

WHERE'S THE SONG? Or SIDEWAYS WITH INTENT

SO...While walking, wandering, wondering, through London streets, on a breezy June day, in 2018, I saw an advert in the window of an Indian music shop:

ASSISTANT WANTED
PART TIME

I was intrigued.

I needed work.

It was near home.

It seemed possible.

I went into the shop.

It was full of sitars, harmoniums, dilrubas, veenas, saranghis, tablas, assorted percussion, bangles for dance and other instruments that I would soon know the name of. I had some knowledge of eastern music, musical and performance skills. It should be easy. Being surrounded by sound and resonance and Indian instruments was what I wanted.

The boss of the shop asked for my CV, He read it, and replied:

"You know a lot

You've done a lot

Why aren't you a billionaire?"

The street that I was walking down was famous once for playing host to many music shops before being replaced by pricey fashion brands that traded on being in a 'quirky bohemian' neighbourhood. That is the way with rapidly changing London. When I went back there a couple of years later, the Indian music shop had gone, bought out by another wealthy fashion start up. There is only one music shop left in the street now. The area is still marketed as 'Bohemian' but that's market speak. It's sanitized and wealthy. Once grungy, it's now unashamedly, unconsciously posh.

"I don't know HARJIT, maybe

maybe I am a NOMADIC CRAB," I said

I MOVE SIDEWAYS NOT UP.

I have done lots, travelled worldwide and have had lots of critical success but

Making money has never been my goal".

I wanted to say, but wandering into habitual self recrimination, a voice inside said,

"Here I am, in my 60s, I'm fascinated by language, music and play. I made shows with my

brother for twenty years, we performed on five continents, 28 countries, we got loved, We

were flavour of the month, I formed my own multi-national performance company in New

York City. I lived there for 4 years... I was on a roll! Before 9/11 I went to the very top of the

World Trade Center, I've been to the Taj Mahal, the cliffs of Moher, seen bleached coral in

warm seas and felt an earthquake in Bali, clambered over the Pyramids in Egypt, seen the Berlin wall collapse when I was performing there, and ... but ... those days have gone but I've strayed ...now I fall over

I used to have delusions of grandeur, used to think that I was the saviour of Western physical theatre.

I used to maybe those who have stayed successful still have their delusions intact, but don't know it!

Bitter? Me ?

and and ...” (plaintive gypsy violins)

So what?!!

But distant sounds resonate and echo. They are my home, siren calls
My life has been trying to make those sounds more conscious

Now I live in Marylebone, I have a blue plaque above my door,
It says.'Joe Strummer, Wordsmith used to live here'

They couldn't put the word 'squatter' on Jo Strummer's blue plaque, it's unacceptable, so he's now a 'wordsmith'. It's more Proper.

It's 45 years since I moved into this flat when the Clash moved out.

Then it was a squat, a communal house, now it's a housing co-op flat. It was home to various 1980s performers, dancers and musicians from London, Barcelona, Melbourne.

There was so much empty property in London then. Squatting was what many young people did at that time. Its part of a housing co-op now.

But it's in Marylebone!

Yes I have a flat in Marylebone now! With a blue plaque!

I had been recently diagnosed with 'Spino-Cerebral Ataxia 17'. I feared falling over.

I walked with a stick, my grandmother's malacca cane with a metal tip.

I was over reactive to noise, steps, crowds and anything behind me.

A car door closing might make me jump

My parents were very old and needing attention,

My daughter didn't want to be with me,

I was trying to keep control of my life.

I wanted harmony and a bit of stillness.

In 2017, my siblings and I dismantled the family home after my mother fell ill in August so my parents moved into a care home and then passed on, my mother in 2018, my father a year later, he could have lived longer but his life was empty without her. And both my brothers

have passed on, my older brother, Phil passed on in 1995 halfway up a mountain in Morocco and my younger brother Barnaby, who I worked with for on and off 20 years, died in 2022..

And his wife in 2023, and my Aunt Helen who was the last survivor of my parents' generation in 2023.

My diagnosis was scary, and ... then my daughter who decided to cut daddy out of her life at the moment plays on my heart a lot. Maybe her mum has badmouthed me when i was diagnosed, Kicked me when I was down, I don't know. My daughter stayed here every week since she was born, but when she was 12, after I was diagnosed decided that she didn't want to be with her daddy, and wanted to be in mummy's world and not be in touch ...

A voice says 'So what? Get over it! We've all had knocks!' but another voice, under the aimless carefree wandering of that day, said... 'Why me?'

Anyway, for better or worse, I have allowed many things to have taken my mind, focus and energy away from my once rather successful career as a performer, director and musician. Or maybe I've self sabotaged?

