

The Time of Our Lives

Tom Benyon OBE



Reg Charity No 1112949

ZANE: Zimbabwe A National Emergency

Still walking for Zimbabwe's destitute pensioners



ZANE Walk 2024 26 August – 8 September

	Day	Date	Start Point
1	Mon	26-Aug	Upper Arley
2	Tue	27-Aug	Stourport-on-Severn
3	Wed	28-Aug	Grimley
4	Thu	29-Aug	Clifton
5	Fri	30-Aug	Upton upon Severn
6	Sat	31-Aug	REST DAY
7	Sun	01-Sep	Tewkesbury
8	Mon	02-Sep	Sandhurst
9	Tue	03-Sep	Weir Green
10	Wed	04-Sep	Upper Framilode
11	Thu	05-Sep	Fretherne
12	Fri	06-Sep	Sharpness
13	Sat	07-Sep	Shepperdine
14	Sun	08-Sep	Northwick
			End at St Michael's, Stoke Gifford, Bristol



“ I have seen a little bit of ZANE’s work on the ground and from what I have seen, it is very, very impressive . . . ZANE is one of those lovely organisations that make a little bit of money go a long, long way. ZANE is a good cause and the money is properly and well spent.

John Simpson CBE

World Affairs Editor of the BBC



Dear Reader

Today's press concentrates on reports of people being killed by rockets, guns and bombs. There are few reports about Zimbabwe, where people are dying silently and alone through lack of food and healthcare.

Just before Jane and I set off on our walk, we received a letter from Mabel (84), thanking ZANE for the regular food parcel and medication she receives. In it she writes:

"I was a teacher in Zimbabwe for more than 50 years. My pension and small savings were destroyed by hyper-inflation, leaving me destitute. I didn't have enough food and could no longer afford the medicine for acute diabetes. I was hungry and dying alone.

Without ZANE's help, I would not be alive. I thank God every day for ZANE's wonderful workers and generous donors."

Imagine living in a country with no healthcare or social services such as we take for granted in the UK. Imagine living alone in a country where falling ill means suffering in your own squalor. Imagine this could be you – and it could be me.

For all too many people, ZANE is their sole lifeline and ZANE workers are the only people who care. ZANE provides lifesaving healthcare and food to the poorest of the poor.

To advertise their plight, Jane and I, accompanied by our dog Moses, walked 120 miles along the Severn Way. We walked for the desperate people of Zimbabwe – people such as Mabel, who rely on ZANE for their essential needs. We walked to let them know they have not been forgotten and that ZANE will continue to support them.



We hope you enjoy reading this walk commentary. Please be aware that the views expressed are mine and Jane's alone. You may not agree with some of them, but we hope you will continue reading to the end. Please also note that this booklet raises far more in donations than the cost of its production.

Thank you for your kindness and support.

Tom Benyon OBE *Tom Benyon*
Jane Benyon

Jane Benyon

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The Fear of Missing Out

25 August – The Day Before

Another year, and another walk looms – the “second” last one, no less!

It was Mark Twain who reminded us that there are two vital days in our lives – the first is the day we are born, and the second is the day we understand why we were born. This last realisation came to me only recently – I was born to treasure my wife, Jane, to provide some stability for my precious family... and to start ZANE.

In the vale of tears that is today’s Zimbabwe, this last has led to many thousands of pensioners being enabled to end their days in some comfort and surrounded by affection. Today, due to the care provided at 11 sites across the country, almost 6,000 children who suffered with the hideous affliction of clubfoot are now able to dance for joy. ZANE facilitates the provision of cholera treatment, rehabilitation after civil violence, the running of pop-up classes, aid for political prisoners and the distribution of food programmes. And, of course, ZANE has created essential work for our many valued team members.

This all has been transformative. What an unexpected privilege for Jane and me to be at the heart of this essential work.

FOMO

For years, I was plagued by FOMO – the “Fear of Missing Out”. Somewhere, someone was having a better time than I was – and I desperately minded! Now I know this is total rubbish. It really doesn’t matter a jot what so-called fun everyone else is having – why on earth did I ever think it did?

I suppose it’s just that I was crass and rather stupid in my youth – and FOMO is a disease that attacks the young. It affects those who are unable to grow older gracefully, creating a layer of anxiety between them and the real world. It’s a mirage of foolish dreams that stops people seeing reality – which is, of course, rather sad. US philosopher David Thoreau had a gloomy fix on this – “All men lead lives of quiet desperation.”

The key to curing FOMO is to understand the difficulties other people are facing. Of course, for young people – particularly males in the first flush of youth – this is easier said than done. Yet, as you squeeze FOMO from your life, you then realise just how much time and energy you’ve wasted on longing to be somewhere else or to be doing something else (or in extreme cases, even wanting to be someone else). It gets better after you’ve stopped caring whether other people like you or not, and even more so when you stop being out to impress.

A good thing to do is to cut hurry from your life. Simply slow down and change from “gad about” to “stop and chat”. It’s a much more pleasant way to live. Generally, there’s no reason to rush – and it’s worth appreciating that hardly anything matters very much, and most things don’t matter at all.

And then comes the joy of losing ambition. For most people over the age of, say, 65, your main goals will hopefully have been fulfilled already. These usually revolve around family, children, career and all that – though after 65, who cares anyway? What on earth is the definition of success and who is the judge? Is it all about money, sex and power? How ridiculous is that!

If you google the lives of rich and famous celebrities – those airbrushed people who look as if they fart honey – you will see (and let’s

admit it, with quiet satisfaction) that their private lives are often barnacled shipwrecks. Hilaire Belloc famously wrote, “There’s nothing worth the wear of winning but laughter and the love of friends”, and he was onto something. For as FOMO retreated in me, so my own happiness increased – and so did my sensitivity towards others. I came to understand the importance of friendship, living out kindness above all else and not doing anything I really don’t want to do.

Ambitious... Me?

In no particular order, here’s a random list of things I’ve never done (and have no ambitions to do anytime soon):

I’ve never...

- Watched *Love Island* and *I’m a Celebrity, Get Me Out of Here*, or listened to *The Archers*
- Been to a rugby match, car racing, greyhound racing or a golf tournament (and I never read the sports pages and I’ve no idea what Gary Lineker does)
- Played bingo or visited Crufts
- Attended a fashion show, a rock concert or a séance
- Been tattooed or on Twitter
- Tried “wife swapping” (Jane will be pleased about that), or taken hard or soft drugs
- Worn make-up or moisturiser, dyed my hair or varnished my nails
- Been Morris dancing



- Taken part in wine tasting (and I’ve never been drunk – at least, on purpose, that is!)

Here are a few things I’ve only been to/done once (and I’ve no appetite for an encore):

- New York and Russia
- A nightclub (Annabel’s), a “modern” art exhibition and Scottish country dancing
- A bull fight and a football match
- A parachute jump and a marathon
- The Conservative Party Conference

All this goes to show how dull and unadventurous I’ve become!

Much Tattoo About Nothing

I can’t stop my instant reactions. When I see someone – and it’s nothing to do with sexual attraction – my heart either warms with pleasure or feels an icy chill. Call it chemistry, or whatever you like, but it’s involuntary.

And whenever I see someone smothered in tattoos (and I don’t mean one or two), I instinctively think “Idiot”!

All Hail the Beeb

26 August – Day 1: Upper Arley to Stourport-on-Severn

It was a perfect day for walking – not too hot, lightly clouded and with a gentle breeze. The sparkling river danced by our side, keeping us on track. Jane and I both felt fine as we swung along, a couple of good friends (who don't talk too much) providing us with happy company.

We lunched in Bewdley, a little antique town that is beautiful in every way. Clearly the local council knows what it's doing because the centre has not been ripped out and replaced by a small army of grey, matchbox buildings. Nor is the town centre infested with gambling shops, always a sign of poverty and despair.

As it was a bank holiday, crowds of the vaping and heroically tattooed thronged the streets. I was always taught to serve others – but what, precisely, these others are for remains a mystery!

Impartial and Exceptional

I was brought up to think that God must be an Englishman and that anyone who was English had won the lottery of life. My parents taught me that the British Empire was beyond criticism and that its efficient

handling of all our affairs made us innately superior.

Later, I learned that things are more complicated than this. Just because our armed forces perform Trooping the Colour brilliantly doesn't mean the UK has a monopoly on talent or virtue. And then, of course, our empire had – to say the least – some serious blemishes!

To be frank, the nature of any UK exceptionalism is very hard to define. It's not our monarchy, for six other countries in Europe have monarchs, and it's not the past glories of British rule, for although we had a vast empire (now much reviled), so did others. Then it's not the war, for although Britain wasn't invaded or conquered during the Second World War, we certainly didn't win it alone. And it's not George Orwell's picture of Sunday cricket on the village green, warm beer and ladies cycling to communion on misty mornings. (Let's face it, today it's more a case of people leaping out of the path of demon cyclists!)

The UK today is a different country, rapidly changing and confronting a dangerous and uncertain world. It's a middle-ranking country, fraught with economic problems, and, after Brexit, facing an uncharted future.

However, David Dimbleby reminded me that we do have one exceptional feature and that's the BBC. As the Capitol riots in Washington made clear, once a country stops believing in a common set of facts, democracy itself is placed at risk. Facing down distortions, fake news and sheer prejudice, the BBC – with all its manifest flaws – is a unique bastion of objectivity and impartiality. Trusted by half a billion people worldwide, its only ambition is to serve its audience. Now, that's exceptional – it needs funding properly and it's worth fighting for.

Extra-Mural Activities

Why do those in public life hazard their careers with extra-mural sex?

Many of you will recall Christine Keeler, the 19-year-old model who had an affair with married Minister for War John Profumo – the scandal destroyed his career and rocked the foundations of the Macmillan government. Then there's Lord Lampton, a minister in Heath's government who was caught cavorting with call girl Norma Levy, and Jeffrey Archer, deputy chairman



of the Conservative party during Thatcher's reign, who lied about his liaison with hooker Monica Coghlan.

The list is long. Do you recall Cecil Parkinson and Sara Keays, David Mellor and Antonia de Sancha, Jeremy Thorpe and Norman Scott, and John Prescott and Tracey Temple? Then, let's not forget the sad fall of Air Vice Marshal Peter John Harding, who was brought down by the kiss-and-tell revelations of "Lady" Bienvenida Buck.

The sad roll call trails on to the general entertainment of everyone

– except, of course, those directly involved, whose relationships, careers and reputations are cruelly destroyed.

Why do famous people take such risks knowing that exposure will spell ruin? Of course, it's complicated. My theory is that politicians are usually on the debit side of the good-looks ledger yet remain irredeemably vain. It's a case of, "Wow! She seems to have spotted something in me that no one else has" – and so I fall like Lucifer for the first person who puts a hand on my knee.

But why? Highly successful people must exercise iron self-control to get to the top. As a result, they live with vast pressure, always having to watch what they say or do. However, their free-bird instincts are always there, waiting for the chance to fly from this bleak cage of self-denial.

And then comes the chance to naughtily nibble from the sweet, forbidden fruit. Suddenly, they are transported away to a private place, far from the world of groundhog days and tedious discussions with boring and often angry people.

What a relief to bask uninhibited on their own private island of pleasure, released from the burden of family responsibilities or the need for crushing respectability, and free to become a different person – if only for a short time.

Of course, I am not condoning such behaviour, but it's useful to understand the cause. It's very stupid to put oneself in a vulnerable position and the discovery of affairs causes immense hurt. It leads to loss of work, a breakdown of trust and often the breaking up of the family unit.

So, dear ZANE supporter, have you ever felt under such pressure? If not, do you gleefully condemn people whose lives have been destroyed? Does such exposure make us feel better about our own secret weaknesses?

Perhaps you recall the Biblical story about the woman caught in adultery – and Jesus's response: "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her".

Undiscovered Country

27 August – Day 2: Stourport-on-Severn to Grimley

It was another fine day for walking, overhung by clouds that looked like an old tramp's vest.

The Worcester authorities should be ashamed of their neglected paths that make walking a misery. I remember US billionaire Michael Bloomberg's advice to all those over 70 – "Always hang onto bannisters". Jane and I clutch everything we can at waist height.

Acres of derelict caravan parks were followed by miles of lovely English pasture. We are so fortunate to be alive at this hour, still together after all these years and with valuable work to keep us occupied.

Legacy

Michael Heseltine doesn't expect history to remember him as a former deputy prime minister who held many important offices of state during his political career. Nor, in a hundred years, does he expect to be remembered as a politician who made a lasting impact in Liverpool and the north of England – the original levelling up – because memories are short.

Phew ... I bet Livingstone and Stanley never had it this bad!



Here's a test for ZANE supporters – who was the prime minister 100 years ago?* You can see the answer at the end of this piece, but I bet you won't know without googling – which rather proves my point!

