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Start..

I grew up in Wigan, Lancashire, at the height of Beatlemania. At school, whenever The Beatles released a new single, we would compete to see who would be first to learn the lyrics of their latest number one. The winners became the Fab Four for a brief moment and would perform on the steps that led into the classroom. I played air guitar in the Pretend Beatles. We'd shake our heads like the real Beatles did and the girls would scream hysterically.

I fell in love with popular music in those days.

In 1965 I went to see a Rolling Stones live show at the ABC cinema. I saw them, but could not hear. There were no PA systems as we know them today, just a vocal set up for public address. The music came out of the band's amplifiers (professionally known as "backline"). These were small practise amps placed at the back of the stage. There were no mics on the drums.

Consequently, the music was drowned out by the screams of the audience.

I heard the first three notes of "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction" and it was then swamped by the high pitched sound of hysteria. It was mostly girls doing the screaming, but plenty of boys squealed too. They created a loud shrill noise that was like standing next to an airplane jet engine. Not that I have ever stood next to a revving jet engine but I suspect that is what it would sound like. Kids swooned and fainted and I guess the girls probably wet themselves with the excitement of it all.

Shortly after this life changing event, The Beatles released "Paperback Writer". It was a dirty story of a dirty man who needs a job, but wants to be a paperback writer. He's so desperate for this to happen that he even suggests that, "if you really like it you can have the rights. It could make a million for you overnight". It was a different world then, I suppose. Money was not his God.

When I was very young I wanted to be a footballer. When I realised that wasn't going to happen, I wanted to be in a band like Jimi Hendrix. I never did anything practical to achieve this, such as learning how to play a guitar, or anything like that. I did take up DJ-ing when I was fifteen, but back then I was definitely a room-emptier - aka a turntable fascist - and I didn't get any invitations to play at weddings, parties, or funerals.

I did write a lot; short pieces, essays and other materials I needed to pass exams. The longest piece I ever wrote was the thesis for my degree. Sometimes I did dream of becoming a writer. That came partially from living in Wigan and its association with George Orwell. I passed Wigan Pier every week, my school's sports fields were just down the road from that world famous landmark.

Orwell stayed in digs in Darlington Street when he was in Wigan. That was the street where my grandad worked in an engineering factory. Later, when I moved to London, I lived in Highbury and Islington and in Ladbroke Grove. Both of these locations had blue plaque memorials to the times when George Orwell lived there. It was a kind of literary haunting.

Writing a book was a recurring theme in my family. My father had ambitions to do it. He wrote reams every day and he did actually get a book published. It was a scholarly tome about how to solve the food crisis in Africa. I found it on Amazon many years later, for sale for £1.

So no valuable copyright to inherit there, then.

I liked to write about popular music. I studied Politics and Sociology at university and one module looked at the social significance of Bob Dylan's lyrics. This was nirvana for me. I passed that part of my degree with highest honours. Bob Dylan once said that everyone should try writing a book, because unless you try, you never know what will happen.

The crunch with my writing came many years later. 1994 in fact.

My life had reached a cross roads. That year, I turned forty and got fired from my job, which I had always been assured was a "job for life". At that point in time, the thought of working the 9 to 5 treadmill filled me with horror. I thought I was pretty much unemployable. I had some savings so I decided that this was the moment when I would write the novel. I was tempted just then to write "the great novel" rather than just "novel", but it is not for me to say whether or not it is great.

Its not what I wrote either, I don't consider my effort to be an English language classic in the "Animal Farm" or "Wuthering Heights" sense of the term. That was never my ambition. I wanted to write pulp fiction. I had spent a lot of time on the road touring with bands and I wanted to write the sort of book someone on the road might read to entertain themselves on those long boring drives to the next sound check. I was a huge fan of the movie "Spinal Tap", that was one of the VHS tapes we watched ad infinitum on the tour bus. I had also read Irvine Welsh's debut novel, "Trainspotting", which was a new release back then. I thought that book was incredible. I thought it WAS a modern classic that would one day be shelved in Waterstones next to Orwell and Dickens. It occurred to me that if I could marry those two themes, the insane idiocy of life on the road, with the excess hedonism of "Trainspotting", I might achieve the pulp fiction I was aiming for.

