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A tribute

Volume Three of Six
Letters to dead people



Letters to dead people

Royston

Theo

Roger

Lina

Robert

Mr Hayes

Leave the hand that meets

The hand

Across the skin

Leave the eye that meets

The eye

Across the Memory

Leave the memory that meets

The memory

David Troostwyk

And I had also discovered it wasn't going to be the kind of free dancing I enjoyed. Moving from a class a week to a class a day changed my life. At the Slowcombe school of dance I learnt the brutality of ballet training; the exhaustion and the constant bullying. At nine I was bloodied - in other words put on point. It was de rigeur to emerge from your class with blood pouring through your satin shoes.

Jane Graves

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Volume Three - Letter One - Royston Aire 1940 /48



Dear Royston,

Sadly you personally are a vague memory but what happened sings out still.

Remember the careless streets of the middle to late 1940's and how we played ball games in them. You and I though preferred to climb trees ... we met in the branches of the cherry tree in Hurstborne Road ... who got the best branch got to be highest.

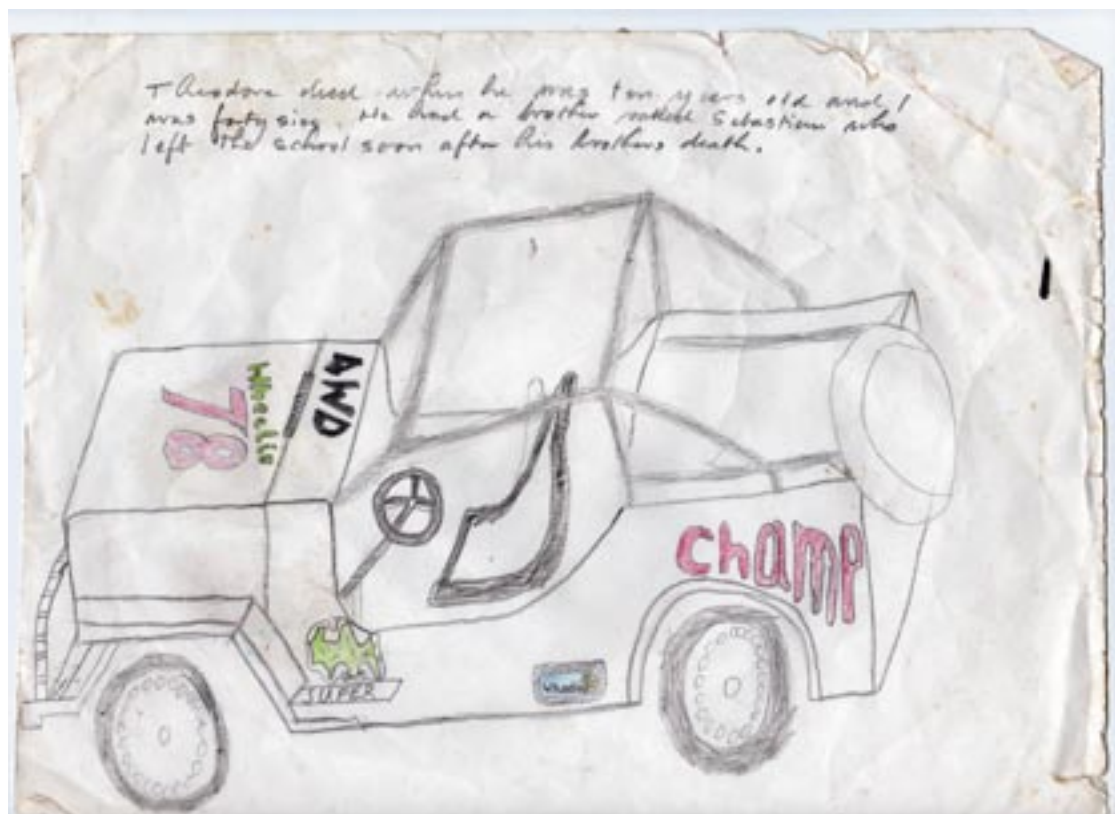
Then there were 'the shelters', left over from war they were a bit scary but the space behind them was a tree climber's paradise. There were a few saplings we could shin up and swing on; the trick being to try and touch the ground 180 degrees apart, wonderful.