Of course, Heseltine was one of the heavyweights of his generation to be measured alongside the likes of Denis Healey, Tony Benn, Roy Jenkins and more recently, Kenneth Clarke and William Hague. And he is the only one, I think, who can demonstrate the double whammy of building a successful business (Haymarket) from scratch and without a whiff of scandal, as well as rising to the top of the political tree. Added to that, he and his wife, Anne, have been married for more than 60 years. However, he thinks that if he is to be remembered by future generations, it will be for the trees he and Anne have planted – and he may be right.

Our recent visit to the Thenford Arboretum, near Banbury, was a delightful occasion – 70 acres of beautifully positioned flowers, trees, statues and waterfalls. It is open to the public 19 days a year and a visit is a must for your bucket list.

What's It All About?

Those with long memories will recall the dark film *Alfie*. Its theme song, by Cilla Black, asked "What's it all about Alfee?" Inevitably, the film left the question unanswered.

You will have been appalled by the deaths in coincidental freak

accidents of the vastly rich Mike Lynch – by drowning – and his accountant colleague and co-defendant, Stephen Chamberlain, who was struck by a car whilst running. In June, they were both found not guilty in a US court of allegations of fraud. Lynch was celebrating this new-found freedom with his family, friends and lawyer, and then... bang! Like the *Titanic*, his sumptuous yacht, *Bayesian*, was said to be unsinkable.

Those of us who try to buttress our little lives with security and think, childishly, that we are the exception to the iron rules of life are suddenly reminded that no matter how rich and clever we may be, none of us will get out of this life alive.

I notice that few people visit the dying but are happy to attend their funerals. And in church, hardly anyone looks at the coffin – they instead gaze at the service sheet, at a mobile, at anything but!

Death is frightening and these days, even mentioning it in polite company can be deemed too morbid for modern sensibilities. Instead, people resort to euphemisms such as "She's pushing clouds around", or they dredge up the story of the dead waiter, "God finally caught his eye". It's too shocking to say someone "is dead" – instead, we talk of their "passing away" or, in Scotland, how they've been "gathered."

Death on the Prowl

"We are all dead men on leave,"



declared German communist revolutionary Eugene Levine as he faced death after his trial in Munich, in 1919 – but not everyone takes the subject as seriously as he did.

I have Christian buddies with enamelled views on the certainty of heaven and eternal life – and after a great deal of reflection, I admire their convictions and wish them well. My own views are tempered somewhat by a sermon given by the Rev Dick Lucas of St Helen's, Bishopsgate. Once, he told us, he knocked on the door of a parishioner. It was opened by a distraught woman – she was carrying a half-naked, squirming baby in her arms, while two screaming children could be heard from the murk of her sitting room.

"I have come to discuss the Gospel

and eternal life," intoned Lucas.

"Eternal life?" the woman retorted. "I can't think of anything worse!" Then she slammed the door in the reverend's face.

Ever since, the endgame has seemed something beyond my radar – it's a deep mystery and so we must rely on Christian promises as set out in 1 Corinthians 15.

A number of years ago, several friends died over a relatively short period of time. Death seemed to be sated for a while and so there was a brief pause. Then without warning, we recently lost two Tims, a Joe, a Barry and a Jinx. They were all people we dearly loved, and their deaths have been profoundly upsetting. Few of them, as far as I

can tell, lived with much Christian conviction.

Of course, we all know death is on the prowl for us like a roaring lion. Yet still, I find the departure of my beloved friends bewildering. Why were they chosen to die when they did? What has happened to them? Where are they now?

Unless we have genius to elevate us to the ranks of the few immortals – the likes of Churchill, Mozart and Shakespeare – none of our lives will be remembered for long. Our work, even the “legacy” beloved by politicians pretending to be statesmen, will begin to corrode the moment we cease to be. Anyone who doubts this should read Shelley’s chilling poem “Ozymandias”. The harsh reality is that our bodies will simply disappear into a grave and the waters will soon close over us – while the living quickly get on with their lives. And the residue? Usually a will, some fading memories and a few yellowing photos – while the dead travel to Hamlet’s “undiscovered country”, the “bourn” from which none return.

Poet Dylan Thomas proclaims we should “rage, rage against the dying of the light”. Then, in rather more

gentle fashion, Edna St Vincent Millay writes:

*Into the darkness they go, the wise
and the lovely*

*Crowned with lilies and laurel they
go; but I am not resigned...*

*A formula, a phrase remains, – but
the best is lost...*

*The answers quick and keen, the
honest look, the laughter, the love,
They are gone. They are gone to
feed the roses...*

*More precious was the light in
your eyes than all the roses in the
world...*

*Quietly they go, the intelligent, the
witty, the brave.*

*I know. But I do not approve. And I
am not resigned.*

Shakespeare’s Prospero said of the mystery:

These our actors

Are melted into air, into thin air...;

We are such stuff

*As dreams are made on, and our
little life*

Is rounded with a sleep.

Let us rest now. There’s no more for me to say.

** Ramsay MacDonald was prime
minister 100 years ago*

A Warm Welcome

28 August – Day 3: Grimley to Clifton

It’s been a hot and muggy day. We notched up around four miles – it was all going well for the first three, and then, bang! We were faced with a vast barbed wire fence that stretched right across our path. It reached a height that The Donald himself would have been proud of.

There were no warning signs, just “Sod off, return to go, and if you think you’re getting £200, then think again!” There was nothing we could have done to foresee it – even Google Earth would have been useless. All we could do was curse and hope the local authority involved is infested with fleas! Or are we barred from such unwoke thoughts these days? We embarked on a mile-length detour with as good a grace as we could muster.

We made a brief visit to Worcester Cathedral, which is beautiful. Building it, and other awe-inspiring structures, was of course what the young did in the tenth to thirteenth centuries. Today they infest Apple, Microsoft and banking in the hope of making millions. I know which activity I prefer!

Welcome to the UK

I would like the following to be read to all potential immigrants when they arrive in the country:

The UK offers you a warm welcome... We would like to provide you with some important advice that will enable you to integrate into our community.

You will appreciate that our culture and laws have been refined over many centuries of struggles, setbacks, trials and victories. Countless men and women have battled – often in blood – to win our precious freedoms,

so please accept them as they are.

Please note that we speak English – not Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Persian, Hindi, Russian or any other language.

**“Countless men
and women have
battled – often
in blood – to win
our precious
freedoms. So
please accept
them as
they are.”**

Therefore, if you would like to live here, please try to learn English.

The UK does not, and never will, recognise Sharia law.

Many people in the UK believe in a Christian God because Christian men and women founded this nation and based its laws on Christian principles. This is clearly documented and, as it forms part of our national DNA, it is entirely appropriate to display these sentiments on the walls of our schools. Our Christian God is an essential part of our tradition.

We promote sexual tolerance and gender equality in the UK. It is vital that you accept this. If a woman wears clothes that reveal her arms and legs, it does not indicate she is available for sexual intercourse.

As part of the process of integration, you must appreciate that neither you nor your faith or culture have any special rights or privileges. You and your religious leaders must learn to tolerate the same harsh mockery and criticism that our citizens have experienced for generations. Free speech is the bedrock of our democracy, and censure and

scorn from all quarters is aimed at our monarchy, the leaders of our institutions, our politicians and our faiths. We have no blasphemy laws and we do not propose to introduce any.

Please understand a crucial truth: free societies, where deep beliefs and feelings can be questioned or even mocked, are the only societies worth living in. You must be prepared to hear – and tolerate – things that you don't want to hear, and to defend things you don't want to defend.

Of course, we welcome you, and we will accept your beliefs and not question why. But please accept the country that has offered you safe harbour the way it is. This will allow you to live in harmony and peaceful enjoyment with us.

Holy Osmosis

Wherever I go, be it to the theatre, the cinema or a restaurant, or on a train or a flight, I am presented with – as I'm sure you, dear reader, are – a polite request for feedback. How do I rate the service or whatever it was?

One of the few places where I've never been asked to pass judgement is in the wake of a church service. It might have been excellent or merely mediocre; newcomers might have been warmly greeted or not; and the sermon might have been an inaudible ramble about climate change, refugees or foodbanks, or it might have been quite excellent. The point is that no one in the congregation is ever asked for an anonymous summary of their views.

Whenever I raise this with my vicar friends, they look grey-faced and intimate they sort of know the views of their congregation – perhaps by a process of divine osmosis?



Wounded Healer

29 August – Day 4: Clifton to Upton upon Severn

Suddenly, there came a voice from God: “From henceforth, thou shalt not be able to put on thy socks unaided” – and so it came to pass.

A sad moment indeed, but best not to dwell on it! Instead, it would be better to think of how we have been much blessed by the kindness of strangers. People hitherto unknown to us have offered such generous hospitality. It would be a breach of confidence to name them individually, but they know who they are – and they have our heartfelt thanks.

We enjoyed another beautiful walk today, and once again, I pondered how stupid we are to travel abroad when there’s so much pleasure to experience here in the UK! Foreign travel is so costly and then there’s the inevitable misery of airports and flight delays. As a doge of Venice once exclaimed, “Why should I travel when I have already arrived?”

Conflict Resolution

Inevitably, some hosts have strong views on the Palestine and Israel conflict. I confine myself to a story that a Jewish friend recently told me.

A rabbi died and went to heaven. As is the custom, he at once sought an interview with God.

“Dear God,” said the rabbi, “please tell me whether or not will there be peace between Israel and Palestine and, if so, when?”

God thought for a moment and replied, “Yes, of course there will be peace... but not in my lifetime.”

Godfatherly Advice

“Humankind cannot bear very much reality.” So said TS Eliot, and when a godson, Ed, was deserted by his wife and at the same time lost his job, I was reminded of these words.

When Ed asked me for advice, I wrote him the following letter:

Dear Ed,

First, the easy one, the job. The greatest problem you’ll face (and I tell you this from firsthand experience) is a loss of self-esteem. Confidence is such a delicate flower, and its withering is always painful and devastating – it takes a long time to recover. It must be restored incrementally, brick by brick, but it’s a tortuous process. It’s best not to go for job interviews until you have rehearsed your performance, for each rejection can compound the misery and underscore the loss of confidence.

The second is more complex and wounding, especially as you are sensitive. We only met Melanie briefly, so what I’m about to write is a

general observation of what happens in the vast majority of cases.

Melanie wants to convince herself that even though she is breaking her marriage vows, damaging your children and hurting you grievously, she remains a “good” person. She must do this not only to maintain her sense of self-worth, but also to convince her friends, family and later, the children, of her virtue.

“Confidence is such a delicate flower, and its withering is always painful and devastating.”

So how does Melanie do this? Easy. She alters reality to accommodate what she wants to believe, and she highlights your many faults. Of course, we all have shortcomings –lazy/ workaholic, boring/ hyperactive, mean/

extravagant, the “fire is out” and it’s all down to you, and so on. It really doesn’t matter much which faults she lists because humankind is not very good at inventing new ones.

Then comes the dramatisation of your flaws with illustrative stories (and the invention of a few others for good measure). In this way, Melanie convinces herself and her audience that leaving you is the only reasonable way forward.

This performance is called “cognitive dissonance” (CD) – the invention of a new reality to fit what the “victim” wants to believe, and it’s a commonplace. The most egregious example of CD I know of concerns



a wealthy Irish Catholic lady who sought to annul her marriage on grounds of “non-consummation”. One flaw in her pleading was the existence of three lusty sons, so the RCs found the argument a bit of a stretch. But anyway, she nipped off to have a fling with a local CoE vicar and then she discovered that what he wanted wasn’t “love” but a “nurse with a purse”.

Of course, the whole thing ended in bitter tears – she was ditched, he defrocked. Yet, to this day, the lady maintains her holiness. It’s not easy but she manages heroically, for where there’s a will, there’s always a way. (I swear this is true).

This sort of thing has happened repeatedly amongst our friends – and we’ve stopped listening to the stories because they are rubbish. But of course, the wicked old world laps them up!

How should you react? Well, the last thing I’d advise is to try and convince Melanie that she’s wrong. Totally pointless.

Now you know the process, don’t believe any of the garbage about your alleged character flaws. You’re a fine man and in time other romantic paths will open for you. I should add that over the years, my Jane has had countless reasons to boot me out, but for some reason, she never has. No skill on my part, just fortune and grace that I found a tolerant and faithful lady.

First, what not to do. Don’t wallow in self-pity or indulge in that never-ending chorus, “Oh, woe is me for I am undone and a victim.” That way lies despair and the bottle, and many of your friendships will fall by the wayside – and then Melanie will feel justified!

To minimise the damage suffered by you and your children, accept that the marriage is over. For until you do this, you will remain paralysed in the bog of despond. Then you need to adopt total forgiveness and grace. It’s tough, of course, but once you take this path, healing begins. No recriminations, no eye-rolling, no arguments. But if you don’t forgive, it’s like drinking a bottle of poison and waiting for someone else to die.

