top ae it and another yin on the bottom ae it, so it disnae happen again like. It's A4 size n ah only need space for three hings so it's barry. Then the jukebox pipes up, and fae the conversations around the bar ah discover it's called *Some Might Say* by *Oasis*. Av heard a few of their tunes on Radio Forth in the jail, normally on Alison Craig's show and that other cunt, the fat boy.

Reminds me, av goat tae get tae Virgin on Princes Street the day and check oot the *Black Grape* single *Reverend Black Grape*. Shaun Ryder's new band. Ah read about it in the NME's that cunt Martin sent me in although am fucking positive it wisnae him, it wis his brar, the yin that's just signed wi Hearts cause I recognised his writing fae the times he used to practice his autograph. And that cunt Martin is an awfy selfish cunt at times as well. If he wis in the gang, he'd be fucking oot it by now.

Huving says that, I hope that other wee cunt, Ronnie they cry him, isnae gitting too flash cause he's a Hearts player now. Ah appreciate the gesture n that but jist remember the pecking order ya wee cunt.

Anywy, it's fucking dynamite that Shaun Ryder is back as Happy Mondays are the best fucking band ever.

Ma mind is drifting tae the summer of 1990 and taking jellies on the 17th green of Silverknowes gowf course when the barman takes ma bottle ae Becks away and snaps me back tae the moment. Ah drain ma gless, the ice now melting the bevvie intae a cool, golden Esso advert type liquid and ah get focussed again.

Right, aye.

The list.

Numero uno - Git a season ticket for Celtic Park.

Things are happening in Paradise boy, don't worry about that. We ended the fucking jinx in May there, Big Pierre bursting the net wi a heider that I was raging about for a split second as I had wee Donnelly in the fucking jail sweep and the baw drops two inches closer tae him and he scores but big picture, fitba is always about the big picture ya cunts remember that, the big man scores, the trophy drought ends and the comeback begins. Back tae Paradise anaw this season and the paper in this boozie says we have after a German boy called Andy Thom and David Ginola fae PSG. Feels like we're emerging fae a long dark tunnel and, when ah think about it, it wis a bit like being in the jail. In fact naw, it wis a bit like being in the jail, gitteing telt ye were being released and then oan the day ye huv yer gear packed, the cunt comes in and says ye huv tae sty another six months.

That's the Raith Rovers cup final am talking about for aw you slow on the uptake cunts.

The wee man fae Montreal came in and things huv changed. Even fae the jail, ye kin tell that. I went in just efter the wee man saved us and I was gled ah didnae go in when the fucking Kellys and Whites were

still in charge, that would huv been a fucking nightmare man. Yit, awready, we're emerging again, like the rising fucking Phoenix, the fenian blood is rising.

So, season ticket is a fucking must.

Nummer zwei - Patch things up with the Mrs and see my daughter.

Being apart fae yer offspring is like getting shot and no bothering yer arse tae get it fixed. It gets sairer and sairer and the pain will eventually kill ye, make nae mistake aboot that. Inside, that is multiplied a thousand fold. The worst thing aboot being inside is no the lack of freedom, it's no, no daeing the things ye normally dae or even the cunts around ye, naw. The worst thing is that the world jist goes on withoot ye and ye realise, when ye die, every cunt will forget aboot ye pretty sharpish. So, there's nae time tae fuck aboot. My daughter's name is Hope, on account ae the fact that she almost died at birth. Her middle name is Cyndi on account ae the fact that the Mrs liked Cyndi Lauper. She was born the day efter Charlie Nick played his last game fir us the first time roond. 19th May 1983, which is funny cause ma birthday is May 26th 1967. Now, before aw you humpty cunts aw go away and come back, efter checking the record books and telling me Charlie's last game wis it Ibrox on the 14th ae May, yer fucking wrong. It wis against Finn Harps in Donegal, ah ken cause ah wis there. She's the light of ma life is Hope but that mother o hers fills her heid wi shite aboot me so she kin git frosty wi me anaw. Disnae matter though, I'd still dae anything fir her. That's whit the mother never understands, ivry time she hus a go it me, she is hurting the bairn tae. Ah used tae cry maself tae sleep in the jail

about her, Hope that is. A lot ae cunts see me and think “Oh aye, wideo, hard man, ticket” and thit somehow that means ye huvnae got feelings, or dinnae hurt. Jist cause ah kin hold court in a fucking pub disnae mean ah dinnae miss ma daughter. But ye put oan an act, act the cool cunt so folk dinnae ask about it and ye end up fawing apart. Ye’ve goat tae but, not jist tae save face in front o any hun cunt watching but tae keep gawn. Freud thinks that bairns dae aw their developing in the first five years o their life and am awright about that because me and the Mrs were cool then. Once Albert Kidd banged in two against Hearts and ah stopped believing that Hope being born had stopped us winning leagues, we were barry. Used aw go tae the park n that, or the beach at Silverknowes. We wid walk doon there and ah wid be hudding one hand and *she* would be hudding the other. Ah’d look at her indoors and smile, she wid smile back and wee Hope would be swinging between us. Ye dinnae realise how magic these things are ur until yer no daeing them as Joni Mitchell says. The wife would disagree and say girls just wanna have fun but she never wis the full shilling. Efter aw, if she wis, how could she hurt me this much?

**Numero trois - Get the rest of the cunts who battered wee
Sidney Dempsey**

Oh aye. The comeback disnae jist come on the park ya hun cunts. I walk oot the boozer and the glare hits me. Am no used tae this as jails are horribly cream, grey and institutional and they never hud sunlight in mind when they designed the cunts. I consider getting a fast black tae ma Ma’s but she will be fretting and fussing and ah

need my heid straight before heading back doon Muirhoose. So I elect to walk along Gorgie Road, bound for Virgin Records.

It truly is a stunning day like, the day I have been waiting on, back to my Hacienda, a Rupert Brooke day, I go over the poem of his that I have memorised:

*Here am I, sweating, sick, and hot,
And there the shadowed waters fresh
Lean up to embrace the naked flesh.*

My mind wanders fir a bit, I'm prone tae that now and again.

*Stands the Church clock at ten to three?
And is there honey still for tea?*

English cunt-like sentiment but you get the idea.

Ah read a lot in the jail. Then again, ah read a lot oot the jail as well. Ah read Trainspotting of course and ah wis impressed wi the fact that the cunt wrote an entire book about Leith and Muirhoose and didnae then top aes self. Ah turn my heid left and see Tynecastle disappear as ah stride forward. Ah'll need tae check the fixtures tae see when Celtic are there again but am positive it's October.

Ah start tae feel a bit tired noo and it's cause ah never slept a wink last night. The cunt beneath me was snoring aw night but that wisnae what kept me awake, it wis the thought of being oot and aw the hassle that brings. See, that's the other thing aboot being in the jail, aw yer

daeing is like planting yer problems and it's like every day yer in, some cunt pits mair compost on them to grow the cunts, so this when ye come oot, the cunts are far bigger than when ye went in.

Am passing The Dickens so take a look in but there's nae cunt in so keep moving, Ryries is coming up and av hud many a good night in there. I look at their ceramic windaes and mind the night the manky mob attacked it when it wis full of straight pegs that were in fir a quiet jar. Ah wis coming oot the station and clocked the situation immediately, could hear the usual shouting and bawling that comes fae cunts who think they want a fight but dinnae really. Ave pushed better cunts oot the wey tae get intae a fucking fight.

Ah could also see a boy ah knew fae Muirhoose, Harry, younger cunt than me, Hibby, bit a sound cunt normally. He wis sitting wi an aulder boy and the aulder boy took a good few digs fae Attila's mob.

So ah waited outside the side door, wannabe wideos are nothing if no predictable, and as they came out one by one, they went down one by one. Badoom, Badoom, Badoom.

Harry came oot and started laughing. Typical o the cunt. He says tae me "what were ye waiting oan?" in a sort of jokey wey but then he surveys the scene and sees the pavement has been replaced by current buns.

He shook his heid and said it...

"Fucking One Punch Ainslie tae the rescue"

Am almost at the west end and the first thing ah clock on ma left is a boozer av no seen before, Ryan's Bar. That definitely wisnae here when ah went in. Ah tilt my head further left and clock that Mathers

is still there. Moving the heid back round, ah spy that Bianco's is still there anaw. Natural order is resumed. I keep walking and am almost at Edinburgh's holy trinity of shops, HMV, Waterstone's and Virgin. Ah used tae come tae these a lot, jist for a browse maistly, but to get away fae shit when it aw came on top. Av bought a fuckload ae books fae Waterstones right enough. Am no gawn in the day though, Virgin is enough. Ah get there and the lay out has changed, aw the classical stuff is upstairs and they have moved aw ma type ae sounds over tae the right hand side of the shoap, jist past the stairs. The big change but is the fact that Compact Disc's are everywhere. Which makes me think: Av no got a player. So I find the cassette single and buy it, no bad for 99p. The cover is shit hot with a photie of Shaun Ryder oan and he's looking superb.

Am oot the shoap sharpish and think now is the time tae go hame tae my Ma's. Ah walk tae the west end and a C1 bus is just pulling in tae the stop at Bianco's so ah step up to a jog and fire oan it. Ah know the cunt that's driving, Walter the cunt's name is, and we have a wee moment when ah go to pay and he looks at me like "Naw, dinnae" and ah tentatively put ma money back in ma poacket and this auld dear looks at me like av just demanded that free bus passes fir the elderly should be stoapped.

City Sprinters they call these buses and tae be fair, they can shift.

Ah fade oot on the bus doon tae Muirhoose and only tippie ah huv when ah realise we are flying past the Western General awready. Before long, am oaf the bus on Pennywell Gairdens, first stoap efter The Gunner and heading across the two roads on Pennywell Gairdens n ah can see it in front of me, 31/5 Pennywell Grove. Ah slip through

the tunnel, veer right and am up the two flights of stairs, knocking on the door of my Ma's.

The grief can begin.

She opens the door and looks me up and doon saying "Well, ye better come in"

The auld dear is awright maist of the time but occasionally she takes a funny turn and goes spare. She's nivir been the same since the auld man died.

I pit ma bag under the stairs and the first thing I spy is that the electricity meter, the 50p meter, has been replaced by a new-fangled yin.

The auld dear does a left tae the kitchen and pits the kettle oan which ah take as a nice gesture until she says "Tae git that smell ae beer oaf yer breath"

Christ sake.

The living room looks the same, the photo of John Paul the Second right above the wee cardboard box that carries donations for SCIAF. The fire place and fire wi jist the one bar oan (My Ma is never warm) and the telly oan that hus they two cunts who are married and present the show in front ae that huge weather map.

I sit doon in the auld man's chair then think better ae it and move tae the couch. The auld man died the day efter the Centenary Double so it's been over seven years now but, ah don't know, disnae feel right sitting in his chair.

My Ma comes through with tea and two sliced sausage pieces she's

done and asks if I've seen the bairn. It's a loaded question so I tell her I will but ah wanted tae see you first Ma.

She looks at me as if tae say "Aye right"

Then though she tells me she hus made ma bed up fir me, which delights me at first but then makes me think "Why wis it unmade exactly?"

Ah slip upstairs, put ma Head bag doon on the flair and survey ma auld room. I moved oot five year ago yit it feels like av never been away. I fade oot again fir a bit and then spy a Celtic View and it reminds me that ah need tae git a season ticket. Ma mate fae Niddry, Everlast I call him, has jist belled me and said he's gawn doon tae Everton fir a friendly. The morn. I think on this for a bit and then say "Fuck it, I'm in"

Av goat hiries in the bank that nae cunt knows aboot and av still goat ma caird fir the account anaw. The caird expires in October so am solid for the summer. Fae memory, I think there is like 700 bar in it, aw wages fae when ah worked doon the pipes. That will see ma season ticket and through the next month or so as ma outlay will be wee gieing that am at ma Ma's.

Ah will need tae buy some claes first though. I'll fire up Rose St this efternin and hit Jaz's for some strides and a couple ae toaps.

First though, I'll bell her indoors and hook up a meeting wi Vanessa. Ah leap doon the stairs, two at a time, and go to pick up the phone that's right next tae the front door. Am aboot tae pick it up when the auld dear pipes up "If that's her yer phoning, dinnae bother. She's away tae Donegal fir a fortnight, left this morning"

Fur fuck's sake.

Gieing her actions in the last three year, I should have fucking know she wid pill a stunt like this but in yer heart of hearts ye do expect it.

I slip back upstairs, reach intae ma bag and pill oot the Black Grape tape.

The chorus hits me:

Oh come oh ye faithful

Oh joyful and triumphant

Gather around,

While I blow my own trumpet

That reminds of watching telly in the jail and seeing Gazza sign for The Huns.

Another two weeks and nae contact wi Vanessa. I can dae that standing on ma heid but it still hurts. I knew I wouldnae be able tae just breeze back in but her, that heid o hers, she disnae git that she hurts others when daeing things like this. Ma Ma for one.

I switch aff fae it and decide to shoot up the toon again and get some gear fir Everton. It's a day trip, but the bus leaves at 8am and we are stoapping at 32 club in Manchester efter it so it's gonnae be a good yin.

Jist before am aboot tae leave, ma Ma calls me intae the living room. She could well be pished as she says "Ye look ok son, lovely dark, fine hair like yer faither, looks like yev been daeing they weights anaw" Am almost gawn red when she slips me two crisp, clean score notes. I go tae push it away but she says "No son" and so I do an about turn, grab my leather jaiket and head oot the door. This means av got aboot

60 bar on me now so I decide to breeze over tae The Triangle Club at the bottom ae Pennywell Road and git a fast black.

I bypass The Gunner, I will for a few days at least, and see a taxi sitting at the rank, the cunt is reading a Daily Record and jolts when ah open the side door next tae The Triangle Club. I tell him Frederick Street and thankfully he just nods and says fuckall for the rest of the journey. Ah cannie stand it when a taxi cunt starts gibbering aw sorts ae shite aboot how it's no as busy as it hus been. If yer a taxi driver in Edinburgh, you're fucking minted. Fur fucks sake, we even jist hud that Tall Ships hing doon the docks. A screw telt me that it was £3 a pint of Becks there. So if punters can afford that, they can fucking afford tae be poured intae a fucking taxi efter it.

He's fanning aboot as we git near Frederick Street, the cunt has went the Stockbridge way which means bumpy fucking roads and a queasy feeling so ah tell the cunt tae pill in at the bit that wid be where The Beau Brummell is if this wis Hanover Street. I gie the boy a fiver and he says "It's actually £6.20 pal" so I peel off a tenner and tell him tae gie me the fiver back. He does and then I say it again and, like clockwork, he hands me another fiver back. Paul McStay in motion, works every fucking time wi these daft, self-inflated cunts.

I jump oot and over the road fast, in case he realises his mistake quick but chances are he will be away mumping his gums to some other poor cunt.

I turn right at Rose Street and fire up to Jaz's. He's a good cunt, bit ae a wideo, but still. He welcomes me like his long lost brother and before long am browsing, picking up two pairs of 501's, a green Lacoste polo and Ralph Lauren toap. I ask him how much he wants

for them aw and he says “Gies a ton and you can go now” I look at him fir a bit and tell him av only goat 55 bar oan me and replies “Jake, come on man, you’re killing me here”. I decide against gieing him a look that says I fucking will and lay it on him, 70 bar and I’ll pay by Switch right now and he smiles and takes the gear oaf me before pitting it in two bags, the polo and toap in one, the jeans in the other. That’s the gear soarted for Everton.

I go tae the phone boax in Frederick Street and bell Everlast and confirm I am definitely coming and he starts going oan about what peev we will need fir the journey doon.

Good to see no everything hus changed.

2

Celtic Joe (Chapelhall 2010)

by Paul Larkin

The pub was packed when Celtic Joe came in. Joseph Peter Clark was on his birth certificate but everyone knew him as Celtic Joe. The usual rabble was in, shouting and bawling, bevvied. Joe surveyed them for a few seconds and then shook his head, moving towards the bar to order a Black and Tan.

“Swallow them, then piss them” Joe thought.

He walked over to the company and pulled a seat up

“Whit’s the subject today then boys?”

They all looked up at him before wee Danny held his stare and said:

“Well Joe, Big Matty is claiming he’s the biggest Tim around here”

Joe laughed, he had heard it all before. Big Matty fur fucks sake.

“Aye? What’s he basing it oan noo?”

Big Matty sat silent. He always did in Joe’s company.

Joe adjusted his arse cheeks on the wooden, leather cushioned chair.

“Well, him and his two brothers are aw season ticket holders, aw Catholics and were at both visits by The Holy Father”

Joe sunk a quarter of his pint in one gulp.

“Youse not got better things tae dae wi yer time?” Joe commanded.

They all looked at each other and thought better of carrying it on.

“Plus, what’s this about Catholics? Jock Stein excluded noo is he?”

Joe was getting riled.

He looked at his paper. He studied the form, he had his bets on and the next race at Catterick was in five minutes. He was about to tell wee Davie behind the bar to turn the television on when young

Tommy said;

“That a *Record* you’ve got there Joe?”

Joe gave him that paint stripper look.

“Naw”

There was a silence, uncomfortable, then young Tommy said;

“*The Sun?*”

Joe sighed.

This was not a conversation Joe was interested in.

“Davie, pit that telly on Channel 4 will ye?”

Wee Davie obliged.

They were under starters orders when young Tommy piped up again;

“Well whit paper is it then?”

Joe snapped

“It’s the fucking *Racing Post!*”

He scooped his pint as he watched the race, his horse was third. With one last gulp he made for the door as the bar went deathly quiet, knowing Joe wouldn’t be a happy man. He stopped just at the exit, like a gunslinger remembering he had left one guy alive, turned round and said;

“By the way, see yer season tickets and Pope visits? Well, there was a Clarke on the Proclamation and a Clark in the European Cup winning team”

And like that, he was gone.