'No I have moved sideways,' like a crab,' I told myself.

But ...

But

But ... ,

What's that sound?

NO, I'M NOT A CRAB!

I've done more than move sideways,
I've had power, and I have willingly shed power,

I don't know why I've done somethings,

I may have tied myself in knots

I just haven't ascended pyramids traditionally.

It's been a capricious path, sometimes clear,

Sometimes circuitous

Sometimes tangled

But unpick it and there is a story to be told.

there is a build to my life!

It's not my choice! I wish it was.

Maybe I'm getting wiser, but I'm far from where I want to be.

You see Harjit, I know something about sound resonance and song. I know it helps people,

'I applied for a job in your shop because I have a balance problem and my soul needs to speak, I thought sound and resonance might anchor me and here I am, wanting to look after your music shop.'

I didn't say all this stuff to Harjit, who I hardly knew. He was no longer the idealistic instrument maker bringing his wisdom and skill to making instruments, Part of me romanticised his mysticism and wished for salvation but now he was the pragmatic businessman, trying to survive in the harsh business environment in London, importing stock from India where they had the skills and knowhow and made things for less money. More immediately, more mundanely, I wanted a job and there were bills to pay.

'Yes, I've done a lot, I know a lot,

But i still want to find my song

And the land where beauty, sound and laughter coexist'

A voice inside told me.

***Doo bee doo bee doo
Let life unfold
Let my story be told***

A voice lost in the wind
is sad and mad
Until it's heard.

Fragments become a story,
diary entries and dialogues
hastily written half-remembered thoughts,
get stitched together,

Right things, wrong things,
Sometimes quick, sometimes slow,
Sometimes blind, but on we go!
From unknowing to knowing and then unknowing again
I haven't sung my song yet, but
There is a story to be told of what I have witnessed,

Why am I doing this?'

'Don't care! I need to piece together my story!

The story begins...

Once upon a time, in the suburbs of West London my life in the outside world began ...in West Middlesex Hospital, Isleworth on December 20th, 1958.
For the first seven years of my life we lived in leafy bricky suburbia.
At first in Worton Way, Hounslow. Recently I went back there and walked around those streets. The vaguely suburban ambience of the place still resonated. I was so small when I was there, I don't have specific memories. It was a bit rundown then, but its oh so neat and moneyed now in a trimmed privet fence kind of way.
And then I, we, the growing Stone family, moved when I was 2 to Teddington. Still Leafy suburbia
I remember loads about Teddington.

Teddington.

Being in a pram under a very large, old oak tree in the front garden of our house in Teddington. Its spreading branches covering the whole of the semi circular front lawn. I remember laying back and gazing at the sun dappling in between the oak leaves and watching the squirrels, leaping from branch to branch above me, finding acorns. I remember being told acorns would give you a tummy ache, BUT squirrels loved them. I remember getting to know oak apples which the larvae lived (according to AI overview, '... wasp larvae cocoons (galls) formed by the *Biorhiza pallida* wasp, not fruit, and are best used for making natural dye or ink'), and the smell of the ground under the large oak tree a melding together of grass, moss, earth, rotting leaves, moisture and dew. I remember one morning a tramp slumped asleep on the ground under the oak tree. He spread some alarm but he was harmless and slunk away unnoticed. I remember the yew tree out behind by the concrete porch beyond which our long thin garden led to an air raid shelter of corrugated iron covered in turf left over from the war, then it got all muddy at the end of the garden where there were some lime trees and wooden gate through to a narrow path the end to my universe until I discovered you could get to the Fitzgibbon's house. Nearby neighbours and playmates.

I was the fourth of five children that my mother bore between 1953 and 1963. The oldest was my brother Philip, then my sisters, Rowena and Nicola then me and then my brother, Barnaby. Now both parents and my two brothers, have passed on, leaving 3 of us, my two sisters and me.

My parents were semi-respectable, middle class, outsiders but both, in their different ways, products of the declining British Empire. They met a few years after the war, fell in love, rescued each other, got married and had 5 kids in 10 years.(1953-63). I was the second youngest, born in 1958, Barnaby was in 1963.

Looking back, it never felt we were privileged; we were not rich, we were not aristocracy.. but privileged? Hmm, Maybe..(I reluctantly admit it), but never rich and definitely not conventional, but, yes, English eccentric from that older world order. But we, the family, were a bit maverick, a bit rebellious, we always felt we were a bit different..

My mother was born on the island of Mauritius in the Indian Ocean, where her father, a forester in the British colonial service, was stationed. The family moved to Palestine and she spent the bulk of her childhood there, from the early 1930s until the end of the British Mandate in 1948.