You now have spun-gold experience and can be a “wounded healer” – for in time, you’ll be able to help others with similar problems. And, of course, you now know who your true friends are – and you know more about yourself.

I’m sure that, when the time is right, you’ll find a new career and another partner. You’ll get through these hard times – I guarantee that.

From your loving godfather.

Names have been changed to protect privacy

The Reverse Jive

30 August – Day 5: Upton upon Severn to Tewkesbury

I was displeased to find that the start of our walk took us along a road. I dislike and fear roads in equal measure – in fact, I have lost my nerve. Whatever care we take, there will always be some moron in a scarlet Mercedes wearing a reverse baseball hat, cutting a corner and giving us the finger. And look at the death of Stephen Chamberlain who died running near Cambridge a few weeks ago.

It’s astonishing that our river walks are wholly deserted. Here we are living in overcrowded Britain, and so few are enjoying England’s Garden of Eden.

Where There’s a Will...

This is how it works. Some three million Zimbabweans – economic migrants – have fled to South Africa. Every now and then, a few are arrested and sent back to Bulawayo.

Mary-Louise, who works in a Jo’burg store, did the “Reverse Jive” a few

weeks back. Her Zimbo accent gave her away to the local cops as an “illegal”. She packed a bag, and was then bussed, alongside others, 320 miles north to Beitbridge – the sole crossing between South Africa and Zimbabwe. Outside the arrival hall are stationed the Malaicha, slang for “we will carry you”. They immediately whizzed her and her pals back to Jo’burg. The Reverse Jive took just 48 hours!

The economics are as plain as hunger. After decades of oppression and mismanagement, Zimbabwe governments collapsed the economy to a derisory GDP of £24bn, roughly the same as that of Derbyshire. South

Africa’s economy is worth £320bn with plenty of jobs in the vast “informal sector”. If you were desperate for work, where would you rather be? Zimbabwe or South Africa?

Land of Milk and Honey

Go figure. Millions of tough and deeply determined young people aren’t going to be put off by a bureaucracy, or being sent to Rwanda or being taken back to

“If you were desperate for work, where would you rather be? Zimbabwe or South Africa?”

I dreamt we were in England ...
we were happy, we were free.



where they started – and who can blame them? Where there's a will, the resilient and cunning will find a way – even if they must Reverse Jive to get there.

The numbers are staggering. Africa, right on the doorstep of the EU, has billions of poorly educated and unemployed young people with lousy prospects. Take Nigeria alone – between 2018 and 2020, some 20 million young people joined the throng of job seekers, yet only 3.5m new jobs were created.

Young people in dusty villages and urban slums across this vast continent may be poor but they still have access to smartphones – and

they can see images of a land of milk and honey full of shiny cars. The UK's GDP is approximately £2.274 trillion. Who can blame the most able and ambitious for wanting to grab some of it fast? Any number of “smugglers” will pave the way – a few are arrested while others appear to be like knotweed.

This is bound to turn ugly. Europe faces being overwhelmed by hundreds of millions of immigrants from fundamentally different cultures, all demanding attention and refusing to go away. Racial tensions will make the debates fraught. The welfare state will face collapse as these migrants are bound

to be an economic drain. The UK needs highly skilled people but that's not what we have coming down the track. Just imagine 50 boats arriving on the same day...

The issue was hardly touched upon during the recent election. But it's vital that we stop playing the nice guy. We need to scrap our asylum system – created in an era before instant travel, smartphones and illegal boat people, and when the population of the world was a quarter

of today's – as unfit for purpose. And then we need to bin the Refugee Convention and the ECHR – and any other law or treaty that stands in the way of the enforcement of our national borders. Poor old Yvette Cooper looks to be out of her depth and Labour's lefty solutions appear to be at odds with the rest of Europe. It's all a gift to Farage.

To ignore this as scaremongering is to forecast an electoral uprising. Reverse Jive anyone?



Ass-piring Comedian

At a recent supper party, I sat opposite a man who sought to turn every conversation into a stupid joke.

It made me wonder if he was an ass who couldn't be serious or if he was a serious man trying to be funny. I found him a pain.

Sod Being Nice

31 August – Day 6: Rest Day

A couple of years ago, I banged on about the hordes of miserable-looking couples who sit in total silence simply staring at the floor.

Most are vast in bulk and potential incubators of diabetes, heart conditions, cancers and worse. Some are smokers and look as fit as a dead cod. No politician dares tell the truth and announce that we cannot go on like this! Unless the population goes on a diet and the NHS is radically overhauled, the UK is bound to go bust.

On hearing my bleak prognosis, one of my friends told me that I underestimated how many saints are doing wonderful things quietly – and that I should be ashamed at my lack of charity. He is of course quite right. But we still face going bust!

No Enemies?

“Isn’t she nice? No one ever said a bad word about her, ever...”

Really! Nice? No criticisms at all?

In common with many ZANE supporters, I’m sure, I attend a lot of funerals. At the most recent one, someone said that the deceased was a “very nice man” and that he didn’t have any enemies. I said nothing.

That’s fine as far as it goes, but when facing the last trump, is that really how you’d like to be summed up? Remember, Jesus never said, “Blessed be the “nice”!

Those who have achieved much – or strive to do so – can’t be merely “nice”. In fact, they must surely face active dislike from some quarters. When Maggie Thatcher died, some sad souls proclaimed (disgracefully), “Ding, dong, the witch is dead”. That says more about them than her for she changed Britain substantially for the better and she played a part in ending the Cold War. She wasn’t “nice” – instead, she was magnificent.

Acute dislike and criticism are occupational hazards for anyone who makes waves or dares to shake things up. Perhaps that’s why so many contemporary politicians are relative lightweights. They want to be liked and popular, and most can’t see a parapet without ducking beneath it. Which UK politician is calling out the unemployed millions who would rather draw benefits than work?

The head of Frontex, Dutchman Hans Leijtens – who sounds very “nice” – says, “Nothing I do can stop people crossing the borders”. He doesn’t want to do his job

properly for that would involve being “mean”. US President Biden lifted The Donald’s border controls because they were “mean and bad”. US electors are keen to stop illegal immigration, but Kamala Harris wants to be nice and cuddly – and it may cost the Democrats the US election. In whatever way you choose to describe the ghastly Trump, “nice” is not a word that comes to mind. That’s maybe why instead of wearing an orange jumpsuit – to match his face – and living in a Florida nick, the old sod might just win.

That’s why – and this list is at random so please add who you will – Napoleon, Winston Churchill,

Ernest Bevin, Margaret Thatcher, Arthur Scargill, Tony Benn, Mary Whitehouse, Peter Tatchell, JK Rowling, Nigel Farage and Douglas Murray are all great people (forget whether you agree with their views or not, just accept they are all mighty consequential). They have stood up for their causes – and possibly failed many times – but in the end they’ve put up with the inevitable abuse and mockery that are an occupational hazard. None of them cared/cares much about being “nice”. Because if you are an achiever, you are bound to accept that people will tell lies about you, and that you may face lawsuits or

Personally, I didn’t know him – but
I’m told he was really nice!



even threats to life and limb. And I've not heard that any of the great achievers has needed counselling, either!

The following poem, "No Enemies" by Charles Mackay, is said to have been on Thatcher's desk:

You have no enemies, you say?

Alas, my friend, the boast is poor.

He who has mingled in the fray

Of duty, that the brave endure

Must have made foes! If you have none,

Small is the work that you have done.

You've hit no traitor on the hip,

*You've dashed no cup from
perjured lip,*

*You've never turned the wrong
to right,*

You've been a coward in the fight.

So, sod being nice. Where's the next "cup to dash from perjured lip"?

King of the World

I see Tony Blair is well on his way to becoming world king. He's offering consultancy to all emerging countries, teaching them how to govern efficiently.

With Clinton-style gifts of persuasion and charm, he won elections of course, but we are still paying a high

price for his premiership in some respects.

He encouraged more young people to go to university instead of training to become plumbers, plasterers and electricians – so now we have semi-educated "graduates" with no jobs. He was behind ghastly devolution that morphed into a costly nightmare, and then he allowed the buffoon John Prescott to relax the gaming laws, resulting in a vast rise in the number of gaming addicts. The UK is now the world centre of gambling – the result has been a growing number of crazed addicts and the suicide of 420 young men (at the last count). If you doubt this, watch any sporting event on TV and count the number of "gaming"

advertisements designed to entice the vulnerable into squandering their last pennies in a sea of debt.

Blair allowed Home Office minister Barbara Roche to reset our immigration rules to far too many people, far too quickly – and guess what? Anyone who objected was deemed to be, you guessed it, "racist". Today, our attention is being diverted by the "small boat" saga, but this masks the real problem that, legally, the number of immigrants arriving in the UK (every four years) rivals the size of the population of Birmingham. Don't forget that the genesis of this problem can be traced back to Blair.

And all that before the Iraq war.

I'm from the Blair Foundation,
here to give God advice
on how to run heaven.



Marshmallow World

1 September – Day 7: Tewkesbury to Sandhurst

We passed a memorial to Admiral Hopwood. No one has ever heard of him but now you'll know he served his country throughout the naval engagements of the First World War.

Hopwood is one of the 12 million servicemen who risked their lives for future generations. And the reality is that today very few of the “future generations” know much about history or appear to care a fig!

All honour to Admiral Hopwood. We are standing on the shoulders of giants.

Inflation and Devaluation

“We live in a time of a terrible inflation of words, and it's worse than the inflation of money.”

So said Uruguayan literary giant Eduardo Galeano, a statement that made me think of how, for years, schools (and some parents) have awarded prizes to children irrespective of whether they were deserved or not. And now, universities are issuing First Class degrees like smarties.

These degrees used to be precious and a matter of great pride, but a recent report reveals that a quarter of students with three “D”s at A-level have gone on to attain a “First” at

university. Bosses are finding that some of the “achievers” they've employed can't even write a letter in clear English, so they no longer value this nonsense – and that, of course, makes a mockery of the first-class accomplishments of the brightest students.

So, the currency of exams has been devalued... Who'd have guessed the inscrutable workings of the iron law of unintended consequences?

Now the term “bullying” has been inflated beyond recognition. I went to private schools. I was a private in the army, attended RMA Sandhurst, and was a businessman and an MP. I really do know about hardcore bullying. Thankfully, the world has changed, and folk are now protected from some of the worst rantings of tyrannical NCOs and bosses.

However, in the workplace, things like eye-rolling, mere “glances” and “micro-aggressions” – whatever the hell this last means – can now be interpreted as “bullying”. Has this made people any happier? The result

is that the word “bullying” has lost its true meaning. Hypersensitivity has been legitimised and forthright communications are now almost impossible.

And look at what's happened to the rules around sexual behaviour. We've all witnessed the nasty stuff, and of course, it can be hugely distressing. However, one of my senior friends described how, at a party, he dared to tell a female friend how nice she looked in her new dress – and was promptly traduced by a beak-nosed harpy who informed him his words were “highly improper and likely to be misunderstood”! Such acute sensitivity over the small stuff devalues the big – for example,

gruesome Alex Salmond's drunken groping and vicious harassment.

Stressed Nation

Suffering from stress is now fashionable – and I don't mean clinical depression and real illness, for which I have every sympathy. Stress is the illness of the moment, and its victims are everywhere – bar the self-employed. I once asked a bunch of workmen if they'd ever been off with stress? “Of course, not,” they laughed. “If we don't work, we don't eat!”

One theory is that the only people who can afford to stop working due to stress are those who know they'll be paid anyway – for example,

We had a sex education lesson today ...
Did you know people didn't start
having sex till 1963?



those who work for large charities, nationalised corporations or as civil servants. I know this is a tad cynical, but I've been around a long time and know something about human nature. The self-employed do not take time off work lightly.

Today, we live in a marshmallow society, where we're as soft as snowflakes and likely to be blown sideways by every zephyr that passes. During the Battle of Britain, can you imagine the reaction from Bomber Harris if his pilots had requested time off due to stress or insisted on taking paternity leave? We'd all be speaking German today.

Of course, all sympathy to the mentally ill – whilst recognising the inflationary spiral that today classifies mere emotions and even bereavement as “illness”. Trauma was once an event that indicated grave injury, threat of death or sexual violence. But then, as is the usual



pattern, the definition started to inflate so it embraced not only one's own experiences of harm but those of our “loved ones” (and how I dislike that expression!) too. I suspect this expansion is due, in large part, to pharma companies hoping to prescribe pills to an ever-widening audience of “victims”.

Years ago, when I ran a health authority – Milton Keynes since you ask – I was told that many of my employees were off with stress because they were fearful there might be a war and their children “might” be involved! So, would we provide a free counselling service?

