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Happy Easter!**



roof roots

The Newsletter of the Methodist Ministers' Housing Society • Spring 2024

The high priest of prog

*A SERIOUS ROAD ACCIDENT
CHANGED EVERYTHING FOR
REVD JOHN SIMMS. HE HAD TO
GIVE UP HIS CHURCH MINISTRY
– BUT FOUND STRENGTH IN HIS
LOVE OF MUSIC*

John Simms stepped off the kerb and woke up in a hospital bed. He didn't realise he'd been the victim of a serious road accident.

He had just been dealing with the aftermath of another impact – that of Storm Desmond which had caused flooding in thousands of homes across northern England in 2015.

John was also struggling as Superintendent in Kendal. 'I discovered how out of my depth I was,' he recalled, 'especially in the flood water which came over my knees.'

A year later his role was under review. Another circuit was considering taking him on. John went out for his morning walk, as usual. That's when the accident happened.

'On a zebra crossing outside the Roman Catholic Church in Kendal, I was knocked over by a small van,' he said.

He sustained serious head injuries and

ligament damage to his left knee. John was rushed to a nearby hospital, but has no recollection of the accident.

John entered another struggle – this time just to maintain concentration and energy levels. 'I gave it two years after the accident,' he said, 'and just felt I couldn't carry on.'

Recovery was slow and frustrating. As an active person who normally walked about four miles most days, John found it difficult to be stuck at home.

Reading was a problem as he had problems with double vision. All he could do was listen to music. John had been a big music fan since his teens, enjoying progressive rock – or 'prog' as it is known. Music became a source of strength.

Eventually he was allowed to retire on health grounds. He was only 56. 'Through the generosity of MMHS, we managed to find a house back in Yorkshire where our two sons were still living,' he recalled. 'We're very grateful to MMHS for providing somewhere for us.'

There was plenty of time to reflect. John



SKY PILOT: When John Simms received the gift of a podcast microphone, life took off in a whole new direction.

thought if the van had been going 'just that little bit quicker', it could have been a different story for his wife Judith and their two grown-up sons. 'I still think how blessed I was,' said John.

In 2021, his elder son gave him a microphone as a birthday gift. He used to ▶

A message from Mairi



Have you found the weather this winter heavy-going? I have! The UK has experienced an unusually stormy autumn and winter, followed by extreme cold – and a new provisional maximum temperature record for January, recorded in northwest Scotland.

It was fascinating for me to discover the climate drivers in play, for example – El Nino, Quasi-Biennial Oscillation, Stratospheric Polar Vortex and Madden-Julian Oscillation – against a background of warming winters.

Spring is 'the season of hope', symbolising the resurgence of life. It's a tonic to watch the days getting longer, feel a little heat from the sun and observe nature bursting out of hibernation. I found some Bible verses that resonate with this – Song of Solomon 2:11-12 (MSG):

Look around you: Winter is over; the winter rains are over, gone! Spring flowers are in blossom all over. The whole world's a choir – and singing!

Wishing you a Happy Easter.

Mairi

Down to earth

NOW IS THE TIME TO GET GARDENING. BUT HOW DO YOU START? HERE ARE SOME PRACTICAL TIPS TO HELP YOU ENJOY YOUR OUTDOORS

After a long winter, spring beckons us to enjoy all that our gardens offer for our health and wellbeing.

Gardening charity Thrive have put together a journey of wellbeing activities. Find these in the calendar opposite. Cut out and keep. You can find all related articles at www.thrive.org.uk/get-gardening/spring-wellbeing-calendar

Thrive have set out a variety of daily activities, spread across a month. These are simple but effective ways to boost physical and mental health.

The activities are designed to make you feel good – whatever your age, health or abilities. You can do them if you have a garden, patio, balcony or just a windowsill.

You'll find a mix of practical, passive, creative, gardening, nature, indoor and outdoor activities. There's something for everyone's wellbeing and health this spring.

Many of the activities can be done in less than 15 minutes. Those at the weekend can be given a bit more time.

The high priest of prog

work on local and hospital radio, so this was just the right trigger. In fact, it was the game-changer. 'I thought, well, let's have a go at this podcasting lark,' said John.

He put a half-hour show together and shared it with the wider world through Facebook. John was a keen listener of internet radio station Progzilla, who played his kind of music. One of their presenters heard his show and asked if he could use it.

Soon, a station manager offered him his own show on Progzilla. 'I said, well, I'll give it a go,' John recalled.

Known as The Sky Pilot, John is now a regular feature on the station. He hosts two separate shows, playing music by such bands and artists as Be-Bop Deluxe,

Don't worry if you can't do everything. Use the calendar as a guide to fit around your time and lifestyle. You can swap days or repeat activities.

The question is, how on earth do you start? Where do you begin to wake up your garden? Thrive suggest some simple ways to get ready.

1 Plan where you will garden

Think about garden design. Can you easily get around and carry out tasks? You may want to consider adding raised beds, containers or elevated planters.

