

BUBBLES BURST

By Andrew Sinclair, August 2018

Andrew is a resident at Aldam House and Cottage, where he receives support for his mental health needs.

Andrew enjoys creative writing and, after a break where he has focussed his time and energy on improving his mental health, he has started writing again. This is his first short story in seven years.



I have to be honest, I am not a cheerful person. In fact, people have said I am downright grumpy! I don't know why but the slightest little things drive me up the wall! I don't like being this way but it's just the way I am. I probably always will be.

“Jack? You haven't been listening to a single word I've been saying, have you?”

“Um, yes I have.”

“Oh, really? So, are you going to answer my question?”

“Er, ah... I wasn't listening.”

Louise rolled her eyes theatrically. “How many times have I asked you to pick up after yourself?”

“Erm... Lots of times?”

“Correct! Lots of times is the right answer.

Go to the top of the class. But yet...” Louise gestured to the messy lounge with an open hand.

That's my wife, Louise. She's a lovely woman really but lately she's about as cheerful as I am. Family life is stressful. Looking around the untidy room I know I should make more effort. But feeling the way I do is draining.

“I'll get to it.

“You'll get to it now!”

There are times when I wish I was Matilda or Mary Poppins. I could sit here and watch the stuff tidy itself up. No chance of that. So I stood, feeling the pain in my knees caused by fibromyalgia or gout, whichever condition

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was causing it. I have a tendency to collect health problems like football stickers. Got, got, got, need. As if I need any more of those. I think not!

And so, I went about picking up my stuff, groaning and grumbling each time I bent down. My task was almost at an end when Tsunami Sam arrived. The chaos he created in his wake is why we named him after a natural disaster. Oh no, I thought. I was nearly finished.

My five-year-old son beamed his wonderful grin at me. I was filled with a cocktail of emotions. Pride, love, dread and a sense of impending doom!

“Daddy, daddy! Let’s play Rough and Tumble.”

“I’m tidying up, Sam, sorry.”

Sam’s bottom lip poked out and his eyes widened pleadingly.

Oh, come on! Dirty tactics! He knows I can’t resist that face.

“Go on then.”

I got onto my hands and knees. I swear he gets heavier every day, I thought as he landed on my back with a thump. I grimaced as my back protested. I then crawled to the nearest sofa and tipped him onto it.

“Again, again!”

“What do you think you are doing?” Louise stood in the doorway.

“We’re just playing,” I said.

“You’re supposed to be tidying up!”

“I was.”

“You’re far too easily distracted, Jack. Get on with it!”

I felt my face flush, my muscles tense, my teeth clench.

“No!” I shouted.

“What?”

“You heard me. Do it yourself!”

Louise’s jaw dropped. This wasn’t good. It was time to leave. I headed for the door before the lit fuse set off my highly explosive wife.

I sat at a table in The Peacock with a pint of Coke in front of me. I stared at the bubbles bursting on the surface of my drink and it occurred to me that they were a metaphor for life. You get so high and then your bubble bursts.

“Are you going to stare at it or drink it?” my friend Christopher asked. I didn’t answer.

“You should drink something stronger. That will make you feel better.”

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“You know alcohol flares up my eczema and gout. I’ll have sore skin, painful joints and a hangover. How much do you hate me?”

Christopher guffawed. “No wonder you’re such a miserable so and so! You can’t drink; you’re running out of food you’re allowed to eat. You should go back to the body shop and get a replacement.”

I had to smile at that one. “If only healthy bodies came off conveyor belts.”

“You know I’ve read about something that could help you. Have you heard of Positive Psychology?”

I returned home with a smile on my face. My mind was overloaded with new knowledge and I was going to do my utmost to make the most of it.

“What are you smiling at?” Louise asked eyeing me suspiciously.

“Nothing in particular.” I pulled Louise close to me and kissed her softly on the lips. “I love you.”

“What do you want?”

“Nothing. I’m sorry about earlier. I’ll finish tidying the lounge.”

“I’ve done it.”

“Oh!”

“You can’t just come home acting like everything is fine when it isn’t. These bad moods, your laziness, the arguments. I’m at

the end of my tether. If we can’t fix this....” She trailed off ominously.

“I will do everything I can to make things better. I promise!”

“I hope so Jack, I hope so,” Louise stepped into my arms and we held each other for a long time, terrified of losing each other.

The next morning, I walked into the kitchen to find Sam eating his way through a jar of Nutella with a spoon. My Nutella in fact. Are you kidding me, I thought. Who eats chocolate spread with a spoon? It’s called spread for a reason.

“Sam,” I said. “If you must eat my Nutella, at least spread it on toast like a normal person.”

“I like eating it like this.”

“It’s not a dessert!”

“What’s wrong now?” Louise said as she came into the kitchen.

“He’s eating my Nutella with a spoon!”

“Oh well. Each to their own.”

“It’s not his own. It’s mine!”

“Don’t be such a child, Jack!”

I sighed. “I’m sorry.” I quickly ate my breakfast and went to work at the local newsagents.

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It was a busy Friday and we were overrun by the enemy... I mean customers. Just when the queue was to the door my next customer asked, "Why didn't I get my newspaper?"

Oh no! Here we go again. Don't panic. Why do they ask this same question every time? I don't know why they didn't get their paper. Ask the paper boy!

If I had my way I'd frogmarch every paperboy who'd messed up his round to every door to explain exactly why they didn't get their paper. Then they might concentrate a bit harder.

"I'm sorry, sir. I'll get you a copy now."

I spent the rest of the day rushed off my feet jumping from till to lottery machine as necessary, avoiding crashing into my co-worker.

Having arrived back home after a chaotic day I was ready to put my plan into action. This wouldn't be easy as I'm still struggling with negative thoughts.

According to Positive Psychology there are three ways to be happy.

1. The Pleasant life: Doing things you enjoy.
2. The Good life: Doing things that

completely absorb you and you lose yourself in the moment.

3. The Meaningful life: Finding a purpose doing something greater than yourself.

Also, laughter is very important. It is actually good for your mental and physical health.

I have realised I can actually use my grumpiness to make people feel good. Ironic? Without doubt! But hear me out. I may be grumpy but I have a sense of humour with it. I can make people laugh.

I am going to throw myself into writing comedy and performing not just for laughs but for peoples' well-being. I'm going to live a pleasant, good, meaningful life.

And I'm going to start now. I will also absorb myself and find meaning in being with my friends and family.

Yes, bubbles do burst. But you can blow new ones.