Reader, please be proud for I blankly refused. For heaven's sake, most of our parents went through a world war, and then there were no counsellors of any kind. They just had to get on with it. And we've all had ghastly stuff in our lives, from our own sicknesses and failures to the deaths of those we love, job losses and all sorts of betrayal. And we just bloody well get on with it, don't we? And what we can see coming down the track doesn't look like a barrel of laughs either! De Gaulle called old age “a shipwreck”.

Decades of “welfarism” has created a society in which millions of people choose to hyperventilate with emotional stress, live off their fellow taxpayers and consider themselves entitled to do so.

We are living in a mad, mad world, my masters. Simply mad!

Those Were the Days

2 September – Day 8: Sandhurst to Weir Green

Today's walk was the least enjoyable so far, with an uninspiring landscape, overgrown paths and a river that stank like a monkey's latrine. Those responsible for this disaster should be made to pay, especially for the disposal of sewage poured into the river.

PM Ponderings

What do you make of the new prime minister? Keir Starmer has a bland, featureless face and looks more or less the same as he did when he was six. He has all the charisma of a Mormon actuary.

He claims not to have a favourite novel or a poem that makes him cry, nor does he dream. He has no religious beliefs, and he's not long on self-deprecating humour. He is a moralistic Pharisee who loves the law. I wonder how he'll respond when several wheels fall off at the same time. In

recent times, Brown was faced with the collapse of the world economies, May faced the meltdown of the Commons, and Boris had to deal with Brexit, Covid and Putin. We're now facing Gaza, Iran and North Korea too... Just what will explode next?

I suspect Starmer doesn't know what he'll be like himself until he's forced to confront a series of unsolvable disasters.

Poor Rishi Sunak was underestimated. He was balanced, talented, disciplined and very hardworking – and in my view a

good prime minister who was more or less destroyed by the cartoonists who sought to portray him as a childish dwarf. It's sad he called the election early. The Tories would have been ousted anyway but perhaps it would not have been such a rout.

“Boris had to deal with Brexit, Covid and Putin. We're now facing Gaza, Iran and North Korea too... Just what will explode next?”

Adrift at Sea

LP Hartley told us that the past is a foreign country, and they do things differently there. And this has never been truer than in the sex-before-marriage/co-habitation debate.



Jane and I are blessed with clergy children and a good many grandchildren. We “big talk” all sorts of stuff, often sex.

Nowadays, it’s about “my truth”, “who are you to tell me anything?” and so-called “freedom”. ZANE supporters of a certain age will remember that when we were young, the Christian ethos was a good deal stronger than it is today and social pressure more vivid.

Today’s parents have lost confidence in whether they have the “right” to say how their children should lead their lives and whether their relationships are “wise” or not. Who dares say, “Monica darling, when you are off your smartphone,

please listen. Is that man with the delightful ponytail, covered in Nazi tattoos, yes dear, the one with a dog on a rope, is he really the very best you can do?”

Or who has the courage to observe, “Henry, your nice girl has told me her dream is to become a ‘pole dancer’. Darling, what on earth does she do now?” for fear of being labelled an old fart. The concept of “family” is today blurred, leaving the young adrift in a choppy sea without a compass or a map – and all because parents fear giving offence. They want to be “nice” and to have their children as “friends”. But our children aren’t meant to be our friends...

In my day, when we tiptoed down the corridor with our shoes in our hands at 2am, at least we knew that what we were about to do would not be approved of by family, our schoolteachers or the church. It made illicit sex even more fun – or so I was told! That’s mostly gone now.

My own view is that I’m all for change – provided it’s for the better. But anything is better than today’s confusion. Of course, there was a good deal of hypocrisy and cruelty in Victorian times, but we

have long since hurled the baby out with the bath water. There has to be a middle way, a compromise. Think of the words today that have lost meaning: chastity, virginity, purity. Of course, girls are more vulnerable than boys, although this flies in the face of the bollocks bleated by today’s tawdry media.

Within a short time of meeting a possible romantic partner, our grandfathers would have been asked by the woman’s father or brother, “Please may I ask your intentions?” And if a man didn’t pass muster, he would be booted out and not always politely. And if he didn’t play by

the rules, he’d be told, “You’re a bounder taking advantage, Sir! My Gad, you need a horsewhipping!”

It wasn’t perfect, but those were the days.

“I’m all for change – provided it is for the better.”

Sew Gifted

Jane is amazed that I enjoy sewing. I tell her that anyone who has spent time in the army can sew – and to tell you the truth, I find it rather relaxing.

She is also impressed that I can thread a needle. And now I come to think about it, given my age, so am I!

Tobacco Bastards

3 September – Day 9: Weir Green to Upper Framilode

On 4 July, something remarkable took place in the UK – something that we take for granted. Power changed hands from one party to another, but no one died, no one tried to disrupt the process and the transition occurred peacefully.

What astonishes me, though, is that at least a third of the country just shrugged and failed to vote. These individuals can have no appreciation of how lucky they are to live in a country at peace with established democratic processes, free speech, a free press and honest courts. They must be plain ignorant as to the quantity of blood that has been shed over the centuries to elevate our magnificent country to where it is today.

Perhaps they think that the tooth fairy just waved her little wand and bingo! – social services, roads and railways, index-linked pensions, the NHS, free education, and endless football and beer all appeared by magic? Many of these non-voters want to live on benefits – which are a right, not a privilege – eat pizza, deep-fried Mars Bars and whine for an even easier life.

I think that, in time, they are in for quite a shock.

License to Vape

Neither of my parents lived to see eight of their grandchildren. They were both killed courtesy of British American Tobacco.

Today, we know that smoking is all too often an early death sentence. So, with horror, I've been watching the antics of the tobacco companies as they try to lure youngsters into taking up the habit that killed so many of their grandparents.

These semi-crooks are spending millions of pounds on research to discredit the idea that vaping is harmful to children. Now you can see an eight-year-old slurping on a cherry-flavoured nicotine bomb – while hoping that someone gives her a Snoopy-shaped e-cigarette holder for her birthday.

Philip Morris International is funding a company that runs pro-vaping “cessation sessions” for hundreds of UK doctors. They are trying to get children hooked

on vapes in the hope they will get addicted to nicotine – and then after shelling out their hard-earned cash on full-blown ciggies, just shut up and die like the smokers of previous generations! These bastards are selling kids cheap and disposable fruity flavoured vapes with twee names like “Gummy Bear”, “Cotton Candy” or “Strawberry Milkshake” to entice them onto the hard stuff.

Top Your Day with Marlboro!

That's a slogan from 1968. And indeed, before cigarette advertising was illegal, our fathers were persuaded that smoking would turn them into rugged cowboys or airline

pilots, and ordinary women were conned into believing they would morph into hot chicks with a chance to lay “real men”.

The tobacco conmen pretended that ciggies were a cure for cancer, asthma and other respiratory ailments, and they used their vast profits to promote plain vanilla lies like, “More doctors smoke camels than any other cigarette” and “You're never alone with a Strand”. And then they did all they could to bribe doctors to hide the links to cancer, heart disease, strokes, birth defects and all the other unspeakable horrors we now know are caused by tobacco. These creeps are still with us, as are



the fat-arsed accountants, lawyers and advertising folk who support them.

My parents must have believed the lies. I recall clearly, when I was 14 – not a good age to lose a father – seeing my handsome dad, who had fought in both world wars, dying by nicotine-stained degrees of heart disease. He realised too late that smoking was a death sentence and tried to dissuade us from ever taking up the habit. My mother was a courageous and talented scriptwriter who had endured a lot of hardship. Forty years on, I can still see her coughing up her guts against a backdrop of the ghastly paraphernalia of the dying. By then, she had shrunk to six stone and was addicted to morphine.

Countless others have suffered the same misery, their beloved family members poisoned by these mega-crooks. Direct advertising may have been banned, but this doesn't stop the conmen from weaselling out loopholes in the legislation with the hope they can add our grandchildren's names to their tar-blackened butcher's list.

A Little List

ZANE supporters know that the chattering classes are routinely

disparaging about our empire. A recent book about Churchill describes how India was removed from the "clutches" of Britain. I suppose "clutches" is one way of describing our contribution. Why are we daft enough to expect gratitude for what Britain has done for so many countries? Recall the bleak



saying, "If you want gratitude in Washington, get a dog" and then the Spanish, "Why do you dislike me so much, what favours have I ever done you?" Just watch how they work out today.

In the 1979 film *The Life of Brian*, John Cleese asks, "What did the Romans ever do for us?" – only to be told, "Education, medicines, wine, public order, irrigation, roads, fresh water and public health!"

It's a forlorn hope, but before cosying up to the Russians, India might recall a little list of what Britain brought to them: railways, mass education, irrigation projects, law and order, English as its first lingua franca, democracy, universities, newspapers, standard units of exchange, telegraphic communications, an incorruptible legal system, medical advances – and the widespread abolition of the practice of burning widows alive on their husband's funeral pyres.

The Last Supper

4 September – Day 10: Upper Framilode to Fretherne

We have been welcomed by wonderfully kind and generous hosts, and enjoyed excellent, wide-ranging debates – you name it, we've discussed it!

Yesterday evening, we shared what we would choose as our last meal if we were to be shot!

Here's mine. First, a well-made Bloody Mary. It's a sad fact that hardly anyone knows how to make one. It's not just a drink, it's an art form! A glass full of top-class tomato juice, at least a quarter of a squeezed lemon, a decent amount of Worcester sauce to colour the mix light brown, a quarter spoonful of horseradish sauce, a shot of vodka, and, crucially, a shot of medium dry sherry, then a sprinkling of pepper. Add ice and then shake it up – pure nectar!

Thence to the supper. A dozen oysters, with Worcester sauce and half a lemon. Two slices of brown bread and butter, and two glasses of white Burgundy.

Then, a medium-rare small fillet steak with boiled new potatoes flavoured with mint, hollandaise sauce and fresh peas. A salad with fresh lettuce, cucumber, tomatoes

and a light French dressing. Two glasses of red Burgundy.

For dessert, raspberries and cream followed by a glass of iced kummel.

Finally, coffee and a Bendicks bittermint.

I am now ready to be shot...

Tom Benyon's Schooldays

Such were the joys of being flogged on my 10-year-old bare bum at Edinburgh's Angusfield House School. I have no recollection of what my offence could possibly have been – though it couldn't have mattered much, for it didn't take a lot for "Tud" (the pervert's nickname) to bend us over his tweedy knees, stare gleefully at our pink buttocks and inflict pain.

Today, this three-flush floater of a headmaster – whose name prudence dictates I should avoid mentioning – would have ended up serving at least six years at His Majesty's Pleasure. But those were the days, my friends, that's just how it was. I got off relatively lightly compared to some of my "pretty" friends who dumbly suffered serious abuse – and the prettier they were, the worse the misery. Would our parents – my



father was an Edwardian – have known what to do if I had confided in them? Would they, or the police and the courts for that matter, have understood the long-lasting effects that sexual molestation has on children? I doubt it.

And the abuse and bullying grew dramatically worse at public school. Christopher Hitchens relates the tale of a friend captured in 1943 and put to work on the infamous Thai-Burma railway.

Five young officers were sitting in a stinking cell waiting to be interrogated. The heat was stifling,

the latrine, a hole in the floor. Mosquitoes and bugs had chosen this particular locale as their Far Eastern rendezvous, for they clustered in swarms. The screams of an officer being beaten and tortured in an adjacent cell grew to a crescendo.

One of the five, Hitchen's friend, fell asleep, and soon the exhausted man was in the grip of a nightmare. He began to moan, then shriek and writhe.

"Oh, please stop!" he shouted. "Please stop! I can't bear the pain anymore."

His neighbour shook him awake. The man glanced round the cell and muttered, "Oh thank God! I dreamed I was back at Tonbridge School."

A to B

Cars are for getting from one place to another, no more, no less. I am always astonished at the sums people squander on them. It all boils down to the vanity of, "Hello Sunshine... I'm much richer than you!"

A friend who's a car salesman describes how buyers often take their new car home just to make sure everyone sees the new number plate. Then, after the neighbours have been suitably impressed, they change the number plate to a personalised one!

Yesterday, I noticed a man sitting in his parked car. Without warning, his sidelights began to semaphore, and then his boot beeped loudly, rising and falling like a runaway guillotine. We couldn't stop laughing as he tried, wholly unsuccessfully, to control the display. But the more he banged on the buttons, the faster the lights seemed to flash – and the boot was having none of it!

On the (admittedly, remote) off-chance that a motor manufacturer ever reads this, please stop adding electronic accessories to new cars! All they ever do (apart from adding to the gaiety of amused onlookers) is to increase the already vast cost of the car – and they always go wrong, wrong, wrong...