3

Hello Texas (Manchester 1990)

by Paul Larkin

I never really went anywhere and now I'm on the bus again to Manchester. Supporters bus this time though. Last time was a National Express. It's a cold, crisp November morning and the windows feel like they have been put there as an obstacle to going out rather than for any protection. Condensation covers them like a dry towel on a child emerging from a swimming pool. Hardly anyone spoke for the first 30 minutes or so. It was still dark and most of us just tried to warm ourselves up after standing in the cold before the bus arrived. You couldn't tell the difference between the smoke and cold air that was emerging from the mouths like the hare at the greyhound track. *Wilson's* of Carnwath and Larkhall was the bus company. So the driver would have been up even earlier than we would. As it got lighter, the bus got warmer, partly the winter sun, partly the body heat, partly Benson and Hedges and partly the bus heater. The tapes aren't on yet but they will be soon. The noise filling the air is that of cans opening and bottles unscrewing. One of the Bhoys is up at the luggage rack trying to get to his carry out. He's talking as well but you can see his frustration growing and pretty soon he's tearing at the bag like a caveman would his latest captured meal. The radio goes on and the news reminds us that the Tory party leadership contest vote is today. Means nothing to me but I'm pretty sure no one on this bus wants Margaret Thatcher to win.

After a football game length or so we stop at Southwaite Services. Most of the bus is six cans in and in need of a fry up. I'm not sure where else in the world six cans of beer constitutes the need for fried food but Southwaite Services seems as good a place as any. The food was spread out under hot plates and for some reason it reminded me

of the conditions in *Tenko*. I'm sure Singapore didn't need to fall before the food got there but I'm positive standards did. I get two rolls on sausage and am charged what I'd normally pay for a three course meal back in Scotland. I pick up an English edition of the *Daily Star*. Its front page has something about Samantha Fox on it but the back page has a wee bit on Bryan Robson and he's talking about his Man Utd career in general and about the game tonight, plus the FA cups he's won, the most recent being in May there.

After the rest of a pretty dull journey, we pull into Manchester and park near the ground. It's only half eleven in the morning but some folk are steamboats already. Other things too. Poppers were being passed round the bus like fruit pastilles and a few others are completely away with the goalie. Jokes are made about throwing one of our number in the River Irwell just for a laugh but folk soon realise that would require physical exertion.

I guide folk into the city centre via a Manchester bus, my previous visit providing the sort of vital knowledge that marvels a company of reprobates on an away day. They are making trams here in Manchester but the sign says they aren't going to be ready until 1992. We all pile on the bus and negotiate the 35p fare, a good 15p dearer than home.

We fire up to the top deck so some of the Bhoys can smoke, me included, and before long the rebs have started.

"It was on a dreary new year's eve as the shades of night came down"

We are battering the windows, full of that pride you get when singing the rebs on enemy turf.

We are just sending our heroes to heaven when I turn round and spy a familiar face on the bus. I'm way too shy to say anything but I recognise him and nudge my mate who looks at me with the friendly "what the fuck did you do that for?" face. I dart my eyes from his to where the famous face is sitting and he eventually clocks on what I mean and looks round subtle like. He looks back at me and stutters away, clearly trying to remember what the guy's name is.

I tell him it's Terry Christian from *The Word*.

It takes him a few seconds to remember who that is. The programme only started the week before so I excuse that but folk like me had been waiting on it all our lives. Or at least since one day in November last year.

That was the day *Top of the Pops* changed my life.

I'd got word through a mate that two Manchester bands were scheduled to play on it and that loads of bands in Manchester were creating a scene. I didn't know what a scene was but I tuned in anyway. I watched in my room on my black and white portable and saw first the Happy Mondays and then The Stone Roses and that was me, hooked. For the next few months I devoured *Melody Maker*, *Sounds*, *NME* even *Smash Hits* looking for anything from both bands but the Mondays in particular.

I watched things like *The Chart Show*, *The Tube* and anything presented by Gary Crowley. Then in January of 1990 the Happy Mondays announced a tour of sorts. They'd play in Iceland and then the G-Mex in Manchester. I considered walking and swimming to Iceland (in a fight with my parents when they said they wouldn't pay

for me to fly there) but then decided on the easier option of getting the bus to Manchester. I managed to get a ticket from Ripping Records for £9 after selling my Atari (plus six games) for £20. The bus cost me £6 leaving me a fiver spending money after my parents finally buckled and paid for a bed and breakfast for me. The journey down to the concert flew by. A mixture of nervous tension and a Sony Walkman ensured that. The week before I had made a mix tape consisting of *Bummed*, *The Stone Roses* and a couple of songs from a new band from Northwich called The Charlatans.

I got a few shady looks on the bus and that didn't help my paranoia but I think it was down to the music blasting too loud from my headphones.

The bus arrived in a place called Shudehill and I jumped off and looked about. It was chilly but bright which leathered into the Manchester stereotype. I looked at the map my old man had drawn for me after he had gone to the library and found a map of Manchester but he was raging because they wouldn't let him take it out as they said it was a book for reference only. My bed and breakfast was in a place called Ancoats and called "Norm's Gaff" which didn't alarm me as much as it probably should have. Even when my Grandad had said a couple of weeks previously "Ancoats? Ancoats? Where have I heard that name before?" and I was about to tell him what my English teacher had told me in that it was mentioned in a song by *Brian and Michael* when he shouted "THE MOORS MURDERERS ABDUCTED BAIRNS FAE THERE!!!!" before laughing and shaking his head at his failing memory.

I walked along Thomas Street then Hilton Street till I found the digs on Port Street. I had a small case my Grandad gave me and when he did he said "There you go McGill" which baffles me to this day. There were two steps up to a white door which was partially open and there was a stain glass door behind that was closed. I noticed a bell on the right side wall that looked like an old woman's breast with its nipple hardened because she had just accidently brushed against a washing machine going through a full load.

I tentatively extended my right index finger towards the bell, dusty and decrepit, I fear one touch and it might disappear in the air. It taunts me like a week old trifle with its cream topping starting to fade and its cherry about to go. Just at the point of contact a guy around 50 appeared from the door and "leave that son, its old, come in, it's cold" His poetry somehow relaxed me.

I moved in as he turned his back and made his way behind a small desk which I realised was the reception of this place. He opened a book, put on the glasses that were hanging round his neck and said "now then, do you have a booking?" I told him I did and could tell right away he expected me say more.

"And what name is the booking under?"

I told him and he ran his finger down a page in his big note book before stopping three quarters of the way down and stopping at what I discover is my name.

He then looks puzzled and says "single room for two nights?" which really should have been "so where exactly are your parents?" but he just kept going with "The room is sixteen pounds for two nights, half

now, half upon leaving, it's lights out by 11 o'clock and breakfast is served between 7 and 8.30 in the lounge. Here is your key, room six, first floor, second on the left" I ruffle in my pocket and hand him the cheque for 16 quid that my Ma had given me which seems to please him. I take the key he hands over and make my way to the room. On arrival, the key has to fiddle in the lock for a bit before finally getting in the hole. The room has a bed, table, two chairs, a kettle, two cups and a shower. A shower? I've only ever been in a bath before.

It was 4.05pm just now and the concert is tomorrow at 7pm. I hadn't even thought about what I might do in the meantime. I unpacked my bag and headed out again, I'd seen a Wimpy which would do me for my tea but I had to go somewhere else first. See, unbeknown to my mum and dad, my Grandad had put a £20 note in my suitcase for me and told me not to tell anyone (I'm trusting you here) and I knew right away what I wanted to buy and, more importantly, where I wanted to buy them from. I had £20 savings with me as well so £40 was really good just for clobber. *Afflecks Palace* had been on the go for about nine years but I'd only heard it about it in January there. I was reading the *Melody Maker* one day and they had an article about it saying guys like Shaun Ryder and Ian Brown shopped there. It also said they were printing a line of new Inspiral Carpets t shirts from in there that had a cow on them and said "Cool as Fuck" on them.

This was the place I had to buy my flares and a jacket.

I made my way along, again with the aid of homemade map, and realised I was closer than I thought. I moved inside and also realised it was a maze of a place. I moved up the staircase, taking in the myriad of different shops and stalls and marveling at the people. I felt

like the dad in *Gremlins* when he's looking to buy his boy a present. I turned one corner and a shop front hit me like slush puppy on a cold day. In front of me were more jeans and tops than you'd see at the concert tomorrow.

Before I could even gather my thoughts someone moved right in front of me and said "Ye alright luv?" and I nodded. I was that excited that I daren't speak and say something stupid. I could feel my face go red as the girl moved away from me again and the piles of jeans appeared in front of me like the Pyramids. I knew what I wanted, 28 waist, 28 leg, 28 inch wide flares and a top to replace the bright red hoodie that my mate Dav back in Edinburgh had lent me for the trip (Dav had a long perm which he had said made him look like Mick Hucknall whereas I thought it made him look more like Mickey Weir) I looked at the prices of the jeans and they were around £19-£28 each but I had £40 to spend so that was cool. It was a *Gio Goi* shop and I picked out pair of jeans and a green *Gio Goi* jacket with gold lettering was going to cost me £55 all in leaving me just a fiver left to spend when I took into account my own money, the money mum and dad gave me and the extra £20 my Grandad had given me, but I didn't care. I wanted to look the part. My hair was horrible and wiry but I still had it in a centre parting. I had on a pair of *Stan Smith Adidas* that I had asked for at Christmas so these purchases would complete the look I wanted.

I went back to the digs and silently prayed I wouldn't be mugged with every step. A few shady characters had clocked the bag and were eyeing me up as if they were lions to my zebra in the jungle.

Thankfully I made it and went up to my room. I laid my clothes out on the bed. It felt good. I then put them on the floor, neatly and went to bed.

Nothing eventful happened up until it was time for the concert. There were a couple of DJ's playing, then 808 State, then the Mondays.

I approached the GMEX and there were was already hundreds of people milling about. TV cameras were there and it was rumoured that Channel 4 was taping the gig. I didn't care about that, I just wanted to get in and joined what seemed to be a queue. After about twenty minutes, a camera crew walked past me and started talking to a guy, they asked him what the Happy Mondays meant to him? He paused for a bit and said "They just say everything they need to say, what's going on like" If they'd asked me I could have told them they meant enough for me to travel on the bus for five hours, stay at some crappy bed and breakfast and risk my life to buy flares.

We eventually got in, just as it was getting really cold, and I just milled about for a while, listening to the DJ's and watching the crowd fill up. Everyone seemed happy but on another planet to me. I stood at the side of the stage, watching and kindae dancing. Loads of folk were just sitting around as 808 State came on and they didn't have the best of gigs in my opinion. As if that mattered to them.

As it got closer to the Mondays coming on stage, I started to get nervous. The crowd was now massive and completely out of it. It was as if a giant spaceship had landed in Manchester and let 10,000 stoned aliens loose.

I was scared. This was too much for me, I put my back up against the wall and considered leaving. What was I thinking, pleading with my parents to let me come down, acting the big man when I certainly wasn't.

Then my vision started to go, it was black in front of me, what was happening? Then a noise, it was familiar and comforting. It was a voice. I composed myself and realised someone was talking to me. I rubbed my eyes and saw a girl, she was leaning in and saying she liked my jeans. She talked like Shaun Ryder talked and I replied "cheers", putting my thumb up as if it was a facial tick I had no control over.

She moved in close to me and gave me swig out of her plastic cup. She had a bottle of vodka stashed in her dungarees. She had a pair of amazing red *Kickers* on and a baggy tracksuit top. We smiled at each other for what seemed like an eternity before she leaned in and said "I've got E's" sticking her tongue out to reveal a white pill on the tip. She dropped her eyes on it and indicated I take it. Nervously, I moved in, resisting the urge to go at it as if playing *Operation*. I moved my head in and concentrated on the pill. As I licked it off her tongue, she moved closer to me and went down my throat as if chasing the pill. The kiss brought me out myself. There may have been 10,000 people in there but right then it was just me, I felt like I was the only guy on earth right there. I focused on her and realised she was looking at me and smiling. We locked eyes and kissed again. Man it felt good to be alive. Nothing else mattered. Then there was an explosion. She had her back to the stage and had to turn but I could see what had

happened, the Mondays had appeared on the stage. Shaun moved up to the microphone and said “Hello Texas!” and everyone went wild.

I didn't see her again.

The crowd went into delirium and looked like an open can of peas that had toppled over.

The ecstasy flew me through the gig and back through the night to the digs.

Goodbye Texas.

We jump off the bus in Deansgate the morning of the Bryan Robson game and spend most of the day drinking in two pubs. In the second one there is a spliff going round and, when I puff, the magic dragon joins the beer monster in me.

We walk to Old Trafford for the game. It is dark and cold with clouds spitting at us all the way. I buy a programme because this game is a big deal for us. We haven't won anything in 18 months and we need games like this. The Huns are at Dunfermline tonight but who gives a fuck about them? My ticket is for the terracing behind the goal and I want to be right at the front. I'd seen so many other sets of away fans go bananas in there and I wanted some of that. Getting in is weird. The ground doesn't look as big as it did on TV. I'd been in it six years before but everything looks big when you're that age.

The game is phenomenal. We've thrashed them 3-1 and the third goal in particular is a thing of beauty. There is a massive surge forward and I get up on the fence, shaking my fist like an American preacher. The last few minutes pass in song with Fergie getting loads of abuse. At the final whistle we all jump about and for a minute it feels like we

are the only people on the planet. It has been a miserable time as a Celtic supporter and we need to grab moments like these with both hands.

I'm still up on the fence when I notice there is a surge towards us. Loads of Man Utd fans have vaulted their fences and are running towards us. The guy next to me starts taking his jacket off and shouts "Yes, here we fucking go now!" but there's no aggression coming from them. As the first wave hits us I realise this isn't guys coming out the trenches, these are guys coming to stand shoulder to shoulder with us and the only things being thrown at us are hands. I'm shaking hands with loads of folk and then a guy intimates to me he wants to swap shirts. I give up my CSC training top and in return get a t shirt that has on the front "Man Utd-FA Cup Final 1990" and on the back "No Scouse at Wembley" He gets the better deal but I don't care, he reminded me of Jesper Olsen. After shaking loads of hands and swapping my shirt, I realise I'm freezing now and so I jump down from the fence for the first time in about 45 minutes. I go down with a start and my face almost presses on the squares of the fence and I realise my legs are sore. Gazing down at my newly acquired t-shirt, it's tatty but I don't care. My head moves back up and it's a bolt of lightning hitting me. I focus my eyes and there she is, looking right back at me. She smiles and as I try to speak my mouth is too dry. Her smile gets wider and she says:

"Hello Texas"

4

U n I (New York 2006)

by Paul Larkin

Man Utd was brilliant. I mean if you wanted to get a game, bottle it and sell it, Man Utd would do. It had everything. The sort of tension that would normally accompany a plummeting plane and then the sort of joy that would accompany Superman saving that plummeting plane. People talk about that Naka free kick but the Boruc penalty save was sheer fucking ecstasy, the likes of which I'd had a few times in life in pill form and maybe twice sexually. That might explain my desire to leave Scotland. See Man Utd wasn't just brilliant, it was also my last hurrah. I was off to New York to stay, in search of Paradise after leaving, well, you know.

My buddy Gary had a different experience which was relayed to me, in his car, on the day I got to New York, Thanksgiving 2006. I saw his car on the corner of 42nd and Madison, got in and exchanged pleasantries and he began;

“Yeah, Tuesday. So you know it's like 2.45 kick off here, and I'm in at 3, right? Except I'm not, cause there's no fucking way I'm going in at 3. So I call my boss and I'm like 'I'm not coming in at 3, I'll be in at like 4.30. So he says 'Ok', cause you know Charlie is down, and I get off the bus at Port Authority at 2.15 and walk up to Connollys, the one on 54th. I get in, order a beer, Henieken Light, it's like 5 minutes to kick off but the TV is already on the station, that's a fucking bonus right? How many times we been in bars waiting? Anyways, the game starts and people are watching, you know, tourists, some regulars, a few locals and the bar man. The bar man is into it, he's Irish, the south, not the black north, so we start talking. He's a good guy, Trevor his name is. So we're talking, you know, shooting the shit, bullshitting about the game, talking about all the money in it, the corporate side,

comparing it to America, stuff like that. Now I'm talking because I'm nervous right? The game is fucking absorbing, it's going on and we're doing ok right? But we start talking about Man Utd, he starts saying about Rooney and Ronaldo and how they will win the European Cup soon, or what, the uh Championship, no, um Champions League. So half time comes and it turns out he has season tickets at the Mets, so I tell him I'm a Met and we start talking and he's knowledgeable this guy, I mean he's Irish right, he's not from Queens but he lives in Queens, he has a wife, Cassie, and she has a fucking season ticket too. So we're bullshitting away about the Mets. In between him working, I mean he is working, right? I'm not like fucking on him the whole game. And when we get the free kick, he's on his break. He's upstairs eating, they got TV's. The free kick goes in and I go 10 feet in the fucking air, right? I'm going crazy and there's like fucking lawyers and uh, art guys looking up but I'm gone. I'm just calming down and Trevor is coming back to the bar, he walks past me and says 'Unbelievable huh?' and I'm like "I know!!!!" right? So I order another beer because it's my last before work, right? I'm just putting my hand on the fucking bottle and the referee gives that fucking penalty, where the fuck did he get that penalty from? Nobody gives a penalty for that, well except in Scotland. My heart is on the floor, I mean I'm gone, I'm 10 minutes from going to work and I'm in bits. Saha steps up, boom, Boruc saves it. I explode, I grab Trevor, I'm throwing him around the bar like he's a fucking bad wrestler and I'm screaming, I mean really screaming. I ain't heard screaming like this since my wife last gave birth, and we end up falling, I fall on top of him and the guy breaks his fucking collar bone! You fucking believe that! I'm killing

myself laughing and in all the commotion I don't realise the referee has blown the final whistle! One of the waitresses comes over and asks what the fuck is going on? So I tell her, we are happy, Celtic has won, we beat Manchester United! And the waitress goes "But Trevor is a Man Utd fan?"

With that, Gary put the key into the ignition and we drove off to Queens.

5

Rosie Hackett's Banner (Dublin 2015)

by Paul Larkin

I've been here a few year and still love that walk from my flat in Pearse Street to my work in O'Connell Street. Normally I'd get a paper in the Spire next door to the pub but I've got a book today. I was on Amazon last week and it was recommended to me from them. I bet they didn't know I know the author though. A guy from where I was born in Edinburgh, pal of my Dad's, so I ordered it out of curiosity as I always remember him as a total waster so I was intrigued to see he had written a book. You could have knocked me down with a feather when, after I bought it, Amazon showed me he had written several others. This one will do for now though, I feel it in my bag and decide to take it out as I head over the O'Connell Bridge, past the Heineken factory, and Joe Higgins stares down at me like a Russian dictator from an election poster.