Miss Radford was the headmistress of our school in Rathern Road, I remember the playground where the girls queued to skip in the endless cycle game and the boys played cricket before a wall chalked wicket. After play came the two-bell signal, one to freeze and two to line up; then the military march into the building. In early days there the first lesson of each day was a chant through our tables ... 'once two is two. Two twos are four...' to twelve twelves are a hundred and forty four' ... so little to do with mathematics ... but before all this Miss Radford always took assembly and we could see from our cross-legged floor seats her stout body by the chair on her dais. It was in one of those assemblies that she told us you were dead, yes dead, run oven, hit by a car. I cannot remember how I felt but we must have been shocked because some of us went to look at the place where you died.

I remember a patch on the road and another boy pointing ... Stanstead Road where we used to cross together to get to the trees behind the shelters. Of you, only place remains.

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Volume Three - Letter Two - Theo, 1983/1991



Dear Theo,

Do you remember the time you spent at St Dunstons in your short life? You lived in Camberwell quite near to where I was living at that time in Camberwell Grove. After you had died I bought a pocket-handkerchief tree for a memory but foolishly left it in the school car park and ... well it's hopefully growing somewhere to remember you.

I kept the last drawing you ever managed ... here's a copy for you with the message I wrote on the top which is so bland I feel embarrassed. I have a few objects to remember the time I spent teaching you all but only two are drawings. Do you remember we used to sing 'drawing's about looking ... drawing's about looking ...' every now and again in the classes; more of a chant really ... you obviously had begun learning how to look.

It's a lovely drawing ... Thank you Theo.

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Volume Three - Letter Three - Roger (Syd) Barrett, 1946/2006



Dear Roger,

I'm not sure why I remember you so vividly ...now I know you were with the wonderful Pink Floyd but before that you were briefly in Meeting House Lane with the rest of us painting our way through that glorious year run by Dick Lee. You sat next to me where Christopher Pinsent had set up a still life for us to work from and were immediately away with things deeper than I could dream of.

It was though the picture made from 'collected Junk' set by Gerry Hunt that makes me linger around that year and you. You stuck on a child's anorak and made your rectangle dominate the whole wall space.

I have no notion of what became of your life but look at the pictures if I type your name into 'search' ...

Nothing is easy but I see Libby Gausden with you as possibility ... don't mention sadness, none of this means sadness; all of these letters are trying to be seen, looked at as differences between a picture and a snap. We all seem to want to take snaps and pay little heed to the differences Proust noticed.

When Swann longed to see Odette as she had been, he could have looked at the Vermeer he owned but chose a snap of her. This is because of time, Odette owned time and time itself knew she had a say in how long a life lasts, she sold Swann Max Planck packages.

You will always be 'Roger' Barrett with your child's anorak dominating a space somewhere that is not a snap ...there we can both 'see Emily play' perhaps even 'borrow a dream or two'.

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Volume Three - Letter Four - Lina Garnade 1959/1977



Dear Lina,

Oh those tricky tape recording classes on Thursday evenings; classes where you all faced not only the difficulty of what to present but the form in which to present. I'm not sure how well I taught them but still feel they were a good sense of one of the needs at that stage; at least a sense of how difficult it is to do art. You were just beginning and learning how to play seriously with the work ... then the sudden illness and ...

Included in my recordings I still have is a loop you presented me with ... though I know what I'd hear I dare not thread it onto the Revox you mother gave me after you had died.

Sometimes I listen to recordings of students who remind me of that time.

I live in Dorset these days Lina and travel up to London now and again ... there you are in the cemetery I pass and back comes the way you taught me how not to be so silly about attractive young women.