New Tricks for an Old Dog

5 September – Day 11: Fretherne to Sharpness

Boris Johnson's book about his premiership will be published in October. Whatever he writes in his own defence, one thing is clear – he plainly doesn't have the self-awareness to be alert to his own failings.

He should have known he was incapable of controlling his staff. If he'd been aware, he would have authorised a tough cabinet secretary with disciplinary authority to ensure that Downing Street staff toed the line – and Partygate might have been avoided. It's not that difficult. When I was in the Scots Guards, an adjutant's job was to ensure discipline. The commanding officer's job was to command. That's all it would have taken. Simple and very sad, really.

Of course, Boris's failings run deeper than that and I'm glad he isn't my son-in-law! I never liked the idea of a mistress in Downing Street. It's sad that his former wife left him for it seems that she took his moral compass with her – if he ever had one – when they split up. Such a golden opportunity wasted.

Variety is the Spice of Life

Many of our friends – and many ZANE supporters – are “of an age”. Some of our friends and loved ones

are suffering in the iron grip of dementia.

Richard Restak's book *How to prevent Dementia* is catnip to me. I learned lots. Common sense tells us that what's good for your heart is good for the brain – daily exercise, not smoking, moderate booze, plenty of fruit and veg, reasonable sleep and going easy on the junk food.

What else is new? Well, Restak reckons that the more we know, the more tools we can muster to prevent the onset of dementia. He thinks that we concentrate too much on the memory loss aspects of the disease whilst overlooking the need to consider the emotional changes that occur. Dementia can “start with speech problems... disorders of emotions and behaviour, unreasonable anxieties, hoarding, impatience, sudden flares of temper, delusions and hallucinations.” Restak concludes that “there's a continuum of dementia in us all, and that we will travel through periods of memory loss, disordered

thinking and emotional disturbance”. Sometimes these symptoms reverse, often they worsen.

Restak has interviewed many thousands of creative and successful Americans thriving in their eighth and ninth decades to establish the basis of healthy brain functioning. The following are all key:

(a) education, (b) curiosity, (c) energy, (d) keeping busy, (e) regular exercise and physical activity, (f) acceptance of unavoidable limitations, (g) the need for diversity and novelty, (h) enjoying our own company, (i) the maintenance of friends and other social networks, and (j) the establishment and



fostering of links with younger people.

Phew! Inevitably, this is a limited exercise because Restak's research was bound to be constrained by the fact that only those without dementia

could be involved. But Restak tells stories of those whose lives have been enriched by learning new tasks, and by having a reason and purpose to live as we age. We need plenty of social connections across the generations.

All these things may – we hope – delay the onset of dementia. At any rate, they'll certainly make life more rewarding.

One Life to Live

And, oh yes, Restak claims that we shouldn't get hung up on getting eight hours of sleep per night. What we need is enough to feel refreshed and alert – and to just take a nap when required. Alcohol may be good for our social lives but is bad for the memory. Moderation is clearly important.

Restak suggests we should drop activities that we don't really enjoy – parish council meeting anyone? – and we should spend time in “green spaces”. And he's an evangelist for lifelong learning.

Finally, our attitude of mind is more important than we think. What do you think of the statement, “The older I get, the more useless I feel”? In a study of cognitive impairment, 65 per cent agreed. Bad news!



Restak claims we should be positive. Here's his final lifestyle suggestion: “Stop obsessing about whether you may come down with dementia at some time in the future, for life's to be lived and not constantly fretted about.”

Perhaps this quote from philosopher Kieran Setiya sums things up: “What's needed to live a good and satisfying life is the courage to hope well.”

To hope well is to be realistic about probabilities, and not succumb to wishful thinking or to be cowed by fear. We should “hold possibilities open”.

Cheer up – and if you can find the bottle, have a (mild) gin and tonic!

Obese City

My buddy and I share a friend who's grossly overweight. Recently, we discussed which one of us should tell him we're concerned about his health.

Thankfully, my buddy volunteered. But then I discovered he'd told our friend, “Tom's worried about your weight!”

Good having friends you can trust, isn't it?

A few weeks ago, I was sitting on a bench in Edinburgh's Princes Street Gardens. As people walked past, I decided to count just how many were overweight. Out of 100 passers-by, 76 looked obese and only five were slim!

Obesity has long posed a threat to public health. It's a risk factor for a range of chronic illnesses, including Type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, liver and respiratory diseases and 12 different cancers.

NHS statistics for 2022/23 show there were 1.2 million admissions where obesity was a factor, up from 617,000 in 2016/17.

When compared to smoking, obesity is responsible for three times as many hospital admissions.

It's estimated that last year, the cost of obesity to the NHS was £6.5 billion so it's hardly surprising that weight loss drugs are in high demand.

Perhaps Wes Streeting might acknowledge that the real crisis facing the NHS isn't the lack of funding, but obesity. Unless the nation slims down, we'll bankrupt the NHS.

“What's needed to live a good and satisfying life is the courage to hope well.”

Victimhood

6 September – Day 12: Sharpness to Shepperdine

A friend announced, “I’ve a funny story to tell you.” I wanted to reply, “Just tell me the story, and I’ll let you know if I find it funny or not!” – but I didn’t have the heart to do so.

Pull Up Your Socks

Politicians of all stripes treat the electorate as babies.

Social security benefits are morphing into a malingerers’ slush fund. There are now millions of adults of working age – excluding students – out of work. Meanwhile, nearly a million

vacancies are filled by hard-working immigrants.

Between a fifth and a quarter of the residents of Birmingham, Glasgow and Blackpool are living on out-of-work benefits. The majority, we must presume, are genuine cases, but with human nature being such as it is, of course the system is open to abuse. The malingerers are throwing away their lives, and wasting billions of taxpayers’ cash that could be spent on better things.

Politicians are dodging their duty to tighten the criteria for benefits eligibility for fear of being abused by the media. Anyone who dares to say what he or she thinks risks attracting a cacophony of noise from lobby groups/think tanks/quangos/commissioners/tsars, all poised to scream in self-righteous anger about persecution. Today, victimhood is all.

Thatcher is, of course, history and sadly political courage died with her. Her doctrine of “Don’t

accept being a victim, pull up your socks and get on with it” is long since forgotten. So too are her messages, “The state can’t solve all your problems”, “It’s your money they are spending, not theirs” and “Money doesn’t grow on trees”. And what happened to “Taxpayers would spend the cash far more wisely than HMG”?

In 13 years of Tory rule, the Iron Lady’s legacy has gone with the wind. The country is today more or less bankrupt, and self-reliance has become a dirty word. We are all victims now in the sense we are unable to tell the truth to ourselves about ourselves.

Poor Parenting

Former Tory MP James Daly was flayed when he said that struggling children in his constituency were not victims of insufficient money being spent on them by taxpayers but rather of “crap parents”. His Labour rival responded by asserting that instead of insulting parenting skills, we would do better to face the fact that children in gangs or carrying knives have nothing to do with poor parenting and everything to do with a “failure to invest in public services”.

So now the claim is that parents have no real part to play in the crucial narrative of bringing up their own children, and our lives are shaped by forces beyond our control. The focus of shame has moved from the person doing something wrong to the person who has the gall to point it out! All problems, you see, are caused by

government, and must be solved by it.

The person “left” teachers most love to hate is “Britain’s strictest headmistress”, Katharine Birbalsingh. Why? Because she is too “judgmental”. Yet intelligent teachers admit privately that poor grades are all too often about crap parenting. In an ordinary comp school, set in one of London’s most deprived areas, Birbalsingh proves it QED. By insisting on firm discipline and manners, she has produced every teacher’s dream – a calm and happy school that achieves top grades. “A school’s problems won’t be fixed by more money,” she claims, but by “better ideas, by tackling bad behaviour and reducing bureaucracy.”

Will she survive? I doubt it!

Set in Stone

Forget small talk. I like a good discussion about sex, money, politics, religion or death. Someone says something, then we discuss it and conclude (or not), possibly modifying our opinions along the way. As Bernard Shaw once said, “Those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything.”

Sadly, a close friend is not open to changing her views. There’s no point discussing anything or introducing new ideas, for her mind is as closed as a clam.

Her prejudices encompass colonial history and empire (a thing of

Working the system



Erm ... that doesn't look much like voluntary euthanasia, Mrs Philips.



unalloyed beauty, no criticisms to be tolerated); apartheid (acceptable because pornography was banned); the monarchy (totally for); the EU (totally for – Cameron's a dolt for the referendum, and the fact that all parties, including the LibDems, promised a referendum is conveniently forgotten); abortion and assisted dying (totally for); and gay partnerships (very much against, and this, apparently, is when the CoE moral rot started – once again, the fault of Cameron. That all free-world governments and their political parties support gay partnerships is overlooked).

There's no room for debate about any of the above issues, for this lady's

iron-clad opinions are primed to be fired even before she opens her mouth. And if you dare to challenge her, she stomps away, quivering with righteous indignation.

Why is she so submerged in "confirmation bias" that she rejects any discussion that might conflict with her embalmed views? I suspect her aggression is down to fear – she runs scared that debate would require her to think. Intellectually lazy, she has simply closed her mind. Her fixed views are water wings – without them, she's terrified she might drown.

Lots of people are like this. Sad really.

Rebel Women

7 September – Day 13: Sheppardine to Northwick

Some of those who have walked with us or generously provided accommodation have related tragic stories about the cruel treatment meted out to them by their children or in-laws. They are elderly and vulnerable, and in some cases, widows.

In two cases, the children are preventing their parents from seeing their grandchildren unless a substantial sum is paid. Of course, we have only heard one side of the story, but we do know the people – and we are convinced they are telling the horrid truth.

Costly Cull

In a short story somewhere, citizens are warned that, due to escalating costs, those over the age of 75 will be culled. The victims are instructed to attend a series of houses where they will be given a dry martini, a medal for past services and then a lethal injection!

This might be a little too close to the bone to be amusing because my spies tell me the Starmer government is poised to introduce legislation to allow assisted dying (and all the unintended consequences that will inevitably come with it). Here are some thoughts...

The change in laws will be irreversible and as the years go by –

as in the case of Canada – the scope of the permissions will inexorably widen.

Then, of course, not all members of the younger generation are kind. For example, some may bitterly resent seeing their parents' assets being wasted on care home fees – and assisted dying might present an opportunity to do something about that. Inevitably, in some families, intolerable pressure will be applied, and relationships will change fundamentally – and not for the better.

And if you think that government promises of cautionary barriers to protect the vulnerable will prove effective, well gosh – look at those rose-coloured pigs flying past my window.

Women, Know Your Limits!

When I last drove to Scotland, Jane was rude to me. I concede she had good reason. I was pondering the meaning of life (and as supporters will know, I have a beautiful and

sensitive mind), only to discover that instead of nearing Manchester, we were hurtling towards Bristol.

"You," she said, "are a freshly minted moron!"

Today, Jane is a confident and feisty woman with serious career achievements to her name. However, the fact she has turned out this way is not because she was primed to forge a career. Her brother's future prospects were taken seriously. He went to "good" schools, and thence to Cambridge and off to make a fortune in the city. But she was not offered the same chances.

When Jane was a child, no one said specifically, "Listen Sunshine, you don't have to trouble your pretty little head with learning how to earn your living because your destiny is to be number two to men." But, through a process of social osmosis, she picked up the thousands of negative messages floating around intended to destroy the average girl's ambition for independence. Many young women were persuaded not to go to university or seek jobs that were deemed "unladylike" – such as joining the police (I know of an actual case of this cruel sabotage in my own family).

You know that thing you've been talking about doing for ages? ... I've done it!



So, Jane was sent to a girls' school that pretended to provide education. There the pupils fluttered around with ghastly nicknames such as "Goonie" and "Dunce" (and there were twins called by their father "Thick" and "Thickest"!) Like many of her chums, Jane was hardly taught anything. She then went to a Swiss finishing school where the agenda was cooking and "how to get on in society".

The young women of Jane's generation ended up as cooks, chalet girls, secretaries, flower arrangers or kindergarten teachers (like one-O-level Princess Di), waiting for broad shoulders to rescue them. Some, teeming with ability and grit and blessed by forward-looking parents, couldn't be stopped by such nonsense, and rose high in the few careers then open to women. But the bulk of Jane's contemporaries had no proper training or confidence-building, so, if they didn't marry, or were dumped or widowed, they ended up unable to forge an independent life. And by then, the sweet bird of youth had flapped off, leaving them middle-aged, disconsolate and vulnerable.

Where did this misogyny come from? I believe St Paul is largely responsible. His message in 1 Timothy 2:11–12 is parodied by comedian Harry Enfield: "Women know your limits!" In these damaging verses, Paul claims that women should not be in leadership roles and that they should be submissive

to men. Because Eve fell for the wiles of the serpent in the Garden of Eden, they can only be redeemed by childbearing.