The book is called *The Grand Old Team* by *Paul Larkin*.

I flick through it, intrigued to see the first story is by a *James Larkin* and I don't remember Paul having any brothers and his dad, God rest him, died about 15 years ago.

The day I went to Tannadice by James Larkin (@jameslarkin01)

The first thing I remember about the day is that I was at my Granny Carole's before the game and I remember putting on my jacket, gloves, hat and Celtic scarf as, although it was May, it was pretty chilly. I got picked up there by my Dad's pal Ally and I remember it felt like a pretty long journey up to Dundee. On the motorway, we passed about five Rangers buses who were heading up to Aberdeen.

Ally told me to put my Celtic scarf under the seat in case they turned rabid.

When we arrived there, everywhere was packed. The turnstiles had huge queues and it took us a while to get in.

I remember we got in, still an hour to kick off, and the place was already packed. I was in the front row of the wee stand at the side.

The game started and Dundee Utd had a few chances. It felt like we were sitting quite deep and it took us a while to get into the game.

As the second half got going, I remember everyone shouting and going crazy and Ally shouted "yaaas" and I asked him what was going on and he said "Aberdeen have scored against Rangers".

Then we got a corner next to our stand. The next thing, the ball was in the net and I jumped up and down and started shouting.

It was obvious then that Aberdeen had scored again and people were saying Rangers were getting men sent off and we knew then it was all over.

I knew they couldn't come back, I knew we had won the league and I was so looking forward to the celebrations.

When the full time whistle went, everyone went crazy. Then the trophy came out and got presented and the players did a lap of honour.

Artur Boruc came really close to us and he had lots of scarves on. He was dancing and shouting.

After that, we left the stadium and went to the car. I fell asleep all the way home and I got dropped off at my Granny's house again.

I sat down on the couch but went to bed soon after as I was really tired.

It must be his son. Not having been in Edinburgh for a few years and having lost touch with old crowd by about the summer of 2000, I'm not 100% sure but it looks like a child's hand that wrote that. Although Paul isn't mentioned in it himself so that throws me. No way would he miss a game normally never mind one where we won the league.

Work pulls me in like a magnet as do the various regulars I pass on O'Connell Street who nod and say "howarye".

Murrays is a decent pub that's desperate to be a restaurant. We still get a drinking crowd but it's not a drinking pub. Not like, say, The Gravediggers in Glasnevin. It's a tourist pub, a "wankers pub" my mate Mick would say and since the Naomh Padriag CSC moved out, there's no reason, no reason at all for anyone to come who doesn't want a 15 euro burger. It didn't used to be like that. There used to be great craic. Like the time Keith came in with a towel wrapped round his head and ordered a pint, oblivious to the fact that the whole bar was looking at him quizzically. Pint poured, he got asked "what's the story?" and he said "wha?" "The fecking towel?!" Keith gulps his Guinness before saying "Oh I was at a stag in Liverpool and I lost me jacket so I robbed the towel, it's fecking cold out there"

Charlie Parnell hovers over me as I see the pub's façade. As good as the statue is Dubliners will say it should be Connolly up there or at least something similar at the other end of the street, not hidden away under a bridge next to a fucking bus station.

Big Conor is always ranting about that. Another regular, the more he drinks, the more Dub he gets. His best mate, Mick, is also a mate of mine and he comes from Tipp. Conor adores him but once he starts adding Vodka and *Red Bull* to the gargantuan amount of Guinness he drinks, he starts giving out to Mick. He will pour on scorn on anyone he perceives to hate Dublin and will continually remind everyone in earshot what Dublin has given the world, namely a revolution in 1916 just up the road there. Then he will take his Boston Celtics tracksuit off and show everyone, for the millionth time, his top emblazoned with the legend “Dublin: The city that fought an empire” and stand there like a new father showing off his baby boy. It will get to the point where folk who don’t know them will be convinced a fight is about to break out. That’s the point where Mick will start to sing. Yep, sing. *The Galtee Mountain Boy* will come out his mouth as if he’s just been wound up and, I guess, in many ways he has. At this point, no matter what he is doing, Big Conor will stand frozen, as if gazing at an approaching army coming towards him. Then his eyes will gently close, as if in slow motion, and a smile will spread across his face like butter before his mouth opens with the inevitable “IN TIPPERARY WITH DAN BREEN!!!!” and everything will settle down again.

Pair of fucking clowns.

I enter the door and that’s exactly who is sitting there, Conor and Mick, already. Marco must have let them in and they have clearly been on a major session the night before.

“Howareye lads?”

They both look up as if reminded they are still alive.

“Just the girl!” shouts Conor.

This could be anything.

“Right, we got you a ticket for the fucking Sweden game, it’s all sorted, my mate John Delaney”

Conor taps his nose. He used to despise John Delaney. Then the papers put a story out that he sang *Joe McDonnell* at a do and Conor would be all for making him President of Ireland.

Thing is, I’m very grateful for the ticket and tell the lads so.

“There’s just one thing” Mick pipes up for the first time. I watch him because he fancies himself as a bit of a ladies man.

“You need a flag”.

“What?”

“A flag, you need a flag! Not a fleg, a flag!”

I try to take this nonsense as a joke but Conor is nodding along in agreement.

“Yeah, the Tipp cunt’s right, you need a flag”

“Why do I need a flag?”

Mick almost falls off his seat, takes a swig of Guinness and says:

“It’s a major tournament, you need a fucking flag, we all have flags, you need one like, I’ve a few Celtic ones and a big 1916 one. It’s the 100 years anniversary, we are off to France, every cunt will have a flag”

“Even the girls? Come on lads, the girls won’t have a flag”

Me saying that made Conor look like he needed resuscitated.

“You started all this!!!!”

I am bemused by this.

“A week before the rising, a young woman called Rosie Hackett hoisted a flag of the Irish Republic over the Hall, that’s 100 years ago and it was a city fighting that bastard empire, now you’re querying taking one to France on an Aer Lingus?”

He had a point the big man. Secretly, I was loving all this because it made me feel part of something again. Moving here from Edinburgh was more of an escape and bar work was a distraction. Losing my father felt like losing my world. I was young, alone and scared witless. Dublin was the blanket that cuddled me and protected me from the demons that lay in wait, just at the back of my mind.

“Oh by the way, I need all your details, passport and all that”

Conor broke the black ice.

I had all that stored on my phone so relayed them as Conor wrote them on a bit paper that looked like it had been pressed down on every bar in Ireland.

I felt happy. France eh? Will be a bit craic.

Then I looked at Conor again, I’ve seen that face before, he wriggles it before saying something that will confirm he’s been a fucking eejit.

“I just realised I don’t know your last name, I need it for the sheet like.

“It’s Ainslie, Hope Ainslie”

6

God's Chosen Few (Musselburgh 2012)

by Paul Larkin

The sun shone in Musselburgh that day. The sort that squints your eyes like chlorine and which then need more adjusting than a *Freeview* box. Brother Sandy MacMillan parked his car about half a mile from the assembly point, got out, looked up at the clear blue sky and thought “God looks after his own”.

This was a dream for Sandy. To have the big walk on his patch was something he felt entitled to, 31 years of service to LOL 234 had got him to this day. A loyal brother, Queen, Country, God and the Lodge. He had it all planned, they were walking from the High St, right down to Portobello, with one wee detour. That was the most important part.

He knew the boys would be up for it today. That omnishambles that was Rangers had hurt their pride. Gave the Fenians something to crow about forever. That didn't sit well with Sandy. Times had changed. A lot of the old certainties had gone, the political climate had changed with the SNP gaining a huge majority at the last Scottish elections. Catholics were getting into positions of authority, particularly on the television. Another Pope had even visited Scotland, Protestant Scotland, our Scotland and another fucking Pape high heid yin addressing the great unwashed. Brother Hugh Dallas had even been sacked for warning folk about him. Celtic had won the league that season too. An Irish Catholic at the helm to boot. These were worrying times for Sandy.

So he wanted the bastards to know today that they were still in charge. This was our day, our country, our religion, our God.

As he arrived staunchly at the meeting point, just past the bridge, he noticed *The Hayweights* was packed with Lodge members. “Would never have happened in my day” he mused to himself. Then he smiled and thought “This is my day” before waving a white-gloved right hand at his men. Those who saw him raised their pints back. Time was there would have been 50,000 Orangemen on the streets for the big walk. Especially on a day like today. Sandy often told people that it was no coincidence that the sky was blue and the sun was orange. Today they were expecting just under 12,000. That angered Sandy but he had his reasons why this was, a Unionist sell out in Northern Ireland and a chemical generation that took away the discipline of the young.

He’d heard all the stories of the UDA dealing drugs and he had refused to acknowledge it. It didn’t register with him until one day he was on the boat from Larne and he clocked a Taig on the boat, talking into his mobile. He listened as this Fenian rat in a Celtic tracksuit was slagging off his beloved Rangers. Then the beggar said something that chilled him to the bone. After pushing his phone off, the Fenian’s mate said to his Tarrrier pal “Did you see the paper last night Gary? UDA dealing drugs in Larne? fucking disgrace” Gary smiled and replied “I like it, Martin. It’s all Hun cunts they are dealing to, long may it fucking continue”

Time was Larne was a safe haven, not any more. Another old certainty gone. The devil had got in about it. As they set off today though, Sandy was still proud. He would show the bastards. No Surrender. The route was a straight one, can’t have the bands making big U-turns, he’d seen too many already in this life.

The bands marched loud and proud along the North High Street, onto the Edinburgh Road, Joppa Road and then Portobello High Street where they would then stop everything for their speeches. Brother Gordon McMaster at Portobello Police Station saw to that.

They approached their target, it was an obvious one, but no less pleasing.

St John's Roman Catholic Church.

Sandy had become embittered with hate by this time. His face was purple, ironically the colour of the Roman Catholic faith, when he screamed "Loud and proud boys, give those tARRIER bastards everything you've got!!!!!" as he skipped round the band leader "This is our country, this is our God!!!!!"

He had become so engrossed in getting that maximum hate impact on his enemy he didn't notice the clouds come.

Even as it got darker, Sandy was too busy screaming about Nuns, Priests and Rosary Beads to notice that a thunder storm had replaced his blue sky.

Replacing the orange sun, lightening had fractured the sky and struck the chapel, causing a massive part of the roof to rip off. Upon hitting the road, the roof killed hundreds of Orangemen instantly.

Sandy looked in horror.

Then before his own eyes a second bolt of lightning came and vaporised Brother John McMorran from Prestonpans.

Sandy was fuming. This was his day.

The third bolt of lightning hit and took out another bit of the chapel which landed on the Cormack's Young Defenders band. All were killed within a week, many lying in hospital for days, fighting in vain for their lives.

Sandy ran for cover, fear gripped him for the first time. Real fear. The sort that soldiers get in the heat of battle but Sandy had never got near to before.

He got into what was left of the chapel then peered back out to see thousands of dead Orangemen on Portobello High Street.

He was so shocked that he never had a chance. A kind of aftershock let out a tremor that knocked the statue of The Virgin Mary down right on Sandy's head, he lay buried under the rubble for nine hours before dying of suffocation caused the statue's hand slowly strangling him all day.

He is survived by a wife Victoria and sons Alexander and William.

After a few years and lots of worldwide support, the chapel was re-built. Father Alex Keane had also taken out an insurance policy with the Safety Insurance Group of Boston, MA. They paid out in full.

Sadly, Loyal Orange Lodge 234 got nothing. At a meeting, a few weeks after Scotland's biggest ever tragedy, with their insurance company the facts were laid out by a man in a grey suit and SpongeBob tie.

His opening sentence said all that needed to be said to the chosen few left of the lodge.

"I'm deeply sorry for what occurred gentlemen, however as our policy clearly states, we don't pay out for acts of God"

7

Mama gave birth to the dole children (The Bronx, 2012)

by Paul Larkin

In the summer heat of the South Bronx, Sean always contemplated his own existence. 26 year's old, eldest of three boys. There was Henry at 23 and little Rudy at 11. Sean peered out the window and tilted his head right, looking up the Grand Concourse. It was 10am so it was busy, people filing into the court house. Sean studied them and saw that most were either black, or hispanic.

He shook his head.

He picked up the newspaper, looked at the job ads, shook his head again and threw the paper across the room.

In the distance, if he really focused, he could see the top of Yankee Stadium. Nothing would be going on there today, the All Star game was last night, the National League won 8-0 and his buddy Clarence (C-Ree) had joked with him last night that the Mets now had home field advantage for the World Series.

As he turned and looked back into his living room, he snapped back into reality. Henry was sprawled out on the couch watching Rachel Ray, Rudy was reading a book by H.Rap Brown. It was part of his history class.

Sean had one job since he left school, he worked at Target in Mount Vernon until one day he was told his services would no longer be required after an inventory showed that his part of the department, men's clothes, was showing a loss. No warning, see ya, thanks for playing.

He pushed the window up further, to make up for the lack of air conditioning, he looked at Henry, H-Bomb to his friends, who had never worked, and saw himself. Sean realised he was now the role

model after their father, Big Rudy, had walked out one day and never came back. People round the neighbourhood said he was shackled up in Paterson, NJ, with a young girl he met in The Yankee Clipper after the Yanks won the World Series in 2000.

Mom was out doing her cleaning jobs with pay that was barely adequate to pay the rent. Sean looked at Henry again and his heart sunk then he let rip

“Whatcha doing today Henry?”

H-Bomb didn't look up.

“I ain't doing shit today”

“How the fuck you supposed to get a fucking job sitting on yaw ass all day”

H-Bomb ignored him and Sean despaired.

H-Bomb then piped up

“You're the one that threw the fucking paper away”

America had a black President almost three years now. Yet nothing had changed for the Lyttle family.

Sean pushed Henry's legs off the sofa and sat down. Rachel was cooking pasta with butternut squash with Adam Sandler and Katie Holmes.

Sean mused “Didn't she just leave Tom Cruise or some shit?”

No one in the room replied.

As they watched the smiling celebrities, silence descended more and more on the room.

In fact, Sean was almost asleep when Rudy leapt up. Henry was asleep, so jolted when he heard Rudy say:

“You two are a fucking disaster area, you’ve given up already. Read these books, know your history, don’t take this shit, fight back. Jesus Christ, Public Enemy were fighting the power 22 years ago and you two can’t even be assed to change the channel. Read these books man, a lot of good shit in here. Yeah we’ve always been screwed, that’s America, it ain’t just us any more, it’s everyone but you can’t give up, or they’ve won”

Henry looked up at Rudy, realised he was finished and so lay his head back down on the sofa.

Sean was till transfixed by Rudy.

Then he smiled.

Rudy was his great black hope. Sean had to say something though, he couldn’t let his little brother think he was the man.

“Rudy, you serious? Everyone? Yeah right. It may be a black President but it’s still a *White* House. Ain’t got no jobs on the Grand Concourse and the black man ain’t welcome in Manhattan. You hail a cab there and they think you just robbed a place”

H-Bomb was listening now. Rudy sat back down.

“You see that bit of the ceiling up there?” Sean pointed at bit of the living room ceiling that had been needing fixed for three months now. “If that was in Trump Plaza, it would be fixed already. Three months we have been waiting on the god damned landlord doing something. Yet he ain’t done shit”

They all paused for reflection. So much so that the door being knocked startled them all. Sean got up and looked through the peep hole to see two burly white guys at the door. He hesitated after seeing them but another, more impatient, knock came and so Sean opened the door.

“Here about the roof”

Sean heard the noise but couldn't decipher the words being said to him. It sounded to him like he was being threatened.

“Excuse me?”

“Yer roof, we're here tae fix yer roof?”

Sean heard roof. He saw the tools and was smart enough to join the dots so let them in. The talker looked up and down whilst the other guy nodded nervously at him.

They both immediately looked up at the roof and the big guy said to the little guy:

“Whit's the damage here then?”

H-Bomb and Little Rudy had looks on their faces like Martians had just invaded their living room.

They spotted the area of the roof that had been rotting away and got to work.

Sean, H-Bomb and Rudy were transfixed. They hadn't understood a word the two guys had said but admired the way they went about their work. The smaller of the two guys was up a ladder and the bigger was directing him. The bigger guy had a foot on either side of the bottom side of ladder as he turned to Sean and said:

“Are you aw fae aroond here, aye?”

Sean looked at him blankly. He felt the need to speak.

“I’m sorry, I don’t understand you?”

This led to a smile come across the big guy’s face.

“Don’t worry about it big man, I’m Chas by the way, that’s Kev” and he turned his torso to offer a hand to shake which Sean took willingly as it was the first time Chas had seemed non-confrontational.

Chas had been in this situation before.

“I was saying, are you from around here?”

Light dawned on Sean at last.

“Oh, uh, yeah, um, we have lived here all our lives”

“Nice one aye”

Sean, relaxing a little, looked at the bag the workers had.

“You like the Celtics?!”

Chas laughed at Sean;

“Naw mate, that’s fuck aw tae dae wi Boston, that’s GLASGOW Celtic. Nae “S” oan the end”

Sean was startled, he actually understood what Chas said.

“Oh, ok cool” said Sean now more confused than ever.

They let the guys go to work and settled back into their talk from before.

“Obama can’t do shit, it’s a shame”

“Yeah you know what, I was expecting to be much moe gangsta n shit by now”

“He’s the first hip-hop president yet nothing has fucking changed, it’s still the same shit up here, day in, day muthafucking out”

And on it went long into the day. So much so that they all eventually fell asleep.

Rudy was first to wake from the noise of Chas, and his partner Kev, clearing their tools up, roof fixed.

Then Sean and H-Bomb awoke simultaneously.

Sean got up and looked at the roof, it was fixed. He thanked the guys and they went to leave.

Chas walked out the door and Kev followed him but then turned back and addressed the three guys for the first time;

“Look, I know how you are feeling. Me and him? We were in the same boat. That’s why we are 3000 miles from home right now. We had to leave because it’s hard for two guys like us to get work in the country we come from. And by the way, that’s not a glass ceiling we put in there”

With that Kev turned and left.