So that is what I tried to do.

During the 1980's I did a lot of socialising in London's Photographer's Gallery. My wife, Yvonne, worked there as the accountant and we used to go to all of the launch parties for their latest exhibitions. I got to know several famous photographers really well. Bert Hardy became a drinking chum at those openings and Yvonne and I were big fans (and owners) of (some of) the works of Calum Colvin. He is a brilliant artist who works across several mediums. He'll take a room and turn it into a three dimensional painting of a face, or of two people kissing, then he'll photograph the results, creating two dimensional pictures of three dimensional images. He was, essentially, experimenting with dimensions.

Later on I became a fan of the work of Peter Mitchell. He is from Manchester.

In the 1970's he worked as a lorry driver out of Leeds and he photographed the cities of Yorkshire; Leeds mostly, but also Sheffield and other places. He captured the way these vast conurbations decayed at the end of the industrial revolution. They are brilliant pictures, but what I liked most was the way he first presented his images. They were originally exhibited in a show called "A New Refutation of the Viking 4 Space Mission". The concept was that an alien had landed from Mars and was wandering around Leeds and South Yorkshire, surprised and puzzled by what they saw.

I really liked this idea and borrowed it for my novel, which is presented as unscrambled messages taken from a number of floppy discs discovered in a cave in Derbyshire, where they had been left by aliens. The cave really does exist and I was able to get a photo of the crack in the rock formation that leads to the entrance of the cave included in the novel.

I also liked the idea of bands who invented alternative personas and fake bands in order to create a space where their creativity could flourish. The Beatles became Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Heart's Club Band. David Bowie became Ziggy Stardust, The Thin White Duke and Aladdin Sane; music producers often used various personas for various styles of music production. Its an old trick that works. So I figured that I could invent alternative personas for some of the bands I had been involved with and that would give me the latitude I needed to write my book.

I had a name for the main character. Harry Viderci. My great friend and mentor Brian Taylor gave me that when I told him I was planning to write a novel based on my experiences. Harry Viderci (arrividerci in Italian = goodbye). I thought that name was brilliant and it set me off on a character naming trail that only really ended when I ran out of time and the manuscript was finally sent off for publication.

I found that once I started writing the original version of my novel, it came relatively easily. On reflection I was lucky that I did have enough financial buffer to spend a year locked away doing nothing but type. That was fine; the financial problems came later. I had the structure, the chapter titles and the stories, so initially it was a case of sitting down and typing it all up.

My step father was an unsung war hero, like many people of his generation. He was also incredibly modest, as most war heroes are. When I asked him the standard, "what did you do in the war?" question, he'd say that he had spent time in the fire brigade putting a few fires out.

What that actually meant was that he was stationed in Sheffield and he fought the Sheffield Blitz. There is a photograph in one of the city centre pubs of the Sheffield Blitz. It captures the sight of these massive buildings burning in raging torrents and there's one tiny man with a hose trying to put the fires out. I always think "that's him" when I see that photo. That's him putting a few fires out.

When that was over they sent him to Burma (now known as Myanmar)

where he drove a tank transporter. He was sent on a mission impossible, transporting a load of tanks from what was then called Rangoon (Yangon) to Mandalay, or somewhere in that area, hundreds of miles to the north. That sounds fairly simple, only back then, 1941/42, World War Two was raging and Myanmar was mostly jungle.