My vicar friends insist these verses should be read in conjunction with the many others that claim that women are loved by God and are equal to men, but this is sophistry. The verses are as clear as "Don't walk on the grass"! There's no ambiguity whatsoever, just wishful thinking.

Even today, our talented ordained daughter is unwelcome to preach in some churches because of these unfortunate verses. And they are why so many women, called by God over the years, have been blocked from ordination – and why the Catholic Church still justifies blocking them from leadership.

Former archbishop Donald Coggan proposed that when he reached heaven, he would ask Paul for an explanation. "Goodness me," he imagined Paul replying. "Did I actually write that?"

Yes, Paul, I fear you did – and the effect has been profoundly damaging, for these verses have echoed down the ages, allowing men to stymie the careers of generations of capable women.

Crazy Taxes

The government treats us like idiots.

Tuppence of tax here or there is not what the country needs. For a start, we should be treated as adults.

There's Rupert Mastermind ... A legend in the service, he managed to waste 500 million pounds of public money last year.



What the chancellors fiddle about with simply doesn't help as a political trick. Just look at a few features of our tax system that are holding up growth and productivity.

First are the crazy marginal rates of tax on earnings of £50,000 and above – when child benefit and personal allowances begin to taper, and “free” children's schemes are lost. Someone earning £99,999.00 with two children under three loses an immediate £20,000 when they earn a penny more! Many studies show how people deliberately cut their hours to avoid marginal rates of tax of 80 per cent or even higher. It makes no sense to earn between £100,000 and £145,000.

Then take the VAT system. If a coffee shop sells £84,000 of coffee, no VAT is payable. At £85,000, you must charge 20 per cent more on everything so, compared to your competitor next door, you're no longer competitive! That means tens of thousands of small businesses quite sensibly will do anything to stay under the VAT threshold. For example, they might be reluctant to recruit more staff or they might shut shop in February.

Then why not just scrap National Insurance? If employers didn't have to pay 13.5 per cent on wages, people would earn more.

If Tory chancellors have been hopeless, what can we expect from the new government?

All is Vanity

8 September – Day 14: Northwick to Stoke Gifford

Jane and I arrived in Stoke Gifford and were happily welcomed at St Michael's Church where our son is the vicar.

fourth time. He's an excellent driver and map reader, and a warm friend.

Finally, as Princess Anne once said, there is no such thing as bad weather in the UK, just inappropriate clothing. She is right!

Soldiering On

In 2017, I met a veteran in Bulawayo who, despite serving the UK and empire for all his military career, was living in near destitution. Dying of prostate cancer, he couldn't afford treatment, and he was subsisting on one meal a day. The services'

As I've already mentioned, ZANE supporters have warmly hosted us along the route... It would be inappropriate to name them individually, for I would soon run out of compliments, but bless them.

We have been spoiled by Richard, who has taxied us around for the

Come with us ... ZANE will never forget you.



charities were more or less skint – so what to do?

I asked General Lord Richards (David) whether he would assist if I set up a committee to raise funds. He agreed. I then persuaded former foreign secretary Sir Malcolm Rifkind to act as chair.

We had a stroke of fortune in that Penny Mordaunt was Secretary of State for DFID, and she agreed the department would fund the operation in partnership with the services' charities.

The result is that all of the 6,000 plus veterans across the Commonwealth now have at least two meals a day. In Zimbabwe, we have established a basic medical programme whereby veterans also have access to free medication for diabetes, heart complaints, nervous disorders and cancer scans.

Three cheers for Richards, Rifkind and Mordaunt!

Luxury Beliefs

The upper classes care a lot about status. Up until the 1980s, they could signal their social standing by owning expensive goods such as a Maserati. However, luxury cars are now more accessible, so proving innate superiority has become much harder.

A clever solution has been found, however – “luxury beliefs”. These are today’s new vanity plays, whose sole purpose is to boost the speaker’s reputation in the eyes of listeners.

Those who do this know they are insulated from the pernicious effects of the drivel they are touting.

So, when you hear someone supporting drug legalisation, open borders, defunding the police or permissive sexual norms, they are engaging in a status display. “We belong to the upper classes,” they are declaring – but they never face the social consequences of what they are promoting.

For example, if you hear someone bemoaning the effects of police “stop and search”, it’s a dead cert they don’t have to worry about their own child being struck with a zombie knife. Another will bad mouth capitalism whilst living on a fat state pension, and I know a young Harrovian who advocates the joys of communism – to be sure, he knows nothing of the reality of the gulags, and I don’t think he’s even read *Animal Farm*. All he’s doing is demonstrating his luxury belief. Then come the Scottish “hate crime laws”. There is no better example of the consequences of this nonsense, for it won’t be the “progressive” political classes who reap the consequences, but rather the poor souls existing on benefits in the slums of Edinburgh and Glasgow.

“Luxury beliefs” link naturally with “virtue signalling”. The expression of such views is not to fix a problem but rather to demonstrate how progressive the speaker is.



The most damaging luxury belief is the notion of sweeping away the very idea of the stable family. Socialist “experts” claim the traditional family is old hat and pretend that children are bound to thrive in all types of care. But this is rubbish – most mandarins and thinkers live in stable relationships, but those at the bottom of the ladder don’t and their families continue to deteriorate. In 2007, when we started the Oxford Community Emergency Foodbank,

families were usually a traditional unit. In 2024, it’s rare to see a child raised by two parents.

Those who believe smartphones and devices are the reason for the misery of the young should look instead at the two-plus generations of unmarried parenting. Today, divorce has been normalised and few couples are prepared to “hang on in there” for the sake of the children – the only thing that matters is one’s own happiness.

The result? We are seeing Zoomers in their twenties raised by a single parent – who were also raised by a single parent. The mandarins have snipped the golden thread of stability that links one generation to the next and are instead passing on chronic instability. It's hard to turn the clock back – and I doubt even Starmer knows where to look for the key.

Philip Larkin wrote:

*Man hands on misery to man.
It deepens like a coastal shelf.
Get out as early as you can,
And don't have any kids yourself.*

Leader of the Free World

The BBC's John Sopel wrote that it's a shame Americans speak English because otherwise we would understand that America is a foreign country.

It's difficult not to notice – despite all the other worries we face, such as the guy with the funny haircut and bombs in North Korea, Putin's ghastly war and the miseries in Gaza and Israel – that the leader of the free world, his finger poised on the nuclear button, has lost his intellectual edge. And another thing – people in the US don't seem outraged when the Donald announces the legal system has been rigged against him. Why? US judges are elected and have to please voters along party lines. Al Capone would have loved it.

How can the US, supposedly the greatest democracy in the world, pretend to be a role model to, say, Zimbabwe?

From Our Weaknesses...

9 September – The Day After

Sometimes, it's not a whole poem that gets me – a mere line can be enough.

I was reading "She Teaches Lear" by Iain Crichton Smith. It's not a poem that touches me particularly, but then the third line of the last verse smacked me right in the guts:

"From our weaknesses only are we kind."

Now there's a thought...

Booze, Bets and Sex

Let's unpack this. A friend is not a smoker, so when he sees someone in a cloud of smoke, although he says nothing – he's English, dammit! – he concludes the person is a moron and is predisposed to look down on him forever.

Then, the demon drink – not his problem! Just a bit of wine now and then, and rarely spirits. He used to share a flat with a buddy who got regularly "stoshered" – a great Scottish slang word – and who regularly lay on the floor, his mouth agape and smeared with vomit. Reasoning with him was wholly pointless – and in time, the poor sod pickled his liver and died in his fifties.

So, booze isn't my pal's problem, and he feels free to despise all drunks as morally weak. Nor is he a gambler,

so he has no sympathy for losers on either horses or tables. And he's as thin as a string of spaghetti! He could live on a diet of deep-fried Mars Bars, Big Macs and Hob Nobs without adding an ounce. So, of course, as soon as he sees a barrel of lard waddling towards him, his lips curl in horror at the self-indulgent slob!

Is he faultless? Well, I happen to know that sex is his torment. He told me once that fate appears to have chained him to a gibbering sex lunatic and he has difficulty keeping his flies up. So, when a close friend was caught "sleeping" – a ridiculous euphemism, for sleep's not the thing you do (so I'm told!) – with a hooker, he was hugely supportive. My friend understands that temptation only too well.

So, "from our weaknesses only are we kind". Now you know!

ALL our hosts were wonderful,
but it's good to be back home!



Of course I'm a gentleman,
I'm a ZANE supporter!



I am sure that most ZANE supporters are ladies and gentlemen, but perhaps one or two of you will recognise this more-or-less universal tendency to condemn others for sins that – by the grace of God – are not our own?

Pascal's on the Phone

French philosopher Blaise Pascal (1623–62) wrote, “All of humanity’s problems stem from man’s inability to sit quietly in a room alone”. Of course, he was making the point that without entertainment or distractions, humankind must confront the harsh realities of suffering, pain and death.

Enter the ultimate distraction: smartphones. They’re hugely

addictive because whenever the devices are checked, a stimulating substance called “dopamine” is generated, which affects emotions and behaviour. Of course, its effect is transitory and then users suffer from “Nomophobia”, or NO MOBILE PHONE PHOBIA. This fear of being without is partly responsible, we now know, for loss of self-esteem and acute depression. And it’s total catnip for the bottom line of the smartphone industry.

Glassy eyed phone addicts stagger down the road, and I expect to collide with one anytime soon. And then at my gym, the cardio machines are strewn with teenagers barely exercising and squinting vacantly at their devices.

You'd like to meet
my friends, Mum?
I've got 2,000 of them!



How can this new generation, with a paper-thin tolerance of boredom, produce poets, authors, playwrights, thinkers, actors or philosophers? Instead, it would seem their creative juices are draining into the bottomless fog of Facebook, TikTok, Instagram and X.

The Last Miaow

The walk is over... and for regular readers, it should come as no surprise that the last word belongs to our cat, Kariba.

“So, you’re home again – and you expect a warm welcome from me?

Let me tell you straight – I’m being taken for granted. I’m a home-loving cat and I find your gallivanting about disturbing to say the least. It upsets my delicate constitution.

Then there’s the small matter of unwelcome visitors. Without any consideration for my feelings, you allow your children’s ghastly dogs to chase me unmercifully, so I’m obliged to hide behind the boiler.

Just so you know, I have friends in other houses who tell me I’d be most welcome if my position were to become intolerable. I have to say, the issue is now borderline.

You can’t say you haven’t been warned...”

So, you're home again –
and you expect a warm
welcome from me?



My Side of the Story

by Jane Benyon

As usual, I kept a journal of our walk, and so here is my account of our adventures. Tom, of course, has his own unique take on things, but my focus is on the landscapes, the sights and the local characters we encountered. I hope this gives you a flavour of the charm of this lovely area – and perhaps you will be encouraged to explore it for yourself.

Day 1:

Upper Arley to Stourport-on-Severn

As Tom is now over 80 and I am fast approaching that age, we once again needed to find a walk that was reasonably flat. Our driver, Richard – who was born in Shropshire – suggested the Severn Way.

At 220 miles long, the Severn is the longest river in Britain. Although a large part of it is in Wales – which being hilly was out of the question for us – further south into Shropshire, it becomes a wide, meandering waterway. Our walk began at Upper Arley, on the border of Shropshire and Worcestershire.

Upper Arley, like many towns in this area, originated due to coal mining and stone quarrying in the Middle Ages. Much of the stone used for the building of Worcester Cathedral was transported down the river from here.

We crossed the river over a metal

footbridge that had replaced a nineteenth-century bridge in 2009. I was intrigued by the countless padlocks attached to its latticed sides, all with personal love messages. Apparently, these “love locks” are very popular. I’ve never come across them before – rather strange!



Victoria Bridge

Making our way along the east side of the river, we passed through woodland at the edge of the ancient Wyre Forest. Dating back to Roman times, the area is believed to have once formed a vast, continuous forest that was used as a royal hunting ground. Then we walked under the

Victoria railway bridge, built in 1861 by John Fowler (the engineer who designed London’s first underground railway) – his name is emblazoned on its side. We had the thrill of seeing a beautifully restored steam passenger train cross the bridge – the evocative smell and sound of steam travel brought back memories of childhood. The line is now used by the Severn Valley Railway.

The river here is wide and slow-moving and can be prone to flooding – as evidenced by the path’s erosion in places. We chatted to a charming man outside his tiny, off-grid cottage. He pays £100 rent a year for the privilege and seemed extremely happy with his lot.

We stopped for lunch along the waterfront in Bewdley, a beautiful town that was bustling with visitors due to the bank holiday. In the eighteenth century, Bewdley became an important trading centre for the Midlands, with cargo coming up from Bristol. Fine Georgian houses line the narrow, medieval streets of the old town.