There was a silence in the room for one minute, maybe even two, when H-Bomb said “He doesn’t say much that guy but when he does it’s kinda fly”

Rudy picked up his book again. Sean looked at the job ads in the paper.

8

The Connection 18+

by Paul Larkin

The York train is always a nightmare. Full of wankers on their way to London for a weekend. The type of cunts who would get off at Kings Cross, see the Flying Scotsman and be poured out it again three days later, weekend over.

As usual we have a train conductor who thinks he is Chris fucking Moyles and spends about three hours telling us about the buffet car.

I don't care though.

Sitting opposite me is one of those women who are mortified any time a man even looks in their direction. She sits with her phone in her hand praying that her, no doubt cockney wanker, boyfriend isn't banging away at some sort he met in a Neasden disco. You can see the anguish in her face, she doesn't trust him, she won't be in London for four hours yet and he could be up to anything.

He could be up anything.

Yet she still does not look at me and you can tell she resents my mere existence.

A group of Newcastle fans get on in Geordieland. Newcastle fans are the English equivalent of The Tartan Army. From the outset they look good, honest, football fans who like a laugh. The reality is they follow a team that have been shit forever and they wear it as a badge of honour that they still follow them. They are patronised constantly on TV yet deep down the whole country hates them. They are going to Peterborough and you'd hope they'd have the good sense to get off at Grantham and lay out a few of these cunts who gave us Thatcher.

They won't though.

Durham. Henri Mancini country.

Roberto Mancini has a long way to go before he achieves half of what old Henri did.

Doncaster. Mate of mine was with a girl from here for years. Says one time she wanked him off in the front of a car he was driving as her old man lay sleeping in the back. I don't know who that reflects on worse.

I see York approach and clock football ground. I turn from it and she's standing on the platform, good as gold, and my stomach turns. A bit of me wants to stay on the train all the way home to London, fucking Dunbar can be a lonely place at times, but I get off and she comes towards me and my heart dances like Michael Flatley.

"You didn't have to do this, it's fucking stupid" she hisses at me.

I hand her the child support and she leaves.

I check when the next train back to Dunbar is.

I slept most of the way back on the train. It was a depression sleep, the sort that you force yourself into when the pain is so much that you can't bare to be awake any more. It was past 10 o'clock when I got back into Dunbar. Only a few people shuffled off the train.

I walked to the car park and got in my car, it felt cold yet it was a warm night. As I turned the engine on, the stereo clicked into gear and Ian Dury said he ain't a bleeding thickie.

The roads were deserted so it only took me five minutes to get home. I'd been away about eight hours all in yet it felt like months. The house was big so it felt empty. It wasn't always empty.

A text came in and my heart skipped for a second but then I saw it was Davie.

It read: “Saw the car pull in, fancy a beer? I’ve got 12 tins in the hoose perishing that I could bring ower”

I text back that it was cool.

I needed company, the telly worked sometimes but not always.

I sat down on my armchair and thought about her. Thought about the kids. My mind wandered to North Berwick beach. I was showing the kids a Starfish and the tide came up and soaked me up to the knees and them up to the neck. She went mental but the kids loved it.

I snapped out my thoughts when Davie rang the bell. I got up and opened the door, Davie bounded in armed to the teeth with Tennents. I took 10 of them and put them in the empty fridge, handed him one and took one for myself.

“So, how did it go?” Davie, subtle as a sledgehammer, addressed the elephant in the room immediately.

“Good, yeah, not bad”

“She gie ye any grief?”

I thought about this for a bit, took a swig and said:

“No more than usual”

Davie frowned, then he moved forward in his seat and said

“Listen big man, it’s no ma place, but ye need to pit aw this behind ye”

He was right.

“Naebody copes well wi loss, especially a partner, but it’s daeing ye nae good gawn doon there jist to hand her sister the money for bairns, ye could dae aw that wi the banks”

He was right again. They are my kids though. It wasn't right her sister got custody.

"I know whit happened wis wrong an aw that, but a new start noo eh?"

I didn't kill her, she slipped, there was nothing I could do.

I sat again with my thoughts, I needed to unload all this. That's what my Doctor said, talk it out.

"I know mate, it's just thing with the kids, she fucking done it didn't she, she got the CSA on to me, the bitch"

Davie sat back in his chair, took a swig and then looked confused.

"Whit the fuck hus the Celtic Supporters Association goat tae dae wi aw this?"

A month passed like a Tommy Cooper catch phrase. The child support was due again and so I phoned the sister, told her I'd put the dough in the bank.

For once, she seemed human and said that the kids wanted to come and see me, did I mind?

I said "No, of course not" and kept cool about the accusation that I would have a problem with it.

We agreed she would come up on the train with them, I'd get them at the station and she'd get the next train back. When they were to go back to York, I'd take them down and then leave immediately also.

We settled on a long weekend.

After the call, I started to panic. What do you do with three young kids in Scotland?

I hadn't a fucking clue.

It's like when you see those promo films for Visit Scotland and they show all those rivers and mountains and you think "Yeah, I'll have some of that", then the reality is four hours on a Megabus from Edinburgh and the kids are bored by the Forth Road Bridge. You're surrounded by young guys going to Inverness on a beano and you smile politely at them talking about girls and the lurid descriptions of what they want to do with them but secretly you hope your kids don't hear and you just wish they would shut up. All the while you know that you were once one of those guys and you wish you were one of them now. Still you cringe that your boorish behaviour once made some other cunt feel like shit.

Culpable manslaughter was the actual charge. She slipped, I couldn't help her. Gullane Beach, I thought she was messing about but realised she had hit her head.

The lawyer said "you'll get six, be out of in four"

Four years.

No kids.

No wife.

Just memories.

Like the time I was about 14 and went up to Celtic to try and skive in. No joy at all, then the teams came out, I heard the roar and then looked down, a fiver in front of me. Got me in, a programme and fish and chips on the way home.

My mum went mental when saw the chippy stuff, thought I'd nicked the money.

The day comes and I see the train approaching.

It stops and the kids come off, I say kids, they look like young adults now.

Four years.

The sister waves and the kids come towards me.

We're about 40 yards apart when I realise that all the looking back is not fondness of the times, it's the fact that I miss my youth.

And my kids.

"Hello there..."

9

The Couple (Perth, WA, 2015)

by Paul Larkin

Everyone knew they were getting married. I mean Facebook was awash with it. So when I got there, I was amazed Eva had been replaced by Paddy. Not literally like, see Andy was on a driving ban and so Paddy drove him to the airport to pick me up but already wedding talk was in the air. After the pleasantries, we talked weddings. In an awkward threesome. The date was next January and this was only April but it felt close, swarming over us like friendly bees.

Yet Paddy and Andy went back and forth like a married couple. Not arguing like but just about the roads, traffic, Perth, Australia, emigrating and, of course, Celtic.

It was nice, even at the hotel, they looked after me like a pair. There was a snooty receptionist who I thought Paddy was about to put the head on but Andy smoothed it, the perfect foil for Andy is Paddy.

The next day I saw Andy again but this time he was with Davy. Burnsy and Brian were there too but Davy was definitely side by side with Andy.

Davy would drive me to Freemantle but he would check with Andy first.

Andy then told me we would be going Mandurah the day after and it would be with Raymie. So it was Andy and Raymie who took me. We go to Mandurah and it's beautiful, meet loads of guys but it's Kev and Danny who stick out.

We get back and meet Paddy and Chris, who are father and son. That's Paddy who was with Andy at the start. Chris is with Gemma really.

Stepping back, at what first I thought was awkward was actually phenomenal.

This was family.

This was Celtic.

In Perth, Western Australia.

Health, wealth and happiness to Andy and Eva.

10

Punt (Letterkenny 1998)

by Paul Larkin

Charlie looked at his paper and studied the form. It was a distraction. His mind was 200 miles away. Being distracted caused him to look out the window. It was 7am and he was due at Derry airport at 9am. He already saluted his two magpies for the day so he was ok on that score. The grass looked plush, the sort of green that Charlie's heart was. He put down crispness of the grass to the five bits of turf he'd bought at Celtic Park in the summer of 1994, fiver a bag.

"Ah fucks sake" Charlie saw another Magpie. "That's that bastard again, not today of all fucking days"

Raging, he phoned his pal Tommy and told him all about the Magpie. Tommy said on the phone "Charlie, it's St Johnstone we are playing the day, no Newcastle. Calm doon. I'll see you at the airport at 11"

With that, Tommy put the phone down, Charlie shook his head, he didn't get it, that Magpie had been plaguing his life. And Dunfermline play in black and white, look what happened last week.

He picked up his bag and jumped in the merc, it was short drive to Derry but all the while Charlie did a good impression of Ray Liotta in *Goodfellas* when he is convinced the cops are trailing him from a helicopter.

Checked in, he was through security just in time for boarding and, as he was in first class, he was on the plane first.

He studied his paper once again, first place Tommy would be taking them was the bookies in Duke Street before the Jock Stein lounge at Celtic Park.

It was a short journey, maybe 20 minutes in the air and Charlie was immersed in his newspaper, checking form, jockeys, the going and the

trainers, always the trainers. He took a glance out the window and then another. “Fucks sake” He swore he saw a bird out of the window. Not just any bird, THAT bird.

“Is the plane ok!!!!” Charlie roared out to a startled stewardess.

“Yes sir, it’s fine, can I get you anything?”

“Listen, there’s a fucking Magpie following me over to Scotland to try and deny us the league so watch yourselves”

The stewardess leaned in and said;

“I know it’s not a long flight but would you like a sedative Sir?”

They touched down 10 minutes later and Tommy was waiting. He raised his eyebrows when he saw Charlie remonstrating with a police officer.

“Tommy can you tell this cu..cop that you’re here to pick me up!”

Tommy confirmed he was and Charlie was free to go. As soon as they got out of earshot Tommy chimed in:

“What was that all about?”

“Tommy, you won’t believe this, that Magpie has followed me here”

Tommy was lost for words.

“Today of all fucking days Tommy”

As they got to the car, Tommy looked at Charlie just before they got in;

“Let’s just get to the bookies”

Charlie had his winners picked and was doing his usual bet of three fivers and a fiver. Well that’s what he told his wife, in reality there

was a zero on the end of each five.

“Right Tommy, that’s me done” Charlie said as he placed his bets.

Tommy had a relieved look about him.

They drove the short distance to Celtic Park where they were meeting up with John Fallon, an old friend who just happened to be a legend.

It was still early but you could taste the tension. Even over the taste of the egg mayo sandwiches in the Jock Stein lounge.

Then there was a problem.

Charlie nudged Tommy and said “look!”

Tommy was bewildered. He was looking in the direction Charlie was urging him to but could see nothing awry.

“Her name!!!”

Tommy scrutinised her name badge, it said “Maggie”

“What about it?”

“Fucking Maggie! Margaret! Magpie!”

Tommy actually laughed this time. As he did, John Fallon walked in, invited by Tommy for the day.

“John, thank God you’re here, this mad man thinks he’s being followed by a Magpie and it is giving him bad luck”

“Fae Newcastle?”

“No, the bird”

Fallon looked totally bemused.

Charlie retired to the TV and the horse racing. His first was beaten by

a head, his second pulled up and the third? Well that was pointless now.

Tommy was chatting with Fallon and Big Yogi when Charlie charged over and threw the betting slip in their general direction.

“Fucking three of them beat! I told you didn’t I!”

Yogi and Fallon were perplexed. Tommy was starting to lose it now.

“Charlie, get a hold of yourself, we are here to win the league and enjoy ourselves. Calm down and have a glass of wine”

Charlie was having none of it.

He stormed out of the lounge and looked for the groundsman John Hayes. Finding him, he slipped him a fifty and took possession of a hose and sat in the front of the main stand. It was still only 12pm. Charlie sat for an hour with the hose in hand, waiting. As he waited, none other than Fergus McCann walked past him, then stopped.

“Are you ok there?”

“Yes Fergus, don’t worry I’ll win us the league today”

Charlie grabbed the hose tighter.

“What are you talking about?”

So Charlie relayed the story to Fergus.

For the first time, ever, Fergus was speechless.

Looking at Charlie, he paused for reflection and said;

“You know, we have a guy called Henrik, why don’t we leave it to him?”

And he held out a hand to Charlie and they walked back to the Jock

Stein lounge.

Not saying a word til Charlie said;

“You ever take a punt, Fergus?”

11

The Journey (York 2016)

by Paul Larkin

It looked like a 1-1 draw. Everything about it said a 1-1 draw. It was freezing and we were disappointed. Then a surge, a twist, BANG 2-1!!!! Ya beauty!!!! I left my seat and went inside, sorted for a few egg mayo sannies and a warm can of Fosters. Would do me but. A few others were there too, relatives and friends, close ones. In “The Gaffer’s Box” as everyone called it. I sent an email to The Godfather of Sonoma County, checking in on him, Jimmy and Isaac. After a while I went down to the manager’s office but he wasn’t there. Just his assistant and the goalkeeper coach. The assistant offers me a cold Bud and I accept readily. They have wraps here too, looks like chicken on them. I’m full though. Of food anyway. We sit and chew the fat about the victory and the banter flies. Then the manager comes in and we all embrace him. It’s a good victory. Then when that dies down he says to his father, who is there as well I’m sure you’ll gather, “Did you give the chairman a bottle of whiskey?”

“I did, aye”

“Why?”

“Just trying to keep you in a joab son”

And the banter flies again.

Then the opposition manager comes in. I recognise him. Played for Man Utd. England too.

I listen for a bit before he shuffles away. He’d be sacked on the Monday.

Then we start gathering things up. Primarily the beer for the journey up the road. There’s me and the driver, the goalie coach, the assistant manager and the manager in the car. It’s a nine seater. The manager

sits beside the driver, the assistant sits with his back to him but facing me whereas the goalie coach is to my left. The cool bag is to my right. The bottle opener is in the goalie coach's right pocket. At one point the goalie coach would drop the bottle opener and be laughed at by the manager.

As the car pulls out, the goalie coach, assistant manager and manager all check their phones.

“Did Bo text you?”

“Aye”

“Darren?”

“Aye”

“Stevie?”

“Naw”

“Naw?”

“Naw”

“Naw me neither”

And it's back to the beer.

It's flowing so pish stops are both discussed at length and inevitable.

The manager's phone goes and it's another manager. He wants a player and will give one in return. Our manager turns round and we discuss the player they want to give. He does score goals and the manager loves his brother but we have lots of forwards already so that is that.

No deal.

Music is sought. The driver is a Tim so has some suitable sounds and before long the whole car belts out “and they gave us James McGrory and Paul McStay!” and we are rocking.

We then discuss the assistant manager appearing on a later version of this song and he confesses to having a cassette tape of a concert where that version of the song was sung. We then enquire why the manager has never been on a version and he replies saying:

“Don’t need to be when your photo is on the side of Paradise”

That ends that conversation.

The Legends

Walking Alone

by David Farrell

I lost my Dad in May 2015. The man who was the inspiration behind everything I did and who instilled in me the socialist, working class values I have tried to live by to this day. He was born and raised in 'the Garngad' which explains his and my affiliation to supporting Celtic. It was a predominantly Catholic area and still is to this day; even more than that though, he was a football man. Like you and I, football and family were his life and many a weekend was planned around how we could get to and from wherever Celtic were playing. In those days he didn't drive and very often he'd be working weekends and it would be buses, trains and Shanks' Pony to make sure he got a morning shift in, made the 3pm kick off and got back again in time for SportsScene. The years in the late '70's and early '80's spent bunging the bouncers on the door of The Wellie Boot pub in Aberdeen a couple of bob, so I could be sneaked in to stand in the corner to allow him and my Uncle John a well-earned pint before yet another thrashing from a great Aberdeen side at Pittodrie.

He was also the hardest man I ever met.

Supporters used to think that I was quite tough on the pitch, but that was something I created to allow me to make the grade, to cover up my inefficiencies if you like, but my Dad WAS hard. He was only 5ft 6in but what he lacked in stature he made up for in heart and presence. He ran with the Shamrock and, as a teenager, he would be involved in many scrapes. He'd have taken on anyone in one-to-one combat and try and maneuver situations to give himself the upper hand. As a player, I took a lot of those attributes into matches as I played against many, many players who were better than me, but I'd do everything possible to make sure they didn't GET the better of me,

and that was him all over. I'd be stepping on toes, tugging at jerseys and winding players up by whispering in their ear that the next time they took more than two seconds with the ball, I'd be there, ready to make sure they didn't do it again. Growing up in Royston, my Dad had to use all those tricks and more, to keep on top of HIS hard man reputation. Their main rivals were from Blackhill (and not as was to become the norm in MY teenage years, The Monks) and this time the leader of the Blackhill gang had challenged him to a 'square go,' a Glasgow term for a fist fight, no weapons, one-on-one. This also meant meeting on common ground, in an open space so you could see that your rival didn't have anyone else with him as back up when he was getting a pasting.

The honorable way to do things was the only way my father would have been capable of as anything other than him turning up with just his Stetson for company would have been an affront to his status. Their top man wouldn't come to the Garngad, so my Dad, being the man he was, went to Blackhill. He stiffened as he approached the spare ground and went hammer and tongs. My old man started to get the better of him as they rolled onto the spare ground and his enemy took blow after blow before my old man noticed, through a gap in the spread-eagled combatant's legs, that this Blackhill hard man wasn't quite the honorable foe he had envisaged.

The bastard had arranged for his cohorts to finish what he couldn't, as he could see a crowd of the Blackhill team gathering like buzzards around a carcass. My Dad got one last punch in before rolling over and curling up to allow the bold boy a few sly digs at his now sprawling rival. My old man, lying motionless, had feigned taking a

beating from one, rather than a hammering from six. They stood over him pointing and screaming “piss off and don’t come back to Blackhill” and as the cowards came walking over they embraced, taking their plaudits and fawning each other in equal portions. As they were now about 10 yards away, my Dad squinted, opened an eye and seized the opportunity to get one last dig at his apparent conquerors. He jumped up and, as the Blackhill mob turned to have one last gloat, they witnessed the miracle of Lazarus proportions as he arose unscathed, other than some dusty marks on his clothes, and with outstretched arms ‘Broonie style’ proclaiming, “SHAMROCK!!!” He told me at that point he had no fear of being caught as, unlike my stealthy athletic prowess, he was very quick on his feet. He turned and ran, but made sure he was only just quick enough to keep them a few yards away whilst turning and taunting them with profanities and hand signals all the way to Germiston, the border between the Garngad and Blackhill that represented safe ground for the Shamrock and with that, the Blackhill mob turned and beat a hasty, broken retreat after both a physical AND mental beating.