There was no road for moving tanks on, so my step father and his crew had to build that as they went along. They hacked their way through the jungle, moving the tank transporter forward a few yards at a time, with Japanese snipers pinging bullets at them from out of the undergrowth. A lot of people thought they'd never make it, but they didn't know how tough and stubborn my step dad and his crew were. When I asked him how he managed it, he replied that if you want to get somewhere, before you start, you have to work out the best route to get there. But, more importantly, in the case of doing Mission Impossible for real, its not the getting there that is important, its the getting back again.

If you plot your route from that perspective, things become relatively straight forward.

I think its the same with a book, any book, but particularly with a novel. If you know how it is going to end, then it becomes easier to write, because you are writing towards a specific point. I knew my ending, so in that sense I was lucky. I had all of the pieces of the literary jigsaw before I began. So I sat down and I started typing.

I also had a few techniques that I applied to my writing. I recalled reading something Graham Greene had said about characterisation and how he gave his characters an identifying trait which he always repeated when he re-introduced them into a plot. So if they smoked, they would always do something smoking related, they would light a cigarette, or inhale deeply, or stub out their smoke.

I tried to emulate that. In my case, I decided that if people took drugs, they would consume extraordinary amounts of drugs. So I tried to get excessive drug taking on every page. Everyone is ripped to the tits on drink and drugs almost all of the time.

I wasn't trying to glorify this behaviour, quite the opposite in the end in fact; but I was trying to saturate the plot so deeply with the drug taking habit that the drugs became irrelevant. The drugs don't work, they just make it worse, as it says in the song.

This did cause me a few crises of conscience management. It was after all fiction, but some people would read it and think it was all real. Which leads to the question, if you took so many drugs, how come you aren't all dead? Answer; because its fiction and as Anthony H Wilson once said, if fiction is more entertaining than fact, print the fiction.

I also knew that the strongest structures are triangular, so whatever the sentence was, it should have three elements - John entered the room, he removed his wet raincoat and smiled when he saw Jennie sitting there. That

kind of thing. I think triplicates and repetition are the best writing structures, along with complex sentences. For example – Jimmy stared out of the window, he was looking at the barge moving slowly down the river when the door bell rang – is a complex sentence. It is also structurally triangular. He stares out of the window, the barge moves down the river, the doorbell rings.

Repetition is also crucial. You can see that best in stand up comedy. “Garlic bread!? Garlic bread? Garlic. And bread? Am I hearing you right? Garlic bread. No thank you I’ve got some milk roll int’ case”. Or, “Twenty years ago we had Johnny Cash, Bob Hope and Steve Jobs. Now we have no Cash, no Hope and no Jobs”. That kind of thing.

Mix these elements together and you should get “a good read”. That’s the theory anyways.

This can cause you problems later on when it comes to proof reading. In my case, the novel was originally finished in 1996. The government were running a scheme called “Arts For Everyone” at that time and I managed to win an award of £10,000 to get my novel proof read and finalised for publication. This was brilliant news, except that I had to form a partnership with someone else in order to get the grant. Unfortunately I chose the wrong partner.

The first thing they did was give the novel to an editor for proof reading and the so called “professional” editor decided to change the ending I had written towards. They also re-wrote certain sections of the novel. They did this without any discussion or agreement from me and I got very upset about this. Things then went downhill and for one reason and another, the whole deal went horribly wrong and the novel was shelved.

By then my money had run out and I had to get myself a day job. I moved into teaching and went to work at a music college in Sheffield’s east end. The novel got forgotten about. It stayed that way until the arrival of the Coronavirus and lockdown two decades later.

At that point I pondered what I was going to do with myself and I decided to revive my novel. I’d met Alfred Boland by then. He’s a Dutch record dealer and graphic designer who I had become friendly with through my record collecting habits on the website Discogs. I told Alfred about the novel one day and the next thing I knew he had introduced me to his colleague Frans de Waard, a record label owner and music book publisher. One thing led to another and before I knew it, we had done a deal for Frans to publish my book, his first novel, via his company Korm Plastics.