Following our meal, we enjoyed a pleasant walk to Stourport, passing the local reservoir and a large park hosting a funfair. The town, which grew up around the point where the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal meets the Severn, became the busiest inland port in the Midlands, after Birmingham. By 1780, it had rapidly expanded into a thriving manufacturing hub.

Day 2

Stourport-on-Severn to Grimley

We spent a lovely evening in Worcester with ZANE supporters. They kindly accommodated us in 2013, when we walked from Holyhead to Oxford, and then again in 2015, when we walked from Ambleside to Oxford – and here we were again!

It was another perfect day for walking, dry and slightly overcast. After meeting our friends of yesterday, we left the marina at Stourport. It was teeming with motor pleasure boats – though we didn’t see any on the river yesterday, despite the bank holiday.

We picked up the Severn Way, just past the marina. This stretch rather reminded us of walking through a mango swamp in Africa with lots of standing water, dead and dying trees, and lush vegetation. This last was mainly due to the intruder Himalayan balsam, which has pretty pink flowers – and we saw another smaller version with orange flowers.

We were somewhat disquieted by the state of the paths, which were covered with fallen branches. This made progress difficult and did not bode well for the rest of the walk. However, the path cleared further along and we began to speed up, a steep wooded cliff to our left and the river far below us.



Holt Fleet Bridge

The woodland was soon left behind and we rejoined the river. After passing Lincomb Lock, we began to see a number of barges chugging along but no pleasure boats as yet. Caravan parks are popular here and we made our way through several, some of them in a very neglected state with lots of empty mobile homes. We came across one inhabited home with tiny goats in a fenced area and chickens strutting around.

After crossing Holt Fleet Bridge, we lunched at the large Holt Fleet Inn. A fortune has recently been spent on its numerous eating facilities, both outside and inside.

Here the Severn Way leaves the river, and we made our way across farming

country to the small hamlet of Holt. It's a peaceful and charming place with a lovely eighteenth-century manor house built around a much older tower – all that remains of Holt Castle. Opposite, is a lovely red stone Norman church.

As we left Holt, the path took us through a retail park selling every size of caravan and mobile home you could imagine. It seemed rather incongruous in this rural area! Then we crossed more farmland, including a field of spring onions being hand-harvested by a team of pickers.

We reached the unfortunately named but pretty village of Grimes, and then it was back to the river and our stopping place at the Camp House Inn – licensed by Cromwell after

the Battle of Worcester in 1651. According to the publican, the pub gets flooded every winter, something that happened three times in 2023/24. After a welcome drink, we were picked up by our hosts for the night.

Day 3

Grimley to Clifton

It was another fine morning, and we were confident of making good progress. The publican had assured us the route ahead was clear, but only an hour after setting off, we had to contend with a broken footbridge – luckily without too much difficulty. Then a bit further on, I received a call from Richard who had investigated a footpath closure sign at the Worcester end of the path and discovered that a metal barrier was blocking access.

We decided to retrace our steps along a farm track, which eventually brought us to the main road. It was annoying that the diversion was well signed at one end but not at all at the other. The upkeep of the Severn Way appears to be excellent in some areas but dire in others!

Back on the right route, we made good progress into Worcester, crossing the river into the town centre over a comparatively new footbridge. We met up with an old friend at the Cathedral Café and afterwards paid a short visit to the cathedral, which was a lovely experience.

We enjoyed an easy walk along the riverfront, admiring the beautifully kept gardens and houses set well back from potential flooding. Many of them had expensive riverboats moored on the bank below. We passed a double lock geared for larger boats at Worcester port but saw no substantial boats.

We were soon out of town, initially on well-maintained paths. The Severn Way signage then directed us down rather alarming wooden steps into a wooded area. The path disappeared and we had to negotiate a fallen tree over a steep ravine, Moses showing us how to do this with ease – though he had the benefit of four legs! We were proud of ourselves for managing without too much difficulty, but curious as to why the signage was so inaccurate.



Worcester Cathedral

Back on the right path, we passed a yacht club where a delightful man told us how he'd started an environmental charity in Worcester. Apparently, he's constantly at war with the local authority about the state of the footpaths and promised to investigate the signage where we encountered our difficulty.

The last hour along the river was somewhat monotonous with visibility blocked by endless Himalayan balsam. I think we were all tired following the day's various hiccups and were pleased to be met by our hosts at Oak Farm – where we'll be staying for the next two days.

Day 4

Clifton to Upton upon Severn

Moses showed no desire to walk today – reluctantly getting out of the car, he held up his front paw, insisting he had a problem. Since we'd be walking along a road, we decided to leave him with Richard, who would bring him to us if he recovered.

After leaving Oak Farm, our route took us not back to the river path (which in this section takes a wide loop), but onto the road to Clifton and the Croome Estate. Croome House is now owned by the National Trust, though the land is managed by various tenant farmers.

We passed several lakes formed from gravel pits. They were teeming with waterfowl, and numerous horses

grazed in the area. It all seemed very chaotic – many of the metal gates were tied up with binder twine and fences were secured by wooden boards, which made access difficult despite it being a prescribed footpath. Long strips of the land were sparsely planted with sunflowers that appeared to be underplanted with barley – possibly last year's crop.

After taking a wrong route, we were told quite firmly by the owner of a large white Palladian house to retrace our steps. He had spied us while working on his roof!

With our tails between our legs, we turned back. Apparently, this section of the Severn Way has been closed for several years, though the signs are anything but clear. Continuing to the village of Severn Stoke, we stopped for lunch with our hosts – and then were joined by our hostess for the final stretch of the walk.

After negotiating a detour along the A38, we returned to the river across pleasant farmland. Near Upton on Severn, we came across several working gravel pits and watched the diggers at work. Gravel and sand were scooped out of the pits, and then placed in shutes into barges, to be transported downriver. It was interesting to see how close the boats' plimsoll lines were to the water when full!

At Upton upon Severn, we crossed the river. The bridge in this pretty, medieval town was previously destroyed during the Civil War Battle

of Upton in 1651, as was the nearby church – only the tower is still standing.

Then it was back to our very comfortable accommodation. The walk was shorter today, but it was good to spend a relaxed afternoon in our hosts' lovely home.

Day 5

Upton upon Severn to Tewkesbury

Having made our way back to Upton, we set out along the west side of the river. It was an incredibly beautiful morning with not a cloud in the sky or any wind. We were glad of the early start as the weather was forecast to be very hot.

Our route took us along the river, which is wider and slower moving on this stretch. The vast floodplains

are usually flooded in the winter – as are many of the houses nearby! This particular area is a conservation zone, noted for its spring wildflowers, which are not cut until late July. We made good progress as the path was open and the gates and stiles in good condition.

We found ourselves at the place where the sand and gravel we saw being quarried yesterday is separated and distributed. A loaded barge arrived and we watched as a large crane moved the mixture into a hopper, which was then taken to the top of the hill. It seemed to be a quick and professional process.

A couple of large fields had cows and calves in them, meaning we had to give them a wide berth – but all was well. We saw the tower of Tewkesbury Abbey in the distance and were soon crossing a bridge



and walking towards this beautiful, peaceful place. We had some lunch and a look around the abbey – and then we headed for home and our day off. Tomorrow we will enjoy the company of our children and grandchildren, who are meeting up this weekend – all 21 of them!

Day 7

Tewkesbury to Sandhurst

Our grand family get-together, at our daughter's house in Oxford, was a lovely celebration and a wonderful day off.

After arriving back at Tewkesbury Abbey this morning, we made our way through the rest of the town and back down to the river. We passed footpath signs to the "Battle Trail", which leads to the site of the Battle of Tewkesbury. This is where, in 1471, Edward IV defeated the Lancasters, a famous battle during the Wars of the Roses.

Passing Cheltenham College Boat House, we were intrigued to see a sign stating, "No fishing for elvers without a license". I had never heard of them, but apparently, these small Severn eels are a great culinary delicacy with many exported to Japan.



Odda's Chapel

We had an easy start to the day, passing through more floodplains on the east side of the river. Our route took us past the village of Deerhurst with its huge Saxon Church, St Mary's. It is considered to be one of the finest complete buildings in England to have survived from before the Norman Conquest, and parts of the church may date back to the early ninth century.

Five hundred yards further along, we visited Odda's Chapel, another exceptional Saxon church built by Earl Odda to commemorate his brother Aelfric, who died in 1053. For many centuries, the chapel was lost inside a rambling Tudor farmhouse known as Abbots Court – the nave had been made into a kitchen, the chancel a bedroom. Its significance was realised in 1865, and in 1965, the chapel was disentangled from the house, leaving a very special space to visit.

We made our way through a wooded area that would be extremely treacherous in wet weather – steps up and down the path were in poor condition due to rotting wood. Tom tripped over a root and took a tumble – but all was well.

Further on, we passed to the left of Apperley Court – many of the wooden holiday homes are built on very high stilts to guard against flooding. Then crossing under a road bridge, we encountered the publican of the local pub walking his tiny Shetland pony. He showed us its many tricks with pride.

Having lunched outside at the Red Lion Inn, we completed the day without further incident – except for having to negotiate our way around a herd of young cattle and one lone sheep.

Day 8

Sandhurst to Weir Green

Moses and I began the day's walking on our own as Tom had gone into Gloucester to shop for something.

All started well, and I even listened to Beethoven on my AirPods as we made good progress along a well-maintained path. But then I came to a field of cattle, all standing around the exit gate at the far end. As I was alone with a dog, I decided not to take any chances, and hurried through a gate into the field above. Sure enough, the cows were young, and they all charged over, just as I

secured the gate and crossed a bridge over a brook. I now had a dilemma as I needed to return to the path but had to get back over the brook. There were more young cattle in the next field too, equally interested in Moses and me. All the adjoining metal field gates were locked, and I had to persuade a reluctant Moses to crawl under them.

Eventually, I had to abandon the idea of returning to the path and managed to get onto a road and walk back to the Severn Way. Tom had joined me by now, but the footpath was totally inaccessible and we had to remain on the road as we approached Gloucester.

There was something rather depressing about our walk into the city, which has a run-down feel about it. We passed the remains of the twelfth-century Llanthony Secunda Priory, situated on the edge of a busy main road. By the sixteenth century, this was one of the largest and richest priories in the country, owning 97 churches and 57 well-appointed manor houses between Bedford and the west coast.

We walked through the docks, which have recently been redeveloped with shops and hotels on the waterfront. However, according to last night's host, this hasn't really attracted visitors yet.

With difficulty, we located the Severn Way footpath, picked up at the back of a small industrial estate on the city outskirts. The path proved to be very



overgrown, with long, tusky grass that made walking difficult.

For the next hour and a half, the track took us along a featureless route, with the river to the right hidden by willows and a bank on our left. The only remarkable thing was the metal bins lining the bank – some were dustbin-sized, others bigger with what looked like electric switchboards beside them. At one point, two white vans appeared over the bank with “National Grid” on their sides. Neither Tom nor I had a clue what they were doing, and the drivers were too far away to ask.

After a long and tiring trudge, Richard was able to meet us with a late picnic. We ate in the car before completing another one and a half miles along a more open track to reach Stonebench.

This has proved to be our least enjoyable day so far.

Day 9

Weir Green to Upper Framilode

The morning was overcast with what the Scots would call a fine mizzle. We were joined today by our host from two nights ago. After picking him up from his home, we set off along the road and were soon hit by a strong whiff of sewage from the river.

We had been told that the Severn is tidal in this area, and sure enough, we experienced the change that occurs when the tide starts to come in. On a high tide, the Severn Bore, a large wave that has been known to reach 9.2 feet in height, moves up the estuary through the narrow stretch of the river at this point. Surfing the wave is a favourite pastime for many, though today’s tide was not like that. All the same, I did see a small wave arriving – and suddenly, the river was running fast upstream, bringing with it logs and other debris. It was quite exciting to see.

We met a chap moving stones with his digger. He told us he has lived in the area all his life, and he and his mates used to ride the Severn Bore long before it became popular. He also confirmed, when we mentioned the unpleasant smell, that the water board in Gloucester is continuously pumping sewage into the river, especially at times of heavy rain – and he would certainly never swim in it now.

The walk along the river was very pleasant – due to flooding, a path has

been built along the top of the bank. This was much more impressive farming country, with healthy crops of maize, harvested cereals and dairy cows. Richard spoke to a farmer and learnt that his dairy farm has a self-milking parlour. All the cows wear special collars, allowing them to get milked when it suits them, while their individual yields are monitored electronically. Apparently, the yield is higher this way.

The incoming tide caused a noticeable rise in the river level. We came across a tiny, boarded-up cottage with a flat piece of ground in front of it. An old wooden notice on the house read, “This is private property. Anyone playing cricket or football will be prosecuted by order of the Ham Committee.” This was miles from any village, and I wondered what the Ham Committee was, what they did and why they were so against ball games!