Their leader wasn’t to be so lucky the next time he ‘bumped’ into my Dad though, as unfortunately for him, there was no set-up and no baying mob hiding round the corner to save him. I’d have loved to have seen that one...

His principles were unrivalled; he would drum into us how to look after people, that you were to be honest and to treat people the right way. He didn’t have to tell us the difference between good and bad, or right and wrong, we just had to look at him, or listen to him, as an example. I remember sitting in the living room one night watching

the highlights of a Celtic game on Sportscene. It wasn't long after I had signed for Hibs and as a new professional I had started to pick up some of the little things from the older pro's, the tricks of the trade. The sneaky, ugly, dishonest side of the game that we only ever pay lip service to. I could intimidate and manipulate situations with the best of them, but I wasn't a cheat, although I was about to show, from my reaction to an incident on TV, that my principles would be tested to the limit in the professional game – but not if my Dad could help it.

Paul McStay took a pass and strode elegantly past the first defender and, as the next one came across to challenge, Paul managed to nick it from his dangling, outstretched leg. It was as clear a penalty as you'd ever see, proven and enhanced by one, single replay (as was the case back then) or at least it would have been had Paul gone over the centre half's leg and made sure there was contact. But McStay being the man he was, skipped over it and in doing so, lost his balance just long enough for him to lose control and the ball ran harmlessly into the goalkeeper's arms.

“What's he doing?” I said.

He sat up, startled and a bit miffed at the same time because you didn't interrupt my Dad in the middle of the football, least of all a Celtic game.

“He should have gone over his leg, made sure he got clattered and got the penalty.”

“What?” he said.

His tone and manner led me to believe he wasn't happy, but I ventured further, hoping he hadn't understood the technicalities of my assertion. I explained further...

"He should have bought the penalty, the defender left his leg there and gave him the chance...."

My explanation was brought to an abrupt end;

"Don't ever let me hear you saying anything like that again...BOUGHT the penalty!!!"

I was severely chastised, in fact he slaughtered me. He was immensely proud of the fact I was a professional footballer, but would only continue to be if I done things the right way. At that moment, my mind drifted back to his 'square go' in Blackhill. You didn't fake death unless you feared for your life, and diving or 'buying' a penalty certainly didn't constitute that. It was a lesson learned in morality and integrity, attributes that are all too often lost in the clamor to succeed, particularly in football. I was as driven as anyone to be a professional footballer, but I wouldn't sacrifice my principles to get there. James Patrick Farrell wouldn't have let me.

The Prawns
by John Paul Taylor

So there I am, in Porto, not knowing whether to laugh or cry. We'd done it, well the team had done it, for the third time in my lifetime but the first that I'd actually know anything about Celtic were in a European Final! Just take a moment to think about that, Celtic in a European Final. This was the team I'd watched through the 70's and 80's who never once that I could recall given me a European match played on a clear night, you know, one of those nights when the clocks had changed and it was still light. Our European adventure tended to end around September after we'd beaten two daddy teams we got something half decent and that was that. Now, however, was a different matter, we'd not long since had the glory of the treble and now it had just all moved up a notch, a European Final, Celtic.

So, why the mixed emotions, this is a day you never you thought you'd see, since first setting foot in paradise in 1971 this was the holy grail, what on earth could take the shine off it, what could possibly give anything other than unbridled joy? Only the small matter that I was in charge of tickets, it was me that was going to have to address the masses and tell them, sorry! It was me who was going to have to be the bad guy, Doctor Evil. It's no use trying to rationalise it, there's a process, a policy, it's all fair and above board, we only get a limited number, people will understand, won't they, won't they? Aye, nae bother!!

Standing in Porto that night, as the car horns blared and the locals danced on the street to celebrate their own team's victory over Lazio and qualify for the final which we would participate in, I just thought oh shit!! I knew what was coming, I knew what was on the horizon, I'd done enough big games, league decides, cup semi-final, cup finals,

treble winning cup finals, Liverpool at Anfield, you name it I'd done it so I knew that one this big, one in the modern era with low cost transport and easily accessible credit, this was going to be massive, it was Celtic in a European Final!

After the match the hosts were none too pleased that they had missed out and effectively left us to our own devices, there was a box of programmes which caught my eye and given they didn't seem too interested I thought, I'm having them for the lads, as I made my way round from the Stadium and on to the main road which was fast turning into a festival I started to pass out the programmes, I was immediately swamped, aye of course everyone wanted a programme but they also wanted to know, will I get a ticket? My head was bursting and that was only from the Gorbals crew, Mark, Davie, David, Azza, Tony and Big Steph they gave me a sense of what was to come.

I arrived home late, very late but you feel there was a real sense of anticipation, the airport was awash with fans and journalists, the boys had got the result and for the next few weeks their lives would be turned upside down along with everyone connected with the Club, can you get me a ticket? Every night after work a queue of people outside the house, "you don't know me but.." I just wanted to get in and lock the doors but there was no escape. We knew we would get around 14,000 tickets but that really was a drop in the ocean compared to the demand, some of those more astute had applied for neutral tickets after Anfield and when my brother in law called to say he'd got one from UEFA that was music to my ears, one less to worry about but I dreaded answering the phone, I changed my voicemail greeting to "

thanks for your call but if it's about tickets there's none, please don't call back" of course it didn't work, all I did was confirm they had the correct number to call. The first day back in work was bedlam but gradually we started to get on top, we had a plan, a rationale, a method which we'd worked with all season, tickets would go to those who we had a record of taking most tickets throughout the season, fair? Absolutely. Judy who worked the magic with the data pulled everything together, we had the list, we then got all the letters together, all in envelopes and ready to go, maybe it wouldn't be that bad after all. It was agreed that we'd have the letters to mailing house in good time to be posted on the Saturday to hit doorsteps on the Monday. That gave us time to get prepared, a full staff, and a script for everyone, it was all coming together lovely. We shipped everything out on the Friday for Saturday post. We could enjoy the weekend, a couple of hours on Saturday morning to finesse the plan then that was that, or was it?

I arrived at the office around 08:30 and it looked like someone was selling tenders for a fiver. There was a queue like an execution and guess what, it was my execution. What happened was that our mailing house thought they would do us a huge favour and get everything in the mail on the Friday night so the successful letters arrived on Saturday morning, great for everyone who got one but not so great for those who didn't. Don't forget this was still in the days when you got your mail before Soccer AM started so the phones were buzzing, got my offer letter did you? Naw I f***** didnae!! So it was into the motor and a B1 to the Ticket Office, where's that John Paul

McBride (a common error in those days) and where's my ticket for Seville.

That was the start of it and a bad start at that, we were on the back foot and it set the tone for the next three weeks. We set up what looked like a Doctors surgery with a queue of people pleading their case and leaving phone numbers waiting on a call back whilst we scrutinised every detail of their application, what games had they attended, did they get the ticket from us, who was there, how did they get there, it was a forensic examination of every case and in fairness to every one of the team they worked tirelessly taking flak, giving out good news, giving out bad news, they stood firm and gave me 100% backing, it was all hands to the pump and everyone in that office played their part.

The problem was, it felt like it would never end and there was also the small matter of the tickets, which we were still awaiting. With the first wave of attack over we were made aware that we would have to attend a pre ops meeting in Seville, this would be to discuss all the match arrangements including ticketing so I was required to go along with Ronnie Hawthorn who had recently joined the Club as our new Head of Security and Rhona MacDonald our PR Manager. We arrived in Seville and were taken to see the Stadium which in truth was rather uninspiring however we were assured that it would look the part come the day of the Final. Later we attended a meeting of all the relevant parties, both Clubs, UEFA, el Policia, fire, ambulance, stewarding and so on. We were given headsets and the questions were relayed to us in English, it was my turn to answer, how many will come? Sixty thousand I suggested, the delegate looked at me, he

advised you have only 14000 tickets, what will happen to the other 2000? I shook my head, I repeated sixty thousand, he looked at me one six? No I replied six zero! The poor man had to be resuscitated. What, why, why they come, they cannot come, you must say no, you must tell them no, they cannot come. I just looked and thought, you want to have a go. They just couldn't understand it. In fairness this is where Ronnie came into his own, he spoke with the authorities and invited them to Glasgow to come see the Celtic fans and form their own opinions. They came and they loved it, this was a major factor in ensuring that things were handled sensibly and Ronnie takes all the credit for that.

That evening we were invited out to a local festival held annually in Seville, this is where families gather and take out small tents in the show grounds to celebrate. We had been invited to attend a number of tents where we were greeted with fantastic hospitality, food and drink. I had a few Bombay Sapphires along with the beautiful seafood, the prawns in particular were amazing. We had the most amazing evening and were looked after magnificently. The next day was another couple of short meetings and it was home, well at least that was the plan. I awoke during the night, I was ill, I was violently sick and even blacked out at one stage, to this day I remain convinced it was the prawns. I called Ronnie and Rhona, no way was I making ear breakfast, they agreed to cover the meetings and come back for me but there was no way I was making out that room, my head was spinning and I continued to be sick. A doctor was called, this man cannot travel, what? The doctor advised that I was unfit to travel,

another disaster, Ronnie and Rhona headed home and I remained, was this month ever going to end?

A few days later it was May bank holiday, great, a chance to get a day off and catch our breath. I decided to have a day with the family, they had to suffer all the stress and strain that the match and brought and we decided to have a day in town, the sun was shining so we went and did some shopping before popping into Pizzaland in Queen St for a bite to eat. We had barely sat down when the phone rang, it was Ronnie and he sounded concerned. UEFA had been in touch, our tickets were still in Seville, no courier would carry them due to the value involved, we had to arrange pick up. Ronnie advised that there was a flight leaving at 6pm for Heathrow, there was then a connecting flight to Madrid at 5am and on to Seville at 2pm. Ronnie advised that all other flights to Heathrow were fully booked until the start of next week, less than ten days to the match, we couldn't afford to miss that flight but who would go? I'm sure by now you've already worked that out, sorry girls dinner is cancelled, next thing I knew I was on my way home, packing a bag and picking up tickets at Glasgow airport.

Straight to Heathrow, straight to hotel, straight to bed, up at 3am another flight and off to Madrid. Finally I get to Seville, I make my way to the arrivals hall, there's a man there who says, Celtic? Yes, I reply, he points me two huge boxes wishes me good luck and disappears. I'm on a straight turnaround and I look down, how the hell do I carry these? I find an airport shop and buy two huge bags with shoulder straps, I hook them round me and make off like some Mexican bandit who has entered the removals business, the weight was brutal and my shoulders were killing me but it had to be done. I

follow the same path home and make it back to the office at 10am on the Wednesday morning, the tickets were here, now get them away and get it over with.

So 48 hours after my bank holiday which wasn't a holiday I was back in the office and back to the madness, back to the rumour and counter rumour, every Celtic celebrity fan was getting tickets, Billy Connolly, Rod Stewart, Westlife there was even talk of Primal Scream and Ant and Dec, it was growing arms and legs and turning into a monster. Finally I thought, enough is enough I went to work and put a proposal to them, get me on Radio Clyde open line, I'll answer all the calls about tickets and then that's it, no more ticket stories, we should be talking about the match not the tickets. Everyone agreed, it's a smart move, let's do it. I was briefed by the Clubs PR gurus and off Judy and I went to Clyde to straighten it out once and for all. The calls came thick and fast but we coped and gave clear answers along with the rationale, no one could complain, it was all explained and although not everyone agreed we answered the questions. That was just about it, with 15 minutes of the show remaining we said our thanks your and goodbyes, it was a huge success, we were delighted surely now that would be an end to it. As we got to the car we were undecided as to whether to the last few minutes but agreed that we dealt with the worst of it, what could possibly go wrong now? Little did I know what was to follow, with the final call of the evening Hugh Keevins announced that there was one final caller looking to make a point, she had listened to the show and was incensed at some of the comments she just had to call to set things straight, yip, you guessed it, it was my Ma!!! My Ma!!! What the hell was she doing, how could she do this

to me, as if it was bad enough I was now the figure of ridicule, I have to say after that things just couldn't get any worse. I even had Martin O'Neill take time out his busy schedule to call me to say that in keeping with that time honoured tradition, I had embarrassed the hoops. He went on to say no matter how many bad games he had and he had a few, never ever did his Ma phone the local radio station to stick up for him. My shame was complete, at the time I was furious but looking back I understand why she did it and it does make me laugh.

So there it was, all the ins and outs, the story behind the story. We went to Seville I was still working so I never got to take part in the festival in town, I was based miles away, I had a hire car with a dodgy clutch and barely got a mile from our hotel the whole time except to go to the match. Even on the night itself I was without a ticket half an hour before the match as it turned out Martins wife didn't have a ticket and I gave her mine but it all got sorted, I met Billy Connolly and Roy Keane, ditched the last couple of tickets to some ticketless fans five minutes before kick-off. Got to my seat, witnessed an incredible match and the pain of losing of watching Celtic lose a European Final, what an effort from the team, we just came up short against the future European Champions. Had we won I'd have been on the open top double decker which was waiting at Glasgow airport to take us through the City, how magic would that have been, sadly it wasn't to be and we all headed home and everyone went their separate ways readying themselves for Kilmarnock and a title showdown on Sunday.

So that was it, my fateful and memorable May 2003, one that I'll

never forget so many crazy events, so many laughs and so many tears. It was all to end in disappointment sadly, to this day, I still blame the prawns.

One week in Paradise

by John Higgins

I had just won the World Snooker title on the Monday and with all the partying with family and friends at the after-party in Sheffield coupled with the nation's media wanting a piece of me on the Tuesday morning, I was physically and mentally drained. Everyone headed home from Sheffield on the Tuesday afternoon and when back in Wishaw, the phone never stopped ringing. In the early evening, I had local news crews coming to the house and although I had won a good few tournaments up to this point nothing had prepared me for the media frenzy that I was now in the middle of. Not one to complain I absolutely loved it and having just achieved my ultimate victory in defeating Ken Doherty at the Crucible, I savoured every minute.

There was one other thing on my mind at this time of course and that was Celtic FC. We had blown the chance to wrap up the league at East End Park, Dunfermline the previous Saturday after Craig Faulconbridge's late equaliser left us needing to equal or beat Rangers points total on the upcoming Saturday to win the league and to stop them achieving the unthinkable 10 leagues in a row. My younger brother Joe was at the Dunfermline game and my older brother Jason had come down to the Crucible for my semi-final game against Ronnie O'Sullivan and had stayed over. For those reading this who know Jason, I'm sure you'll appreciate he was in bits after the Dunfermline result given how nuts he is about Celtic. As for me, well I had other things on my mind as there was a bit of a nightmare scenario developing for the upcoming Saturday I was due to play in a Matchroom League snooker tournament in Portsmouth, and had therefor resigned myself to radio updates from the game but there

was to be a very welcome development the following day. I had arranged to meet my brothers and a few of the lads in Jason's flat for a few beers before heading into town. Stuart Kerr, one of Celtic goalkeepers, was a local lad and we were all pretty friendly with him and he was telling us that Celtic had been asking if I would be available to parade the World Championship trophy on the Celtic Park pitch at half time on the Saturday. What an honour this would be and as a kid I had dreamt of playing for Celtic of course but I said to Stuart there was no chance as I was playing in a tournament. Jason was having none of it. My Mum and Dad's next door neighbour Therese who worked in at Celtic had also called to check on my availability and 'Operation Convince John to Juke the Snooker' was now fully underway. Now I'm not one for rocking the boat and normally just go with the flow so I was still fully expecting to be playing snooker on the Saturday....in Portsmouth of all places....Until Jason convinced me to give him Barry Hearn's telephone number. He called the number and got through to Barry's secretary Sharon and he explained the situation, but as expected she was adamant I was to attend the snooker. A bit of verbal jousting ensued and Jason convinced her to speak with Barry and the tournament organisers to see if it was possible for me to drive down straight after the match on Saturday and play on the Sunday instead, as there were no flights available on the Saturday evening. She was to get back in touch in half an hour and the waiting game started. Cutting a long story short, Matchroom agreed to postpone my game to the Sunday and my Dad agreed to drive me down after the game on

the Saturday. Celtic were notified and all was sorted for me to be on the pitch at half time. Game on!!

Celtic provided two seats in the Director's box for me and I took Joe which meant our season tickets were going spare over in the North Stand so Jason contacted big Harry "The Dog" Findlay who was the part-owner of the racehorse Denman and Harry took my ticket and my Dad had Joe's. Harry repaid the favour and then some a few years later when Jason and Joe were in his box at Cheltenham when Denman won the Gold Cup beating Kato Star.

Match-day arrived and as me, my Dad and Joe made our way up to Celtic Park the atmosphere was unreal. Everyone was terrified, but buzzing at the same time and in all my years of going to Celtic Park, I haven't known an atmosphere quite like it. My stomach was churning and not because I was due on the pitch but just because of the magnitude of the match. We simply had to win!!

Walking from the car to the ground I had the trophy with me and loads of fans started recognizing me and shouting "Well done wee man" and shaking my hand. I posed for a few photos then got inside. My Dad then headed round to the North Stand to meet Jason, Harry and myself and Joe headed up to the bar which was used by the Directors. Once inside I noticed Billy Connolly straight away and to my amazement he came right up to me and shook my hand saying "Absolutely brilliant on winning as I watched it all". This was a real 'pinch-me' moment as I've always loved listening to Billy and he is definitely one of my favourite comedians of all time, and a bona fide Scottish legend. To have a guy like this walk up and even recognize me was amazing.