Frans brought in a professional proof reader and editor. The first thing he did was take my manuscript apart and analyse it. This was a very useful exercise as it highlighted the over use of repetition. Where I thought I had used the same phrase three times or more, the analysis showed I had actually used the same phrase dozens of times. I’d done this a lot, which meant I needed a re-write and an expansion of my thinking. I had to come up with many more variations on certain words and phrases.

It was tough, but also inspiring and it caused me to do a very extensive re-write that expanded the original manuscript by about hundred pages. These difficulties and amendments were very time consuming; so much so that the original aim, which was to have published copies available for Christmas 2021 was knocked back by a year. The book finally made it into print November 2022, twenty six years after I first started it.

Some of the problems we had were down to placement - where certain sections appeared in the overall text. This was something that has influenced my thinking going back to university days. In those days I used to hand write all of my essays (and thesis). This proved arduous as I would write out an essay, then start cutting and pasting it, which meant re-writing the whole thing by hand in a new order. Sometimes I'd do this three or four times until I got the paragraphs in the sequence that I felt worked best.

Imagine how delighted I was when the home computer was born and I could actually type out a document and save it. This made editing so much easier, in the sense that I did not have to keep writing out the same thing. But it also made life more complex as it meant I could analyse every single word in a document and I could also re-arrange and replace same. That meant I could spend a day on writing a piece and a week on editing it if I allowed myself to do that. Nothing ever got finished.

Only, in the case of Harry1 as it has become code named, it did get finished. I finally reached the cut off point where I decided that any more alterations would be saved and used in the sequel to "Losing It". That story is, of course, the story of what happened after 1996, which is where Harry1 ends. However, I have a problem with writing Harry2. Although I have enough material to make another novel, I do not know how it ends yet.....

All that I have left to do with Harry1 is the marketing and promotion. I say "all" but in fact this might prove to be the biggest task of all. I recently had a meeting in Waterstones cafe. It was the first time I had been in a book shop since I knew my own book was at the printers. For the first time ever I was struck by how many books there are out there. There's millions of them. So the question becomes how do I persuade people to read mine? In other words, how do I market the thing?

Well, its not I for starters, its "we". Its a collaboration between the author and the publisher. We have many ideas on this front and I am not giving them away here. We are going to instigate them in the months that follow and if they work then perhaps I will write another blog about how we did it.

All I will say here is that we come from music industry backgrounds and what we know is how to market records on a Do It Yourself level. Word of mouth plays a big part in this and immersive marketing also plays a role.

My original idea for "Losing It", which is about two bands, was to produce some soundtrack albums to go with the text. That way you would end up with music to listen to whilst you are reading. I did actually start doing this and I

released two twelve inch singles by one of the bands in the novel – Cloud Bass. However, breaking bands and music is a long hard expensive road and I did not have the cash-flow I needed to keep this method going until something broke.

In the years that have passed, the way people consume music has changed and from my point of view this has done me a favour. Nowadays I don't need to produce my own albums. I can exploit the streaming services instead. One idea I am going to activate is to set up Harry Viderci's Spotify page. On there I am going to post play lists. There's twenty three chapters spanning different musical eras, so I am going to post twenty three playlists named after the chapter titles in the novel. Each list will have music you can listen to whilst reading that chapter. If this works I can develop this idea by making these playlist open ended, so other people can post their own playlists. In this way, the audience can interact with the author and eventually there will be multiple choice playlists to enjoy for a multi dimensional cultural experience.

Finally, I have to say that I do not have any particular ambitions left for this novel. I am not sitting here thinking that it deserves to be a best seller and if it does not become one I have failed. Nothing like that. My ambition was in getting the book published without resorting to vanity publishing. Thanks to Alfred and Frans I have achieved that. If it sells one copy it will have been a success in my eyes. It has already done that, so from a personal point of view its been successful (though not in the eyes of Korm Publishing whose minimal return is in recouping their investment).

The next book, however, is a different story all together...

Ends.