Gradually, the tide began to turn and the river to flow south again. It grew far wider, becoming the Severn Estuary. At low tide, it’s covered with sandbanks that teem with birds, mainly black-backed gulls. We stopped at a very rural pub on the river, largely frequented by the local farming community.

Following lunch, we had a delightful walk along the raised bank by the river. We passed several small holdings with ponies, donkeys and small spotted sheep all separated from each other in little fields – our access was over well-built stiles. The weather had lifted and the light over the estuary was stunning. Our walk ended at Upper Framilode.

Day 10

Upper Framilode to Fretherne

We arrived back at Upper Framilode just as the tide was turning again. We could clearly see the Severn Bore

coming up the estuary, although the wave was not as spectacular as it can be at certain times of the year. All the sandbanks had disappeared.

Today’s route, around the Arlington Peninsula, was eight and a half miles long, and ended just three quarters of a mile from where we started. The path, mainly on

flood banks, was well maintained throughout.

During the day, we witnessed the change in the estuary from deep and fast-moving, to swirling mudflats as the tide went out again and the birds returned. On the west side, we could see into the Forest of Dean, and ahead, as the river curved to the right, were the Cotswolds stretching back to our home in Oxfordshire.

The houses of Newnham, on the west bank of the river, were only a mile away. However, since there's no river crossing between Gloucester and the old Severn Bridge in Bristol, visiting your neighbours would necessitate a road trip of at least 50 miles!

We reached The Old Passage Inn, which was closed and looked as if it's undergoing a complete renovation – though whether it will remain a pub is unclear.

In prehistoric times, Old Passage was a crossing connecting the Arlington Peninsula with the iron mills in the Forest of Dean. The Romans are thought to have crossed here too, with some accounts suggesting they did so on the backs of elephants. Cattle drovers favoured this crossing, and a ferry operated here from 1809 until after the Second World War.

We picnicked in the porch of Arlington's parish church. Poor Tom had a very bad back, so Richard finished the walk with me, and Tom met us at Fretherne with the car.

Day 11

Fretherne to Sharpness

A good friend and his golden Labrador, Tattie-Bogle – after the Scots name for a scarecrow – joined us today.

Instead of taking the river path, we followed the path along the Gloucester and Sharpness Canal. The canal here is much wider than average, built to navigate large freight around the tidal Severn with its dangerous mudflats. We didn't pass any locks along this stretch, and all the bridges have a swing system that is operated either manually or electronically to allow tall boats to pass through.

It began to rain in earnest, and we must have looked a pretty bedraggled group when we stopped for lunch at a Slimbridge pub, accompanied by two dripping dogs. This was not helped by Tattie jumping into the canal and then having to be dragged out by her collar up the concrete sides!

We were joined for some of the afternoon by tonight's host. Being so close to the wildfowl sanctuary at Slimbridge, I hoped we might see some interesting birds. However, I was told that it's still too early for the migratory season, when large flocks fly in for the winter.

The rain eased up in the afternoon and we had a pleasant walk along the canal to Purton. The river and the canal are only a few hundred yards apart along this stretch, and at the beginning of the twentieth



century, there were concerns that river erosion would damage the sides of the canal. From 1909 until 1963, the riverbank was reinforced by beaching old, redundant boats – now known as Purton Ships Graveyard. There are around 50 wrecks, forming an effective barrier against the tidal river. All their names and tonnage are on a sign by the canal.

A little further along, we passed under two huge stone pillars. This is all that remains of the 1879 railway bridge that spanned the three quarters of a mile across the river, allowing coal to be brought to Sharpness. On a foggy night in 1960, two ships – carrying 395 tons of black oil and 354 tons of petroleum respectively – collided with the bridge. The resulting explosion brought down two spans of the bridge and killed five crew members. The bridge was never rebuilt due to the cost.

We reached Sharpness, where the canal terminates, and ships can rejoin the river through a series of locks. At that moment, there was a violent thunderstorm, and we got soaked to the skin as we walked through the docks to the car. Richard was prevented from getting any closer to us due to traffic bollards. Our poor host had to contend with our soaking clothes when we arrived back at her home in Slimbridge!

Day 12

Sharpness to Shepperdine

We awoke to the sound of thunder and more pouring rain. Having only just managed to get our clothes sufficiently dry to wear again today, we were reluctant to set off early.

Our son-in-law John, who was joining us from Oxford, rang to say he'd be late, so that suited us well.



Son-in-law John joined us for the day

Our hostess decided to join us at the last minute, which was lovely.

The rain finally stopped, leaving a misty and rather muggy morning with poor visibility. The tide was still up when we arrived on the well-built embankment with tidal defences.

We were quite surprised at how far the water comes in, evidenced by the flattened sea grass below us.

The path deviated around a number of tidal ponds and the now disused Berkeley nuclear power station – which has cleverly been turned into a successful technical college. Back at the water's edge, the high-walled embankment continued, and we saw the massive sandbanks had reappeared, once again teeming with birds. Sadly, the low visibility and my not-very-good binoculars meant I was unable to identify many of them, although the distinctive flight of two herons was easy to spot. They always remind me of prehistoric creatures!

Richard picked us up along the way and drove us back to Berkeley for lunch. It's a pretty town, dominated by the fourteenth-century Berkeley Castle, which is still home to the Berkeley family.

Our afternoon walk along the embankment was much the same. We passed several warning devices, the modern substitutes for lighthouses, as this must be a very treacherous part of the estuary. In one field, we encountered five inquisitive llamas who came over to take a good look at us.

At Oldbury Power Station, we could see the old Severn Bridge in the distance and knew we were nearing the end of our walk. Here, we turned left through farmland, recently sprayed with manure. We saw huge battery chicken houses, windowless and so well-sealed that you could not even hear the chickens inside – poor things!

We returned to Berkeley, where we are staying for the next two nights.

Day 13

Shepperdine to Northwick

After a lovely supper party, we enjoyed a good night's sleep. This morning, we drove back to the estuary, which was still looking a bit hazy but at least it was dry.

We met a twitcher, who was very excited to have spotted two ospreys.

They are rare in this area, though he informed us he's seen them on other occasions. As the tide was coming in and the sandbanks were again disappearing, he told us he was off home.

The embankment continued to make walking easy. We made our way around the comparatively new Oldbury Nuclear Power Plant, which replaced the old one we saw yesterday. It's a vast place with a slightly sinister feel – we walked past high-security fences with warning signs, including the prohibition of flying drones near the site. There didn't appear to be anyone around.

Further along, we were forced to take a detour inland. We walked around a sailing club, full of sailing boats of all sizes. Our prescribed path should have taken us into the village of Pullens Green and back down the other side. However, we were told by a local couple that we could take a shortcut by passing through the sluice gate. Richard picked us up a couple of miles further on as there was nowhere to have lunch nearby.

After lunch, we set off towards the old Severn Bridge that crosses over to Wales. The map indicated we could get around the bridge by keeping to the shoreline and then going over a footbridge. However, the shoreline was clearly not navigable at high tide, and there was a steep cliff to our left, so we retraced our steps and walked up an extremely steep hill. There were no signs at the bottom to tell us

this was the right route, so we were very pleased to find a gate at the top!

We crossed over the motorway. As we were reluctant to walk down the very busy A403 (with its very narrow footpath) to rejoin our path, we had to reroute ourselves through the village of Old Passage. As it turned out, this was the right decision as that part of the footpath had been closed.

Back on the embankment, we made good progress, leaving the river to meet up with Richard at Northwick. This is where we bade farewell to the Severn as we'll be taking a rather different route tomorrow.

Day 14

Northwick to Stoke Gifford

We decided at the outset that instead of completing the Severn Way and finishing at the quayside in Bristol, we would deviate from the route and end the walk at our son's church in Stoke Gifford.

As we intended to meet him and his family for lunch, we made an early start so we could complete our eight miles in the morning. Ignoring the prescribed route signs, we headed down ordinary footpaths, which can be hazardous depending on their upkeep. We were pleasantly surprised, though, as most of our route into Bristol was along bridleways – and although they were very wet from last night's heavy rain, progress was easy.



At the top of the track, a footbridge took us over the M5, and then we were in Bristol proper. We walked through a large and modern commercial estate called Aztec West, full of offices belonging to multinational companies.

For the next hour and a half, we walked through suburban Bristol, arriving at the church a bit later than planned. We received a very warm welcome from our family, who had made a wonderful banner to greet us.

It's been a good trip and we're pleased to have completed the route – and thrilled we can still do these walks for ZANE.

We passed over the M4 and then walked alongside it for some time, which was an extremely noisy experience! There were very deep culverts beside the tracks, full of water and well maintained. Much of our route ran parallel with a busy railway line, which then disappeared into a tunnel while we were faced with a steep wooded hill. Tom and I have been pleased to find we can still do hills, provided we take it slow and steady – and look down at our feet so as not to be put off!



“ZANE is a brilliant charity working in the failed state of Zimbabwe, caring for the old and lonely, providing medical treatment and supporting communities. You can choose where your money goes.”

Dame Prue Leith DBE DL
Cookery writer and restaurateur



“I have supported ZANE for many years as they do excellent work amongst the vulnerable in Zimbabwe.”

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“ZANE is really in touch with the people it assists. ZANE's work is wonderfully moving . . .”

John Humphrys
Author, journalist, and radio and TV presenter



“ ZANE is a wonderful charity. [ZANE] is about service and it's about love . . . What is special is that ZANE forms relationships with everyone it helps.

The Rt Hon the Lord Paul Boateng

Former UK High Commissioner to South Africa
and Labour cabinet minister under Tony Blair

”



“ I much admire ZANE's valuable work amongst the poorest of the poor in Zimbabwe, particularly amongst pensioners and for its clubfoot programme.

Rt Hon Andrew Mitchell MP

Former Minister of State for
Development and Africa

”



“ I am deeply impressed with the work of ZANE; one of those charities that make a little money go a long way.

Baroness Royall of Blaisdon

Principal of Somerville College, Oxford
Former Labour leader of the House of Lords

”

“Without ZANE’s help, I would not be alive.”

Eighty-four-year-old Mabel* is a widow. For more than 50 years, she was a primary school teacher in Bulawayo, working in both government and private schools. Just a few months after she retired, her pension and savings were wiped out by hyper-inflation and her retirement plans were left in tatters. Mabel found part-time work in a local government school, and though woefully underpaid, she just about managed to survive.



Seven years ago, poor health forced Mabel to stop working altogether. She sold her house and moved into a small cottage in a retirement complex where she led a frugal life. Earlier this year, however, the proceeds of her house sale ran out and Mabel was left destitute. Not knowing where to turn, she faced a stark choice between buying food or buying essential diabetes medication.

On a visit to the pharmacy, Mabel discovered the price of her medication had once again risen. Realising she could no longer cover the cost, she broke down in tears – and was mercifully referred to ZANE. For weeks, Mabel had been eating little more than oats and the avocados that grew on her neighbour’s tree, and she was weak with dangerously low blood sugar.

Thanks to the kindness and generosity of our supporters, ZANE is now assisting Mabel with her rent, medication and a regular food parcel.

“I didn’t have enough food and could no longer afford the medicine for acute diabetes. I was hungry and dying alone. Without ZANE’s help, I would not be alive. Thank you for helping me. I will never forget your kindness. I thank God every day for ZANE’s wonderful workers and generous donors.”

** Names and images have been changed on grounds of security.*

Reasons to support ZANE

1. We provide aid, comfort and support to 2,100 impoverished pensioners with nowhere else to turn. Only those genuinely in need of assistance receive it.
2. We invite you to choose which area of ZANE's work you wish to support.
3. We were the Telegraph Group Overseas Charity of the year.
4. We look after around 465 aged and frail veterans and their widows. These people fought for the Crown in WW2, Malaya, Korea and Aden. Without ZANE, they would be living with insufficient food and no healthcare.
5. We organise education programmes in a high-density area, assisting women and children living in extreme poverty.
6. We set up the first clubfoot correction programme in Zimbabwe. Fifteen treatment centres have been established and over 5,900 children have received treatment to date.
7. We run a unique medical programme, providing basic medication to pensioners (including war veterans and their widows) for the treatment of conditions such as hypertension, diabetes and prostate issues.
8. We ensure your donations are subject to rigorous audit and ZANE is proud that since its foundation it has never lost money to collapsed banks, middlemen or corruption.
9. We asked an independent consultancy to review ZANE and the report stated:
"The charity thrives on its responsiveness, flexibility and lack of bureaucracy. Operationally, ZANE is frugal, focused and effective in delivering aid to the needy."

If you want to save a life, then please support ZANE



“ZANE's work in Zimbabwe provides an essential lifeline of support for those who cannot help themselves. It is a wonderful charity and the money goes where it's needed.

Lord Hastings of Scarisbrick CBE

Chairman, ZANE Council of Reference
Vice-President of Unicef

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Reference (for office use only)

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