Time for the game and Joe and I took our seats hoping that our prayers were going to be answered. This was serious ‘squeaky bum’ time and although in normal times a home victory versus St Johnstone should be a formality, today was different. Very different. This game meant so much for every Celtic man and woman in the stadium and across the globe. My memory is a bit hazy of the exact minutes but pretty near the start King Henrik cut in from the wing to rifle in the opening goal and the stadium erupted. The joyous scenes were amazing and now we just prayed for another couple of goals to settle the nerves, bring home the title and to start the party of all parties. However, the goals never came in the 1st half and St. Johnstone’s George O’Boyle nearly equalised before half time with a header. We were all still on tenterhooks at half-time as 1-0 was far from the unassailable lead we all craved.

As the players trooped off I was led down to pitch side and then introduced to the crowd as the new World Snooker Champion and the reception I got will live with me forever. There was 60,000 Celtic fans on their feet and then they all sang “There’s only 1 John Higgins” which is one of the greatest ever moments in my life. The feeling at that moment in time was just incredible and I’m sure my brothers and Dad shed a tear. I had made it so to speak. Walking off the park fans were shouting “Magic wee man” and just giving me great words which I’ll cherish forever. When it’s the fans of the club you have followed all your life chanting at you as if your one of the Celtic players it’s all a bit surreal.

Back in the Director’s box for the 2nd half it was a nervous time and the whole ground was getting a bit on edge. You could really feel the

tension. However, a through ball midway through the 2nd half and Harold Brattback more than paid his transfer fee to put us 2-0 in front and then we knew the League Championship was coming home to Paradise. The stadium erupted once again and the party started in the stands. When Celtic Park starts rocking there is nowhere like it in the world.

Joe and I were obviously a bit out of our comfort zone in the Director's box but all inhibitions were now gone as we were all joining in with the party atmosphere. The final whistle sounded and we had done it!! The dreaded 10 in a row had been stopped!! I wished it been a week earlier of course but in a funny sort of way, Craig Faulconbridge had helped provide one of the greatest days of mine and my family's life.

After the league trophy presentation, the players were on the pitch for a while and we headed back into the bar for a well deserved couple of drinks. I was then asked if I wanted to meet the players and the next thing I knew, Murdo McLeod had me in the dressing room with the full team. At this moment in time I was floating and to compound it Paul Lambert turned round, saw me and started singing "Stand Up for the Champions" and they had me up on a seat with the full team joining in. This was a surreal moment and very hard to put into words when you're in the dressing room after just clinching one of the most important league titles in our history with Henke and the rest of the legends who wore the hoops that day singing songs. If I could have bottled that moment.....

I went back to the bar and my Dad had made his way round from the North Stand as we had to get going on our long drive to the South

Coast in England. Joe headed off to meet Jason and the lads as they continued partying into the small hours and we headed to the front doors of Paradise. I headed out the door and it was pandemonium with all the fans grabbing and cuddling me and sticking me up on their shoulders. This was mad and my Dad quickly realised there was no way we were making it out this way to reach the car. He rescued me from the jubilation and we had to leave via a side exit of the stadium as there was no chance of getting through the crowd via the front door. They were camped in until Wim, Murdo and the Bhoys made their appearance. Walking round the stadium to the side exit I just gazed at my field of dreams and every dream I ever had was fulfilled that week.

Any Regrets from the day? Only that I didn't get to fully celebrate with the lads and had to head off for work and that's still something that nags at me to this day.

How did I get on in the Matchroom League? No idea

Practice makes perfect

by Simon Donnelly

Helenvale. I scored a hat-trick and someone noticed. Before I knew it, I was in the reserve team, Celtic reserves. Top players played in these teams getting back from injury or trying to regain form. The experience is phenomenal because it meant you trained with the first team. The Celtic first team. I know fans think the early 90s was a terrible time for Celtic but it was magical for me. I signed for Celtic in 1992. Eddie Hunter at Queens Park told me they were interested. Previous to Queens Park I played for three teams. Yep, three teams, which meant three games on a Saturday. Practice, practice, practice. It's what the game is all about. Mix it up with a positive attitude and you have a chance in this game. In training that's all we did, the young Bhoys, shooting and passing, trying stuff again and again, on long afternoons at Barrowfield in the pissing rain, often with Brian O'Neil. It was on one of these sessions that my life changed forever. Myself and BON were mucking round and I was trying a shot I'd seen that week on TV from a European game. It was a kind of sand wedge to the top corner and I hit one perfectly that sailed into the stanchion. Then I heard a voice behind me

“Can you do that again?”

I turned and expected to see one of the lads but it was actually the manager, Lou Macari, standing there. His look intimated that he wanted me to try again. I sized it up, trusted my technique and replicated my previous effort. When I turned, he was walking away and I thought nothing more about it.

As the week went on, I started to get a feeling something was happening. Then on the Thursday John Collins walked past me and said:

“You’ll be in the squad on Saturday”

It could have been a wind up but JC isn’t really a wind up type of guy. It was confirmed on the Friday when the team was picked. My name was among the subs. S Donnelly. I was Sid to everyone by then. This was nothing to do with me, what happened was I’d put my name on my boots one day as “Si D” and then they were handed to me with a coach saying “Sid?” and that was it, it stuck.

Travelling on the team bus that day, to Easter Road, was an incredible experience. Paul McStay, Peter Grant these were guys who breathed Celtic and I was among them. I could tell fans were looking at me as I came off the bus.

I did all the usual things a sub did, running back and forth behind the goal, trying to catch the manager’s eye. Then, in the 73rd minute, it happened. Lou Macari told me to get stripped and in a flash I was standing on the touchline with Charlie Nicholas come towards me. Charlie Nicholas. He wished me good luck and I was on. For Celtic. In the 80th minute I made a turn and tried that sand wedge again. Except this time it flashed over the bar. I’d keep practicing and score two like that against Raith Rovers a couple of weeks later.

Most importantly, I was now a Celtic player.

Dial M for Murder Polis

by Jackie McNamara

Most fans know I played for Celtic for ten years. I loved every second of it. There's no other club like Celtic and don't let anyone kid you there is. I captained the club. My name goes with people like McNeill, Aitken and McStay in that respect. However, what very few people know is my Celtic career could easily have ended in July 1998.

It had been another long and frustrating summer at Celtic with no manager. We had experienced the same thing the previous summer and the players were getting a bit pissed off with the same scenario unfolding again. On this particular day the papers were full of Ruud Gullit becoming our new manager and, obviously, this intrigued and excited the players. We came back from training that day and the rumours were that something was happening. The players were desperate to know. So I hit upon an idea. The security officer, and ex-policeman, was Jamie Church and I knew he was the guy who handled this kind of thing. So I said to the players I'd go down to his office at Celtic Park and if he was there, we'd know nothing was happening but if he wasn't then it could be.

I trekked to his office and he was nowhere to be seen. Hmm. So I picked up his office phone and phoned his mobile. At this time if a call came from anywhere at Celtic Park then it would just show up as Celtic Park, not the specific office or area. So I rang his mobile and someone picks it up, I say "Alright Churchy?" and the phone goes down. Thinking he had been cut off, I try again, same thing, I speak, phone goes down. Upon the fourth frustrating time of doing this, the person on the other end of the phone says "look, who the hell is this? And what the hell do you want?" I was pissed off already and didn't take too kindly to being screamed at down the phone so politely said

back:

“Who you talkin’ tae ya fucking prick?”

At this point the phone on the other end went dead.

So I went back to the dressing room, none the wiser.

After getting showered, changed and enduring the usual banter from the lads, I was leaving the park when I saw Jamie Church approaching me.

He looked ashen faced.

I said “Alright Churchy? I was trying to phone you earlier”

He replied “I know, Jesus Christ, what a scene you caused”

I was baffled.

“When you rang my phone, it was Fergus McCann who picked it up. I had Dr Jo Venglos in the back of the car and Fergus in the passenger seat, Dr Jo is the new manager”

My life flashed before my eyes.

“Fergus went absolutely ballistic about it, demanding to know who you were and guaranteeing the person responsible would be sacked immediately but he didn’t know where it came from because it only flashed up as Celtic Park”

I was saved.

Trying to divert, I asked him about Dr Jo.

“Well Fergus brought me in and said I had to take him to Edinburgh Airport to meet him. He says ‘Do you know what he looks like?’ and to be honest I didn’t, I only had a brief memory from his time at Aston

Villa. So Fergus says 'Ok, I'll sort it' and off he goes. Five minutes later he comes back and says 'Right, he will be wearing a red tie' and off we go to the airport. I go in and thought I was seeing things. Every single person coming towards me had a red tie on. So I say to a guy 'What's happening? Why is everyone wearing a red tie?' and he says 'Big Labour Party do in Edinburgh mate'. Christ almighty"

As I laughed, I realised my career was safe, for now, but if Fergus had ever found out it was me? This story would have been about my last act as Celtic player.

Ones for the future

A Celtic Story

by Marcello Stefani (Paisley 1999)

Stevie Keane could virtually class himself a life-long Celtic supporter. From the moment he emerged into the light after nine months of comfortable oblivion curled up inside his mother's womb, he had had a green and white woolly bonnet placed on his head and an old and worn Celtic scarf wrapped around his fragile trembling body. His self-employed father, Seamus, the owner of the scarf, an honest man, hailed from a small village in County Cork, loved his football, drank very little but had acquired a taste for Sweet heart stout, and whenever he had the opportunity, would go along to the matches, on rare occasions with Stevie's older brother, James, but mostly always accompanied by Stevie's uncles Matt and Mick, the latter a veteran of two of Celtic's European cup final, one that had exceeded the expectations of all in the family, while the other best forgotten. His grandfather Wullie, his mother's father, born at the turn of the 20th century, too young to participate in the Great War, and refused admission to the armed forces during the Second World War, on account of his flat feet, but still did his part in the war effort on the home front as a warden, had been at first an apprentice wagon builder on the rail roads in Lanarkshire, and then for the rest of his working life repairing wagons. He'd turned down the opportunity of a better salary working as a foreman in Motherwell, on account of the sectarian employment situation at that time, or expressed in his own words, "Nae chance: me, a Catholic ,having to order around a bunch of blue nosed bigots? They'd never listen to me!"

All four of them, Seamus, Matt, Mick and granda Wullie, had arrived at the RAH in Paisley straight from the evenings European Cup Semi Final against Atletico Madrid at Celtic Park, (football records would

mark this game as not one of the finest sporting spectacles). Weather wise it was drab. A typically wet April evening in Glasgow, where after standing for a good few hours, soaking up through the soles of their shoes and their long bell bottoms, all mixtures of liquids that oozed down from the slopes of the terracing, and then into the car, which quickly steamed up from the inside, as their humid garments evaporated, emitting a pungent smell, coupled with their vision being clouded, had them gagging the entire journey from the stadium to their destination. Seamus had phoned his chip shop immediately after the game, and had learned from them that Jean had gone into labour. He knew her time was near, but did not want to lose the opportunity to see Celtic in the semi-final. Only Stevie's father would be admitted into the delivery room, while the others would skulk around in the hall. Jean hadn't been too enamoured of the fact that Seamus had gone to see Celtic, and even less when he showed up at her bedside just as she was in the throes of delivering a baby, reeking of the evening's profusions. Finally, Stevie (Steven) arrived, all the animosity vanished, to be replaced with the feeling of joy. He was handed over to his father, who immediately adorned his son with Celtic colours, much to Jean's consternation. "Get those filthy rags away from him! God knows where they've been!"

So it was in these circumstances Stevie had been brought into the world, just close to midnight on the 10th of April 1974: covered in blood and mucus, cleaned up with a Celtic scarf, in a room smelling of sweat, beer and stale urine. One could suggest a football supporter's version of the Nativity, without the wise men.

A relatively normal childhood followed, growing up with his older brother James, eight years his senior. Stevie would be the focal point of petty sibling abuse at an early age, as James, along with their cousin Paul would regularly torment Stevie to the point where it would end in tears. “Stevie, you’re a jinx! I was born when Celtic began their nine-in-a-row. Then you came along and ended it!” And now we can’t even go to the games because of you!” This was rather harsh, and hardly Stevie’s fault, as their mother had deemed her children attending the football games involving Celtic extremely hazardous, especially against Rangers. She would remind them of the time Seamus had taken James and Paul along to a game at Parkhead in early 1972, and Seamus had lost James in a queue at the turnstiles when the massive crowd had surged forward, with father and son being temporarily separated. The Ibrox disaster the previous year was still fresh in her memory, therefore no child of hers would ever go to the football again. Leaving aside the usual violence between rival supporters and the launching of beer bottles from back end to the front of the terraces, it was just too dangerous and she would not take the risk. Occasionally when Seamus wasn’t working Stevie would be allowed to go to Hampden to see the national team. Supporting the national team however, didn’t produce the same emotions when watching Celtic. Not being 100% Scottish, he lacked the same enthusiasm of other members of the Tartan army. Furthermore, some sections of the Scottish support were prone to dislike anyone or anything of Irish persuasion, and this didn’t sit well with Stevie. He had experienced the same discomfort and relative fear, while travelling once on a train one Saturday in the mid-80s to Coatbridge

to his grandparents, and a group of Rangers supporters announced to everyone travelling in the car, that they would like all Catholics present to identify themselves so that they could throw them out the window.

Stevie had to wait until his early teens to get to his first game against Rangers and lose his Old Firm “virginity”. That was August 1987, the start of Celtic’s centenary celebrations, where Billy Stark made the difference, scoring the only goal of the game and being fortunate not to be seriously injured by Graeme Souness, the Beast, who had taken him out with a disgraceful tackle. Souness got his marching orders much to the delight of the Celtic support. Celtic would win the double in May of 1988, and Stevie at last felt he was beginning to get some real Celtic experience, witnessing the league triumph in April and then the Scottish cup win at Hampden in May. The following season saw Celtic playing second fiddle once again, with only the Scottish cup triumph over Rangers the one bright spot in a pretty dismal season, with Super Joe Miller latching onto a slack back pass and drilling the ball past Woods. What was best about both these games was the atmosphere created by the Celtic support. He felt at home amongst them.

Sadly, the years following produced only misery for Celtic and their following. Rangers triumphed year after year. Now approaching 20, Stevie in December 1993, in between attending lectures at University, pondered whether his team would ever win anything again. McNeill, had been replaced by Liam Brady, who was subsequently replaced by Lou Macari. But the results remained unchanged. Worse, there was a

growing unrest amongst the Support venting their ire at the Celtic board of directors, who had proved to be utterly incompetent and powerless at halting the Rangers juggernaut.

James his older brother was more disillusioned. "Tellin folk you support the Celtic now, you need to walk around wearing a balaclava to hide yer brass neck! I'm no going!" It was worse for Stevie. His girlfriend since he left school in 1992 was Lorraine Kearney from Shettleston and she had relatives who came from the other side of the divide. All her aunts husbands from her mother's side, bar one, were bluenoses, and being present at her family gatherings was as pleasant as a trip to the dentists, having to endure put downs and sarcasm until they realized they had gone too far and would then proceed to patronize you and your team, which was ultimately worse than the slagging. All the same, having Lorraine as his girlfriend suited Stevie to a tee. His mates would urge him to "dump her and come out to the pubs after the game" but Stevie didn't listen, since (a) He could drink just as much as he wanted with Lorraine and her pals and (b) he would be a fool to give up the good times with his girlfriend.

Furthermore, her younger brother Neil looked up to Stevie and had recently started to attend the games. So on Saturdays he'd join up with Stevie, his mates, and granda Wullie and they'd faithfully take their place on the terraces of the Celtic end. "Why here and not the Jungle?" Neil asked on his first outing. "Ach the Jungle is over-rated, replied Stevie, "besides, here in the Celtic end is where I first watched Celtic beat Rangers, where I saw them win the league in 1988. For me, the Tims in the Celtic end are the last line of defence, driving the team on." Neil accepted that answer as Gospel and would never set

foot in the old Jungle.

Christmas had come and gone and 1994 was fast approaching. Stevie had procured everyone tickets for the New Year's Day game. He had attended Mass also for the first time in a while and gone to confession. He was more superstitious than religious, but since he recently had an altercation with a current Celtic player during a Kearney family outing, he had felt some remorse. They had gone ten pin bowling at Finnieston, everyone split into 4 teams, one of them including Celtic defender Mark McNally. Stevie ended up in the winning team, with McNally's coming second. The Celtic defender remarked that he was used to coming second, which prompted an irate outburst from Stevie. "That's not f'n good enough, is it?" McNally had stood motionless with eyes to the floor. Not getting a reaction, Stevie continued with his rant, "Aye! Gutless! Just like your performances on the park!" Lorraine's family remained speechless, while Stevie hollered abuse at the embarrassed player. Lorraine eventually had to use all her strength to pull Stevie out into the car park and bundle him into her car. Stevie later blamed his rage on the pints he had consumed at the bowling, but he knew that deep down he'd gone too far.

So he felt the need to ask for forgiveness from a higher source and be reassured that God would be on our side against Rangers. After the church service he lit a candle in front of the statue of St. John Oglivie. Stevie regarded this Jesuit saint as a rebel, just like the Tims: a 16th century Scot, who converted to Catholicism, joined the Society of Jesus in 1608 and practiced the Roman faith in his home country where it had been outlawed. He was hanged and disembowled at

Glasgow Cross, next to the Gallowgate in 1615 after he refused to renounce his faith. Stevie's familiarity with this Saint was also founded on the fact that one of the people that helped in his canonization in 1976 was the cousin of Stevie's grandmother.

Hogmanay shortly followed, and Stevie had been invited to the house of a friend of Lorraine. A huge mansion in Sandy Hills, with many rooms, where nobody could find you. For the occasion, Stevie had therefore armed himself with two six packs of lager and a box of ribbed rubbers. The party was good, songs were sung, Stevie descending into the more Irish rebellious ditties the drunker he got, but he would suffer the following day.

Suffering from a hangover for a football match was not the best preparation. Given it was an Old firm game, the headache intermingled with the nerves gnawing in the pit of Stevie's stomach. Experience of these games had taught him to expect the unexpected. And after almost 5 years of disappointment, he never felt confident for a Rangers game. "Come on God, give us a break today, eh!" he muttered to himself. Stevie had left Lorraine sleeping soundly in bed. He planted a kiss on her forehead and headed downstairs where Lorraine's mother Margaret had made breakfast.

"Good afternoon and happy New Year. Is that you just up?" she inquired as Stevie stumbled into the kitchen and fumbled for a chair.