Should I travel back to Farnham you would still be there ... I keep saying I'll go back and see the end of year shows ... see if the relief you made is still embedded in the wall near the entrance to the college ...perhaps next summer.

P. S. Lina ma belle, I actually did go back to the college ... how things change; your relief has gone, forever I expect and the prize your mum left to remember your youth no more. How right Trot was when he said 'we burn a rose on National Day' but I shall always remember, at least until, like you, we both are empty space.

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Volume Three - Letter Five - Robert Usborne 1954 - 2001



Dear Robert,

Being killed in an avalanche sounds ... no is dramatic ... hard for me to imagine anyway. When you arrived at Cathedra with a degree in Philosophy and a brother who was the New York correspondent for the Independent we on the floor were a bit in awe but there was no need you blended in beautifully. As we made furniture the degrees of skill were evident and as is the way best practice soon moved off the floor and into the office.

Sadly the 'Sail Loft' is no more; the person who 'found' the building after years of neglect gone; it was my friend Trot who searching for a studio back in the late sixties found the vacant loft. When he got there Trot could have had no notion that Cathedra would begin life there a few years later.

The loft was first divided into three art units but it was so dusty from nearby works that the artists moved out and furniture making begun. The loft had been last used many years previously but the barge sail templates were still secured to the floor, even the canvas rollers were at the far end that became the spray shop. Artists often find places to work but the rich follow and have the spaces for themselves ... St Catharine's dock where Bridget Riley and Peter Sedgley began the 'Space' project is hard to imagine filled with visual art these days but it was. 'Our' sail loft took longer to be taken over than St Catharine's where the rich soon moored their gin palaces and sort after London apartments. The Thames Sail Lofts have all been flattened, the floors where men sat to sew red ochre sails changed to other states of matter. You loved the history of the loft Robert and used it when you managed a leaving party ... what a night that was ... you were a link mon brave to so many things, the river, docks, sail loft, Cloth workers Guild all link up ... so much so that I can see, looking back, all our lives woven one into another ... you were such a force that since your death wonder what we all have missed.

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Volume Three - Letter Six - Tubby Hayes, 1935/1973



Dear Tubby Hayes

I was in Oxford Street the other day and saw some of the East West Railway Installation ... you'd be amazed by the project. The academy cinema basement, alas no more, was the place I first heard you play ... but that was back in the 1950s when Janet and I were on tentative dates.

On the Saturday nights you played there I began to get the feel of 'Modern Jazz' in that wonderful basement beneath the Academy cinema. It didn't last and was soon to become 'The Academy Two Cinema' where later I watched Buster Keaton to a solo piano accompaniment.

Janet and I were teenagers and very naïve, being in Oxford Street seemed very grown up and we sat listening, perhaps even a dance as you played; it was such a thrill. The last time I heard you playing was after an interval of many years: I had been to and left art school, I'd married and brought my young wife to hear a hero of my youth, sadly not at Ronnie Scotts, that would have seemed more like home ... you had lost an awful lot of weight, it was in the early 1970s. You died soon after that last occasion, as had the time with Janet and my wife; like The Marquee Club, they were gone. The Jazz though remains, I can still here you play on a recording I have and it connects you to the world of music we need. If I think, and I think I do, painting is about being still ... about the next moment in anticipation ... then jazz seems to be about a trail of thinking ... I keep trying to hear 'classical' music but only seem to respond to fragments.

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Volume Three - Letter Six - Tubby Hayes, 1935/1973

Continued



I think that Ronnie Scott may have got his jokes and patter from you ... but one evening at the Marquee club you announced a new composition “I’ve been very lucky, the next composition is called ...my son, my son...” you said seriously. I have no notion of how our memories function or how our thoughts begin and travel. Back then I sometimes wondered where your thoughts came from, the musical ones, the ones still available on recordings and because you are dead and I watched you blow from close range, different from listening to say Miles Davis who I only ever watched as I listened from the back of a large audience.

A potent part of my past I’m listening to you play as I type.