She had a huge archive of her father's papers which she lovingly preserved. It totally dwarfed any records of my father's past and obscured the fact that my mother's mother was a gave up her career promising nuclear physicist, to bring up her family. My grandfather was working on growing tree plantations to fix the shifting sands of Gaza. Very laudable, but later to be built over in squashed city streets then destroyed by so much warfare and killing. He worked elsewhere in the country but when I read about his work' on the coast around Gaza, it resonated as I imagined his work then and how it has, like a palimpsest, been over-written by recent history.

So there is no point in adding my opinion to the cacophony, to the tragic poison of Arab-Israeli politics, but I do know that retribution through killing and the blame game is a bad way to solve arguments. One thing I have learnt is that often it is not WHAT you say that gets heard, but how you say it, that causes conflict.

My grandfather loved trees and was very anti-military, but I didn't realise until much later that he, and all UK citizens were under the protection of the British Military in a volatile place. So defacto, they were all, however benign, part of the British Empire. The Empire was no longer sustainable, and, as part of their get-out plan, they were committed to support the establishment of an Israeli state. World sympathy in the late 1940s; with the true horror of the Nazi concentration camps becoming known, was with the Jews. Years later, I inherited a box of books and pamphlets from that time. It lay untouched for years and one day I chose to open it. When I was looking through it, there was a Guardian colour supplement from 1936 mainly presenting a rosy picture of the Holy Land in order to drum up investment in Israeli companies (Many Guardian readers now would be surprised to know what their politics were then!), and a pamphlet containing a facsimile of the Balfour Agreement 1917 which committed the UK to supporting the right of the Jews to a homeland in the Holy Land and building a Zionist state around it. Post war, there was worldwide clamour for a home state for the Jews and near total deafness to the Palestinian Arabs. But both Jews and Arabs and many Christians came from that land and mostly co-existed before- they were all Semites. The term, 'Semite' means person from the Holy Land, whatever their creed or breed. But its meaning has changed. Meaning or usage?

I did not really know the extent the British were complicit in present violence. But everyone's past recedes into some old world. It's the present world that matters. It's no-one's fault that their ancestors were complicit in some issue. You can't blame them for who you are now.

In our home there were few reminders of my mother's childhood in Palestine: we always had Jaffa oranges in the fruit bowl, my mother always talked about how much juicier and sweeter Jaffas were than other oranges. To my childhood ears, Jaffa meant orange. It was not a place. There were a couple of prints on the wall; one of old Jerusalem, one of an Arab man sitting cross legged in a dusty courtyard in Ramallah.

But the present was bigger than the past. During childhood we were blissfully unaware of past strifes. We never were close to being hungry or not having a roof over our head. My mother's past and family history was much more present than my fathers'. My mother was an intellectual, bookish, a poet and a dreamer, my father was no nonsense, direct and pragmatic. He made a few beautiful wood carvings. A hidden creative streak. They loved each other, out of their love came five fortunate kids.

Short descriptions always feel inadequate, but incompleteness can be a virtue. Once one memory is recalled others tumble out, And when a memory is put into words it solidifies and its accuracy begins to blur.

When my grandparents retired in the 1950s, they built their retirement house on 11 acres of woodland near Crowthorne in Berkshire. We used to go there most Sundays. I knew their home and that wood very well. I remember walking through the woods with my grandfather listening to the wind in the trees, our footsteps, birds and distant traffic echoing through the trees. He always had a billhook in his hand to casually cut through any shoot of vegetation that had grown intrusively over the paths we walked. My grandfather was very at home in the woods and I felt safe in the manicured mini wilderness.

By the side of the house, at the back of the garage he had a toolstore for his woodland. It was practical, neat and complete. He had a home made trolley with pneumatic rubber tires but made from split logs splayed out to make a base covered in sack cloth, upon which you placed any tools you might need. There were many tools to choose from - billhooks, rakes, scythes, secateurs, saws, shears axes. For fencing a long narrow spade, a sledge hammer, a metal spikes, industrial staplers, wire, an oily rag for wiping any moisture from the metal

blades, a whetstone for sharpening tools and an oil barrel containing creosote for preserving fence posts. A well thought out tool store for the woods. It smelt of creosote oil and wood, well maintained, solid.

That world of my grandparents is long gone, but I have been gardening a lot recently, sensing in my hands the feel of secateurs, the importance of having good tools and how to use them. It's a sensory memory in the bones gained at that time. No amount of AI can compete with it. My recent experience of using tools for gardening helped bring back that memory.

In this world of rapid change, a world where the older order seems more often than not irrelevant, it is so important to remember how much knowledge we carry in our bodies.