"Aye, eh happy New Year. What time is it?"

"It's half past 12! Is Lorraine not coming down?"

"No, I left her sleeping. She'll no get up for another hour probably.

Listen, I'm not feeling that hungry, I'll just have a cup of coffee."

“Good night was it?” she smiled knowingly. Stevie felt unsure if she meant that he had over did it with the booze, or the fact that Lorraine’s overactive bedsprings may have woken her parents out of their sleep.

“Eh, aye, it was ok!” Stevie replied sheepishly. “Neil up?”

“Yes and he’s ready to go. He’s in the living room. You’ll look after him at the game?”

This was Neil’s first Rangers game. She reminded him of his mother, but maybe all mothers were the same when it came to the Old Firm.

“It’ll be ok, don’t worry!”

Neil was sitting in the living room watching a video of Celtic old firm victories. Stevie coffee mug in hand planted himself down in the armchair opposite him.

“What’s it like, the game?” Neil asked excitedly.

“Well these games mean a lot more than any other to both sets of fans. So they’re quite tense affairs. And the current on-form team doesn’t necessarily mean they’ll win. Sometimes the “form book” goes out the window. Whoever stamps their authority on the game from the outset will win. And you also need a measure of good fortune, like last time at Ibrox. We got 2 goals when Maxwell dropped the ball at John Collins feet, and then he completely arsed up the last corner kick and Brian O’Neill put it in. I’d have that again today, but I ‘ll don’t think we’ll be that lucky in two consecutive derbies.”

"Must be great when we score against them. The crowd must go wild?" Neil inquired.

"Well, scoring against Rangers is different than scoring against your

average Hibs or Dundee. The feeling you get is a euphoria unlike any other. How can I put it?" Stevie thought for a moment, then smiled, and continued, "Imagine that your body is a stadium, and each cell in your body represents a supporter. So when Celtic score against Rangers, a celebration is like every cell in your body going into overdrive as the supporters go wild, get it?"

"Naw, not really!"

"You'll find out today.....maybe!"

Margaret had made her way from the kitchen into the living room, carrying a mug of tea. She sat down on the sofa beside her son, and looked over at Stevie, slowing sipping his coffee, still trying to come to terms with his alcoholic induced migraine. Margaret showed mild signs of disapproval and she smiled again slowly shaking her head. Her husband, Alan a year older than Margaret, wasn't much of a drinker, and also ran his own business, like Stevie's dad. They had been married young in 1967, aged 18 and 19, but unlike Seamus, Alan didn't care much for football. In fact when Alan's non-Catholic in-laws, were left somewhat surprised about the Catholic Alan from Easterhouse being so unfazed at Celtic's triumph in Lisbon against Inter Milan. Margaret at least needn't therefore contend with a husband who had a love for football, unlike Stevie's mother Jean.

"So who else is going with you today?" she quizzed Stevie.

"My dad, James and granda Wullie. Dad's leaving early this morning, driving out to Coatbridge to pick up the old yin. Then on his way back he'll pass by here, pick us two up and then we'll head in. I think they'll be here about quarter to two."

"Ok. You staying here again tonight aren't you?"

"Er yeah, if that's ok!" asked Stevie.

"Of course, but just remember, tonight we're all going round to my sister's house, and Derek and Ian are going to be there. So you better win." Margaret was referring to Lorraine's blue nosed uncles, who without any doubt would lord it up if Rangers are victorious.

"Well Mags, I hope so, but it's not up to me. Don't worry we'll be on our best behaviour tonight, regardless. Rising carefully from the chair, Stevie at first stumbled forward from a bout of dizziness (he'd been sitting down too long) and put his hand out to the wall to stop himself from falling.

"I'm going up for a quick wash, and get myself ready for them arriving."

Stevie reached the first landing before he heard Margaret calling him back.

"I think you lost something," she said grinning, "I found this at the foot of the stairs." She held up her hand and in between her forefinger and thumb Stevie spied a small square foil wrapper. Instantaneously, he felt like the size of a mouse.

"Er.....", he began.....

"Ribbed extra? My, you're confident!"

Stevie's face grew redder.....

"You sure they're not....." stammered Stevie.

"Who? Neil's? He's only 14! And they're definitely mine. No, I'm sure it's yours, and by the sound of things during the night, Lorraine

seems sure also!"

Stevie was aghast.

"Don't worry" she said, letting out a small laugh, and tossing the contraceptive up at him, "both Alan and I agree that as long as you are both being careful then it's fine."

"Phew! Lorraine's parents are cool," thought Stevie, "if my mum caught me with a rubber, she'd have me locked in the house for a month. Mind you, my dad would castrate me if I got Lorraine pregnant. Alan probably would too, so hurrah for Mr. Johnny!"

Stevie, reached Lorraine's bedroom door, knocked softly and walked in. She was still sleeping soundly. Stevie looked around the room for further evidence of their nocturnal coupling. Satisfied that the used material was concealed in toilet paper and thrown in her waste basket, Stevie grabbed a towel from the cupboard, and headed into Lorraine's bathroom.

He turned on the shower and let the warm water cover his body. It began to relax him and Stevie thoughts eventually turned to the coming game. " They're top of the league, but we're at home.....home advantage.....their back line is solid, but we've got better midfielders in McStay and Collins.....got less confidence about our defence..... our back line have all the speed of a sloth on crutches..... yet, in the league we've only lost once at Tannadice under Macari and haven't lost a goal at home..... they've got a few injuries, and Maxwell will be in goals again.....2-1 to us....maybe.....please!!!!"

His thoughts were broken by Neil shouting, "Stevie's that yer dad

here, you ready?"

Stevie jumped out of the shower, towel dried himself quickly, dressed and headed for the bedroom door. Stopped then turned back to give Lorraine one last kiss. "See you later," he whispered in her ear.

"Mmmmm hmmm,... good luck," she murmured back, without opening her eyes.

"Gonnae need it!" He rolled off the bed, sprang to his feet, grabbed his scarf, the only one he ever took to the games, the one he received at his birth, and headed out the door and down the stairs.

Seamus and Neil were waiting in the hallway, along with Margaret and Alan, who'd just come back in from the garden.

"Alright Stevie, happy New Year!" Alan lowered his brow and met Stevie with a fixed stare. He offered him his hand, and gripped Stevie's with extra force. Stevie winced, and replied "happy New Year, Alan!"

"Right boys, I'll see you later. Seamus, good seeing you again, give our love to Jean!"

"Will do," replied Seamus.

"Well come on Celtic and be careful," said Margaret, as Neil, Seamus and Stevie trooped out the door.

"Stevie," called Alan, "here take these." In his hand he held two pieces of silver foil.

"I think you'll need them after last night", he said in a semi-serious manner.

They were two large aspirins.

Stevie stopped and smiled. “Thanks Alan! They’ll be just the ticket!”

And off he went to the car. Old Wullie was sitting in the front passenger seat, while Neil had already squeezed in the back with James. Stevie exchanged the New Year’s pleasantries with his brother and grandfather as he pushed in beside Neil.

“Good night?” asked James. “You look rough!”

“Aye, it was good, ya part-timer. Don’t recall what time we got in! How did your night go?”

“We just stayed in and had an early night!” James, married and with a young child had relinquished the nights out in the pub.

“Did you phone your mother to wish her happy New Year!” Seamus asked Stevie as he turned the corner of Lorraine’s street onto the main road.

“Haven’t got round to that yet,” replied Stevie, “I’ll do that after the game!”

“Aye you’d better do it!”

They had the radio on and listened to the pundits prattle on with their nonsensical opinions, offering their listeners what could transpire at the day’s big game.

“What a load of keech that lot talk,” piped up James. “They’ve already got Rangers to win. Haven’t even kicked a ball yet!”

“Do you think we’ll win?” asked Neil. “After all, we are at home!”

“We hope!” replied the other four in unison.

As the car rolled along Duke Street, crowds of Rangers supporters, were pouring out of various blue-nose drinking dens and making their

way towards the stadium.

“Christ Dad! Why did you come along this way?” asked Stevie, pulling his scarf from his neck and sitting on it.

“Only way I could get round near the Forge and park,” replied Seamus and added, “Everyone hide yer colours. I don’t want my windows smashed!”

Stevie looked out at the blue white and red hordes marching down the street. They ranged from all shapes and sizes, some that couldn’t find a football top large enough to fit their extensive frame.” The women”, thought Stevie to himself, “not one of them would qualify to present to your mother.” No matter their appearance, they strutted arrogantly down the street singing their awful tunes.

“Aye, look at them,” Wullie remarked with an air of disgust.” Whit a shower! We better beat them.” He turned in his seat and addressed Neil. “Yer first time son?” Neil replied with a nod of the head. “Aye well, don’t think about who is going to win. Jock Stein used to say that if his players were right up here” tapping his forehead, “then they’ll be fine on the park!”

The problem, Stevie thought, was that Stein was long gone, and we had Macari as manager, who had played during the Big Man’s time. One hoped that some of Stein’s experience had rubbed off on his pupil, but performances, results aside, under Lou suggested otherwise. Macari had adopted a mundane, boring football which would have insomniacs clamouring for video footage as an alternative cure. Again Stevie gazed at the Rangers supporters. No argument that Rangers were currently top dogs and favourites to another title, their fifth in

succession. Perhaps theirs was not arrogance but confidence, something which Stevie lacked in his team. He recalled the incident at the bowling: if one of your own players has accepted that being number one was unattainable, what chance do they have of winning? They lack belief, and surely this was the fault of the manager? Macari must address this or else he'll be at Celtic for a very short time.

As usual the traffic was slow moving up to the Forge, and it took some time before Seamus found an adequate parking spot. Stevie put his scarf back on, geared himself up, slowly exhaled to let out the tension, and said "Right! C'mon CELTIC!" They left the car and walked through the streets amongst the throngs of Celtic supporters to the stadium.

While passing some Celtic supporters in the street they heard a few dissenting voices and grumblings about the current Celtic board. The support were being fed lies from the "official Celtic news" while the media continued to print stories challenging the Board's claims. One prime example was Kevin Kelly walking about a muddy pitch with a billboard in Cambuslang only a couple of year previously, and some pie-in-the-sky story of building a new stadium at that site. You really had to be stupid to swallow some of the garbage the Kelly's and White's were churning out. The media's reports were rather accurate, but gave the impression that they delighted in fuelling the supports frustration, pouring petrol on the flames of their anger. Perhaps a full revolt by the fans was the media's desired objective?

"Listen to them complaining" quipped Old Wullie, "half of them weren't around to see the crap we had to watch way back when I was your age."

“Aye Wullie, but that was in nineteen-canteen”, ventured Stevie.

“This is the nineties, where money now rules the roost in football. If you don’t have the readies, you won’t go far. Rangers spend millions every year on players. Christ, Pat McGinlay’s transfer fee of half a million to Celtic was decided by tribunal. Our board was struggling to come up with the kind of money Rangers would spend on an 18 year old kid! We’ve seen little investment, some signings but no household names. Players like Paul Byrne and Andy Payton, just make up the numbers but are nothing special. And then there’s Wayne Biggins.”

“Ach, yer just as bad thae moanin bastarts!” Wullie answered, indicating some Celtic fans crying derogatory chants against the Celtic board. “Success comes in cycles,” he went on, “and at the moment they are the ones winning, but our time will come!”

Wullie did have a point, after all he’d had more experience of Celtic than the rest of us. However it was an indication of the differing opinions held by sections of the support: on the one hand, you had those with a kind of tunnel vision, like Wullie, that would follow Celtic through thick and thin and they would mainly be from an older generation; and then you had those ranging from 20-40 years bracket, who had seen Celtic reach the pinnacle of sporting excellence and were growing more frustrated at Celtic’s decline since the 9-in-a row years, and James fell into that bracket. Stevie and Neil were too young to have seen the likes of Jinky and Bobby Murdoch, but were aware of how good they were and how poor the standard of quality had fallen. Stevie had had a taste of celebrating victory in the mid to late 80s. Neil had seen nothing of the sort. Change was necessary.

They finally reached the ground. Seamus and Wullie had tickets for

the main stand, while Stevie, James and Neil headed for their usual turnstile for the Celtic end.

“Right, we’ll get you outside the main stand after the game,” said Seamus.

With less than half an hour until kick off, the terraces were already crammed with supporters. Neil, James and Stevie squeezed their way through to their usual place, directly behind the goals in the middle of the Celtic end. Songs from both ends filled the air, and Neil’s eyes widened at the site that beheld them in the traditional Rangers end.

“There’s millions of them!” he said.

“Aye, but there’s more of us!” replied James.

“You mean, are we all goin to run on the park, up to their end and knock hell out of them?” joked Stevie.

“It’d be a start,” laughed James. “Remember the 1980 cup final?” Stevie was only six years old at the time, but he remembered how his dad had recounted the tale of the all-out war on the park after the game had ended.

“You mean the riot” added Neil.

“Aye!” replied Stevie. “Our dad was at the final. Said the game was terrible, but the fights after on the pitch were too good. He was late for work as well, cos he stayed he couldn’t tear himself away watching the battles and cavalry charges.”

Stevie purchased a soft-drink, withdrew the two aspirins from his pocket and dropped them into the bottle. He gave it a quick shake and let them dissolve before unscrewing the tap again and took a long drink. He hoped this would counteract the headache he had all that

morning.

As the hour approached kick-off, the Jungle and then the Celtic end holding the scarfs aloft commenced a rendition of “You’ll never walk alone!” . The reply from the Rangers end came in the form of “Derry’s walls” as they twirled their scarves above their heads. It was the usual electric atmosphere prior to kick off, with both sets of fans anticipating the arrival of their heroes onto the pitch. Neil beamed with delight and looked up at Stevie as they both continued to sing with their scarves held high. Stevie winked at Neil acknowledging his younger companions joy at finally being present at a Glasgow derby.

Onto the field came the players as the Glen Daly’s Celtic anthem was belted out by the tannoy. The crowd roared with excitement. “C’mon Celtic!” they all shouted, with Neil and Stevie shaking their fists in defiance at the other team wearing blue.

Pat Bonner took his place in the Celtic goal in front of the Celtic end, with the rest of the team forming a 4-4-2 formation. Macari in recent games had deployed Brian O’Neill up front, and so he would be along beside the veteran Charlie Nicholas in the centre-forward position. The midfield was Celtic’s forte, with the excellent Paul McStay and magical John Collins along with Pat McGinlay and Irishman Paul Byrne. Grant, Gillespie, Wdowczyk (Shuggie) and Boyd had defensive duties.

Rangers matched Celtic’s formation, and Stevie could make out Mark Hateley and the supposedly injured Gordon Durie as their two forwards, with support from the Russian Alexi Mikhailchenko. Richard Gough and Stuart McCall also listed doubtful filled their ranks, while Maxwell retained his position as goalkeeper. Two

youngsters in their line up with Neil Murray in midfield beside Trevor Steven and Stephen Pressley another youngster in defence with Gough, Brown and Gary Stevens.

The Celtic support sang as Celtic got the match underway. The crowd around Stevie, James and Neil offered their encouragement. Rangers managed an early effort on Celtic's goal but was comfortably dealt with by Bonner. The ball ping-ponged in midfield until it fell to Gillespie who passed out of defence but straight to McCall. The Rangers midfielder threaded it through to Hateley who had held a tight line with the Celtic back four, and off he went on his own bearing down on Bonner. Hateley curled the ball past Bonner and into the net with only a minute gone. A moment of dread and numbness filled Stevie's body as the Rangers end exploded in ecstasy. Stevie and James looked at each other and both shook their heads.

"Was he not offside?" Neil asked in despair referring to Hateley's starting position.

"God knows? We cannae really see it from here but he did look off!" replied Stevie.

"Who's the ref?" asked James.

"Does it make any difference?" answered Stevie.

The Celtic quickly recovered from the initial shock and rallied behind their team again as they re-started.

"Right, c'mon!" shouted James.

Celtic went forward again attempting to break the Rangers defence, however they again lost possession. Another pass then allowed Neil Murray run right through a wide gap in the Celtic defence and again

bearing down on Bonner. His shot was parried by the keeper's feet but it fell to Mikhailchenko who was in support and he slammed it into the net. Two-nil down and only three minutes gone.

"Where the bloody hell was our defence?" barked Stevie. "You could fit four double-decker buses right through that gap! Shuggie and Gillespie were miles apart!"

The crowd around them stood helpless in disbelief. "This is no real!" one of them said. Stevie had just about given up. He pulled at the scarf around his neck, curled it into a ball and prepared to launch it onto the park.

James stopped his younger brother's arm in mid-swing.

"Here, what do you think yer doin? No way you throwin that scarf away. There's history behind that. Dad'll no be pleased!"

James and Stevie both held each other's gaze for a moment, then James relaxed his grip as Stevie lowered his arm. He was right. His father would be really hurt if he'd tossed the scarf inherited all those years ago.

"This is the f'n pits!" said Stevie, breaking the silence between them.

"Sure is," replied his brother, "but don't lose the plot over a game!"

The Celtic crowd were more disgruntled. "Sack the Board!" they chanted in unison, to which the Rangers end taunted them with "Keep the Board!"

The game was just not going to plan. Stevie had hoped for Neil's first encounter against Rangers, he'd at least see some fight, and perhaps a victory from Celtic. But this Celtic team at the moment were powder dry, lacking spirit. Tom Boyd tried an effort at goal but it came to no

avail.

Minutes passed without much happening. The odd foul, some more passage of play, while the crowd looked on silent, motionless.

Then came another attack from Rangers, this time down the left flank. The ball was crossed into the middle, and again Celtic defenders all at sea. Hateley towered above them all and headed it back across the goalmouth, where Durie mishit the ball, wrong footing Bonner and Mikhailchenko was on hand again to make it three nil.

“Aw fur Christ sake, that’s it!” James clammered. “Game over!”

“It was over after 3 minutes,” said Stevie. He looked at Neil, who was shouting obscenities at the Rangers players celebrating in front of the Celtic end. “Well, thought Stevie, “ at least the wee man is putting his worth in!”

At that moment, a lunatic, who had obviously taken umbrage at the Rangers goalkeeper celebrating ran from the Jungle towards Ally Maxwell. Gough and Brown huckled the assailant to the ground.

“Here, that’s fuckin assault!” lamented one supporter next to Stevie, who obviously believed the two Rangers defenders were being too heavy handed. Stevie turned to confront him.

“Do you think he’s running on to ask for his autograph!” joked Stevie.

“Shut it, ya dick!” as he landed a punch squarely on Stevie’s jaw.

Stevie fell backwards into Neil, as James surged towards the fan that had hit his brother. In such a confined space, it made mobility very cumbersome, leading to two, three people grappling. Eventually other fans broke up the wrestling match, chiding all of us with shouts of

“Behave yersels!”

What was transpiring on the pitch was just too much to bear. Some headed for the exits.

“You want to leave?” James asked.

Neil looked desperate. Stevie understood. Regardless at how badly the game was going, Neil didn’t want to leave his first old firm game not even half-way through.

“And wait outside the main stand for another hour?”, replied Stevie.

“Nah, we’re staying put”.

Shortly after, the referee blew for half-time, with the players running off the park, jeers ringing in their ears.

“I’m going for a pie, “said James. “Yous want anything?”

“No,” both replied.

James left the other two and headed for the snack bar.

“Well?” Stevie asked Neil, still nursing his jaw from the blow received earlier.

"Pretty grim!" replied Neil." Do you think we can turn it around?"

Stevie believed the prospect of winning now was futile, but he hoped Celtic could do something in the second half. "We've come back from behind to win against them before, and at Ibrox, so you never know. I don't expect us to win now, at best maybe a draw. Three goals down is just too much to come back from, especially for this Celtic team."

The minutes passed, as Stevie and Neil looked at the other end displaying their colours, most certainly all of them jubilant that they were ahead and almost sure of winning the game. For the Celtic

support, it was a revolting, sickening display, and it took great courage to remain and support the team for the second half, even if many of them felt that a recovery was forlorn.

Stevie was not looking forward to this evening house visit to Lorraine's aunt.

James had still to return from the pie stall as the teams emerged for the second half. Celtic would be attacking the goal directly in front of the Celtic end.

"Right Celtic! Let's get stuck into them.", thought Stevie.

Rangers got underway, and from kick off launched the ball high towards the Celtic defence. The ball was dealt with some relative ease and brought down for the Celtic players to maintain possession.

Rangers at times would regain the ball but only for short spells before Celtic again had the ball. McStay weaved and twisted, passed inside to McGinlay, who was fouled just a few yards outside the Rangers penalty area by Trevor Steven. Celtic had a free-kick in a dangerous area.

"Ok, here we go, this could be promising!" said Stevie to Neil.

Rangers lined up their wall, as three Celtic players positioned themselves to take the kick. It was touched to John Collins, who feinted turned, skipped away from the on-rushing McCall, and smacked a strong left-foot shot outside the area which ricocheted off the post and in. Celtic had been given a life-line right from the first minute.

Stevie and Neil and supporters surrounding them all hugged each other in celebration, as Collins ran to the Celtic end punching his fists

in celebration and determination.

"Yes!! That's it Celtic! Get intae them!"

James suddenly reappeared carrying half a pie and half soaked in cola.

"Jesus, I was coming down the steps", James gasped, "when we scored. My pie and coke got knocked out of my hands. Brilliant stuff from Collins!"

Celtic continued to press, for more, but gave another heart stopping moment, when Gordon Durie picked up the ball and raced towards goal. Thankfully, there was enough cover to push him wide and his shot was saved. Another break from Celtic and some intelligent play allowed Charlie Nicholas a turn and shot from outside the area, which agonizingly crashed off the crossbar. However it looked like Celtic were edging closer. Could the unthinkable happen? Some changes had to be made in the Celtic ranks: McNally came on for O'Neill while Wdowczyk was labouring, probably carrying an injury, and was replaced by Wayne Biggins. For Rangers, Oleg Kuznetsov replaced Murray, who had been lucky to stay on after a terrible lunge on McGinlay at the touchline.

Dusk descended as the floodlights came on. Still the scoreline remain unchanged, until Rangers came forward again. A cross from the right broke to the left foot of the new arrival Kuznetsov who hit a dipping shot from 30 yards. Bonner must have seen it late as it squeezed inside his right-hand post. 4-1 and game finished. Stevie's heart sank, and the heads went down. The Celtic players at least produced a bit more effort this half, but it was too little too late.

As the game approached the final ten minutes, Charlie Nicholas headed in at the back post to bring it back to a two goal difference. It didn't raise much of a cheer.

"Big deal!" said James.

The final whistle sounded and once again jeers rang round the stadium, while the Rangers support sang "Happy New Year" to the Celtic support.

Stevie, Neil and James, made their way round to the front entrance of the main stand and found Old Wullie and Seamus standing around. They passed a miserable looking fellow, who looked as if he had been in the way of a cattle stampede judging by the state and colour of his clothing. With one hand, he was grabbing hold of a lamp-post.

Whatever he was muttering was utterly incomprehensible, but his mannerism and appearance reflected his misery, in fact, the misery of the entire Celtic support.

Wullie was first to speak as the three of them approached.

"A bloody disgrace!" he declared angrily.

The rest all nodded their heads in agreement.

He continued, "You should have been where we were. Bloody pandemonium. Folk chuckin stuff at the directors, tellin them where tae go, fightin.....whit a terrible day. And that's before, I talk about the game. Shite so it was!"

"There was bit of fightin where we were too, " Neil added, looking at Stevie with a smirk.

"Aye, never mind that," replied Stevie, anxious to change the subject, " I think it's safe to say we've all just about had it with the Board! I

think today was the final straw for some. You could see it in their faces, the anger and disappointment. Celtic fans will intensify in their protests. Something better change!"

They made it to the car, piled in, and Seamus started in the direction of Sandy hills, back towards Lorraine's aunt's house in the Tollcross area. Not much was said in the car, while they listened to the interviews and analysis on the radio. Stevie thought that nothing would ever be the same again. He felt the time had now come to add his voice to the others protesting. Hundreds would now become thousands. The Board would be harassed after every game, every day even, until they left office.

When Macari was interviewed, he talked about the Rangers players being more "hungrier" than his team for the win.

"Hungrier?" said Stevie, "I think he just met his own players this morning. Shuggie looked injured and shouldn't have played, and that useless bastard Biggins, the guy couldn't manage a shite after a fortnight's diet of prunes."

At least his last comment raised a laugh from the rest in the car.

Seamus, finally pulled up outside the house in Sandy Hills. Neil and Stevie got out the car. They could see the shadows moving behind the curtains in the front room, that meant the house was full of people already. Stevie knew what was coming.

"You remember to phone your mother," Seamus reminded Stevie.

"I will dad and thanks for the lift! See you James, see you Wullie!"

They both bade their farewells together.

"Right Neil, you ready for this now?" said Stevie forebodingly.

Lorraine was already at the front door as Stevie and Neil walked up the driveway. Her expression was of half-pity, head tilted slightly to the side, as she greeted Stevie and Neil both with a hug.

"I'm sorry!" she whispered in Stevie's ear. "But tonight will be much better for you!"

Stevie pulled slowly away from her embrace and looked at her as she smiled and winked at him. It made him feel a little better. He gave her a warm kiss.

"Everyone here?" Stevie asked, "Your uncle Pete?" Peter was the only Tim amongst the crowd of blue-noses.

"Yes, he's here, sitting in a corner on his own. He's not saying much, just drinking his beer out of the Celtic tankard he got for his Christmas", she said with a smile. "Come on in."

Lorraine led Stevie through the hallway towards the lounge where everyone had congregated. A Van Morrison song, was being played, and he could hear Lorraine's uncles singing along to the melody but had changed the words and as he walked through the door, he was met their smiles and voices raised singing "Have I told you HATELEY that I love you!"

"Oh Jesus wept!" said Stevie. "This is going to be a long night!"

“A Riotous Afternoon in “Wee Dublin””

by Frank Rafters

Whilst the following story is based around true events, it is a work of fiction intended to dramatise an often forgotten day in the history of Celtic Football Club. The match, goalscorers and crowd trouble were real and are described as accurately as possible. Everything else comes from the imagination of the author. Please, enjoy.

“I’m awful sorry, mister”, said James as the crowd swayed strongly and he temporarily lost his footing on the terraced steps below, causing him to crash into the man in front involuntarily.

“No bother son”, came the prompt reply, “I just hope the next time you do that the League flag will be ours again!” The positive nature of this response provided James with momentary respite amongst the sea of bodies around him. At just fourteen years of age and standing around five feet and six inches in height, the dark-haired lad was still adjusting to the trials and tribulations of standing amidst the adult thrall on Scotland’s terraces, after a childhood spent down at the front with the other young lads. An apprentice at a city saw mill, he lived for the weekend’s football in a manner similar to countless other Glaswegian men.

Regardless, he knew that this had the potential to be the biggest day of his Celtic supporting life thus far. It was the end of April 1922, and the Hoops knew that if they were to at least match Rangers’ result on that final day of the league season, they would be crowned as the Champions of Scotland for the first time in three years. Whilst the Ibrox side headed to Shawfield to face Clyde, Celtic and a hardy group of their travelling supporters made the journey to Cappielow to take

on Morton, the team who had overcome Rangers to win their first Scottish Cup just a fortnight beforehand.

James, or Jimmy as he was commonly known, had been named after the legendary Celtic striker, Jimmy Quinn. His father, Charlie, the man who had proposed this nomenclature in honour of his childhood idol, stood beside his son at the end of Cappielow colloquially called “Wee Dublin”, thanks to the nearby cottages once populated by many within the local Irish community. Jimmy and his dad had been just two of the hundreds of Celtic supporters to have made the trip west – much to their mother and wife’s disapproval – on one of two special trains arranged by the Football Club’s manager, Willie Maley, in the explicit hope of trying to generate as much support as possible for his side amidst what was sure to be a very hostile atmosphere. After all, many within the home crowd not only disliked Celtic, but actively despised all which they perceived the Football Club to stand for.

Many others, particularly those who were members of the Brake Clubs, had travelled to Greenock by motor charabanc and now, just as the teams were set to emerge, Cappielow positively swelled as twenty-three and a half thousand people crammed themselves inside to take in the match. As Jimmy readied himself for what was to come, the crowd swayed again, this time as a result of a skirmish which had broken out some thirty feet away or so. This was resolved momentarily however, as the Morton team – bedecked in their customary blue and white hooped shirts, accompanied by white shorts and blue socks just as they worn in the Scottish Cup Final – took to the field from the wooden stand to their right, only to be followed by Celtic, in their now famous green and white Hoops. Charlie could

remember when the Celts played in vertical stripes, something his son often mentioned when trying to wind up his father about his age.

Jimmy was confident this could be the Celts' day, as the line-up read: Charlie Shaw in goal; Alec McNair and Joe Dodds the full-back pairing; John Gilchrist, Willie Cringan and Willie McStay at half-back; Andy McAtee, Patsy Gallagher, Joe Cassidy, John McFarlane and Adam McLean forming the forward five . After all, the Hoops had not lost a Scottish League match since the middle of November 1921, more than five months ago. Rapturous applause ensued and after the obligatory handshake between the team captains had taken place, the match began.

Much to the dismay of the gathered Celtic support, it was not their heroes but rather the home side who quickly established themselves as the superior outfit. Solidified by precise tackling, of a fair if somewhat robust nature, in defence and encouraged by the incisive and flamboyant play of inside-forwards Brown and McKay in attack, the fans of Morton urged their side onwards noisily. Not to be outdone, however, the Celtic supporters responded by singing the songs of Celtic Park and Ireland in an attempt to turn the tide on the field. Jimmy knew that his father, now in his mid-thirties, only sang loudly when the stakes were at their highest, so the sight of him belting out song after song simply reinforced the importance of the day to the young man.

As the half hour mark came and went, the Celts had only managed to offer up two serious advances into opposition territory, with a shot from Adam McLean being saved and a typically mazy run from Patsy Gallagher being ended by a superb challenge before the Irishman

could attempt to send the ball goalwards. At the other end, the trio of Charlie Shaw, Alec McNair and Joe Dodds had been kept much busier than their attacking counterparts, finding themselves under almost constant bombardment. Thus far, they had coped admirably, but when the ball fell to the feet of Alf Brown after a goalmouth scramble, the half-back smashed the ball home past Shaw, whose vision was blocked by those players in front of him. As a result of this, Jimmy sunk his head into his hands in despair as an immense cheer went up from the home supporters, who could clearly smell footballing blood with the opportunity to defeat each of the two Glaswegian giants in quick succession now a very real possibility. Inevitably, this did nothing to endear the two sets of supporters to each other, as insults were traded back and forth and the pressure continued to build around the ground.

Just as the half-time whistle sounded, these insults progressed to blows once again, as violence, albeit now of a much larger scale, broke out. As the crowd standing on the “Wee Dublin” terrace parted like the Red Sea, Jimmy stood behind his father, who was forced to raise his fists a few times before the crowd enveloped the pair again and they were able to retreat. Amongst this madness, Jimmy had not paid much attention to the field itself, which was now awash with spectators, some of whom were cowering and attempting to shield the young and the old whilst others engaged in vicious physical encounters. A cry from the Sinclair Road terrace at the far end of the stadium signalled a charge across the park, as the Celtic supporters housed there attempted, albeit in vain, to assist their comrades in battle. Although he did not wish to appear weak in front of his father,

this level of violence frightened Jimmy, who had only previously been involved in fights with boys around his own age. The seemingly random nature of the charges and counter-charges unsettled him, although he knew he would likely be alright providing he did not become separated from his father, who would protect him at all costs. Regardless, with bottles flying and blood now being shed copiously, the officials made the decision to bring the teams back onto the field early in an attempt to restore some semblance of order. This strategy was relatively successful, and once the park had been cleared of debris and the odd downed supporter, the match was able to resume on time.

However, as the attentions of Jimmy, Charlie and the rest of the travelling support focused on the football once more, they were to be left disappointed as Morton again forced their way into the ascendancy with any signs of a Celtic revival remaining few and far between. The home side did not look quite as dominant as they had done previously, but as time began to creep away and Celtic knew they had to become more adventurous going forward, the risk of being caught out by a counter-attack also grew. One such example of this came as Morton broke away with only a stunning late tackle from the veteran Alec McNair preventing a shot on goal. The tension continued to mount at Cappielow, with rumours circulating that the tie at Shawfield remained goalless. Celtic likely had to score, and so the team began to look for salvation with increasing desperation. The travelling supporters urged them on faithfully and, with just eight minutes remaining in the season, the Celts sent a high ball into a crowded penalty area. Edwards, the Morton goalkeeper, rose to

collect, only to see the ball slip from his hands under pressure from several attackers. The ball hung in the air once more, and as Jimmy, Charlie, Cappielow and Scotland held their respective breath, the great Andy McAtee readjusted his body, and hastily headed the ball home.

At that moment, thousands of Celtic supporters, housed not only within the “Wee Dublin” or the Sinclair Road terraces, but in small pockets around the ground exploded with glee. Before any of McAtee’s nearby teammates had made their way over to celebrate with the goalscorer, Jimmy found himself moving down the terracing at a remarkable rate. Bedlam ensued, with people jumping up and down, hugging each other and gesturing towards the home supporters. Jimmy was so ecstatic that it took him a minute or two before he realised that he could no longer see his father in the crowd. Quickly, his delight turned to concern, as he swung his head from side to side in his attempts to locate him. This task was made all the more difficult as the crowd continued to sway; waving flags obscured his vision; and loud singing negated the chances of his voice being heard above the general din. Jimmy began to panic, whilst the virulent atmosphere continued to bubble away. As he began to recite his prayers in his head in search of divine intervention, a sharp dig in his back caused him to spin around, only to see his father – who had clearly had the experience to keep some track of his son amidst the crowd – finally managed to complete his journey through the mass of bodies to join him. Reunited, Jimmy felt a wave of relief wash over him, only to then remember there were a few minutes left to be played on the field.

The continually chaotic nature of the crowd was tempered only by the fact that everybody knew anything could happen yet in the short time remaining. Another goal for Morton could deny the Hoops the league title in an incredibly cruel manner if Rangers were to win, but one for Celtic would have the opposite effect, guaranteeing them their place as Champions. Jimmy caught sight of Willie Maley in the stand with his arm raised, urging his team to attack once again in search of the winning goal. Celtic mustered all of their might and for the first time could be said to have the better of Morton, but it wasn't to be. As the final whistle sounded at Cappielow, joyous cries emanated from the Celtic terracing and Jimmy hugged his father tightly. At worst, they had secured a play-off tie with Rangers for the League flag, but without concrete news from Glasgow, nobody knew if this would be required.

However, as someone from the director's area in the stand – which critically had a telephone – spoke briefly into Maley's ear, he began to wave his hat above his head as a signal to the players below. With this, the character of the Celtic team turned from steely determination to utter jubilation, as they began to jump into each other's arms and punch the air. The travelling crowd took these gestures, quite correctly, as indications that Rangers had not managed to find a late winning goal at Shawfield, and therefore the Celts were the Champions of Scotland once again. Jimmy leapt around like a madman with his beloved father, as green and white favours were waved across the majority of the "Wee Dublin" end. Cries of "Celtic, Celtic" rolled off of the terracing behind both goals, as the players quickly disappeared into the safety of the stand.

As the exuberant Celtic support began to pour out of the ground they yet had a gauntlet to run, as many members of the home support, predominantly young men, had not taken too kindly to their celebrations. Bricks, bottles and stones were hurled as the motor charabancs prepared to head off towards Glasgow, whilst the trip back to Cartside Station to board Maley's special trains proved equally dangerous. People sheltered in doorways as chaotic trouble ensued, and the war wounds of many were clearly visible on the train home, with the worst example being a man whose face had been badly slashed.

As for Jimmy, he and his father would make the return trip safely, except for a few bumps and bruises, and life would return to normal during the summer months ahead. Celtic may not have been the most popular side with numerous locals when they went on their away travels around Scotland, but Jimmy was buoyed by the fact that they had proven themselves to be the best team regardless. Moreover, he appreciated how much his father's company meant to him, with his family and his faith remaining the only things in life he considered more important than his Football Club, the 1921-22 Scottish Champions, Celtic.