If you have recent sight loss, you may want to get reacquainted with your garden. Walk around it at different times until comfortable with the layout.

Consider where you need to be, to carry out activities. For seated activities like sowing seeds or potting up plants, you may want a table outside.

2 Get the right tools

Check you have everything you need before you begin and that it's suitable for you. You could make a checklist.

Tools don't need to be expensive.



Barclay James Harvest and Peter Gabriel. He's also been nicknamed 'The High Priest Of Prog!'

A disabled listener asked if John would lead his wedding. As it was to be in Scotland, John had to seek special



Spring forward with Thrive

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MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
1 Send a photo of a spring flower to a friend (5 mins)	2 Change your phone background to a nature photo (5 mins)	3 Go for a walk in nature with a loved one	4 Read our article on preparing for spring (5 mins)	5 Listen to bird song (5 mins)	6 Sow some seeds (15 mins)	7 Give a plant or some seeds to a loved one
8 Go for a walk and observe people's front gardens	9 Take time to notice blossom and tree buds developing	10 'Deadhead' plants (follow our guide) (10 mins)	11 Read our '5 Ways to Wellbeing' article (10 mins)	12 Go for a walk somewhere with a nice view	13 Make a bird feeder (10 mins)	14 Grow sweet peas/broad beans (follow our guide) (15 mins)
15 Lie under a tree and look at the leaf patterns (5 mins)	16 Draw a plant and share a photo of your drawing (10 mins)	17 Grow a herb (follow our guide) (10 mins)	18 Find 5 plants that feel nice to touch (be aware of thorns) (10 mins)	19 Make 'grass hands' (follow our guide) (15 mins)	20 Pot up a plant (follow Thrive guide) (10 mins)	21 Sow microgreens (follow our guide) (15 mins)
22 Go on a walk and observe wildlife	23 Write 3 ways you'd like to connect with nature more (5 mins)	24 Pick a favourite tree on your local walk	25 Smell 5 plants (5 mins)	26 Save your own seeds (5 mins)	27 Prick out and pot on seedlings (follow our guide) (15 mins)	28 Plant a sunflower (follow our guide) (15 mins)

Often, simple items will do the trick. You may find some specialist or adapted equipment make some tasks easier.

Before buying any new implements, try them for size, weight and

ease of use. Well balanced, lightweight tools help prevent stresses and strains in your hands and arms.

3 Get your body ready

Getting your body ready can be as important as having the right tools. When it comes to gardening, like any physical activity, starting slowly is important.

It may help to ease yourself into gardening with low-intensity activities such as seed sowing and pruning – especially if you've had a period of being fairly inactive.

Warm up with some simple bending and stretching exercises to loosen up your muscles. Take a short walk around the garden as part of your warm-up.

4 Plan your time

Sticking to one task at a time can help you stay focused. It's also good to vary activities. As a rough guide, spend around 20 minutes on a task before you switch to something else.

If possible, try not to keep your body in one position for too long. Think about the order in which you do tasks.

Weed before watering or clear beds before you mow. Take plenty of breaks. Depending on the weather, have a warm or cold drink – and maybe a snack!

After some simple preparation, now you're ready to enjoy your garden space. And you can make the most of the opportunities for wellbeing it provides.

Thrive are passionate about the health benefits that gardening, horticulture and spending time in nature can bring. Their aim is to ensure that people with varying needs have the opportunity to access therapeutic gardening and horticulture programmes.

ROCK STEADY: John believes he is 'blessed' to still enjoy life with wife Judith and their two grown-up sons after the road accident. Inset: John has met some of his music heroes such as prog rock guitarist Steve Hackett (left).



Convention playing the music!' said John. It's obvious that music and the radio station have played a part in John's recovery – and continue to do so. 'The online community around the radio station is quite strong,' he said. 'We support each other.'

You can listen to John Simms' Sky Pilot programmes at <https://progzilla.com>

permission to conduct the ceremony. Members of folk-rock band Fairport Convention provided the music!

'We have lovely photos of the groom dancing in his motorised wheelchair, his bride on his knee, with Fairport

Step out into the new season

AFTER THE DARKNESS HAS GONE, LIGHT AND WONDER RETURN. DI WALLACE UNVEILS THE SPECTACLE OF SPRING.

It seems to have been a cold, damp long winter. Not that I haven't made use of those darker days – painting pictures and playing music.

But there can be few of us who do not rejoice in the return of longer days, spring sunshine and new life springing from the earth.

I find there's a wonderful feeling of hope that comes with the first signs of spring. Bird song seems brighter. It feels like the planet's mood is lifting again.

The beginning of 2024 has not been the greatest for us. Health issues and loved ones' lives ebbing toward their close has made for a difficult start to our year.

However, we know this is part of the cycle of life. We must face it the best way that we can.

The good news is that we're not alone. Close friends are always the most wonderful gift you can possess. And I've found yet again, taking a walk is always balm for the soul.

As spring starts to stir, we are treated to the carpets of snowdrops, violets, aconites, catkins dancing on the branches of the willow.

Resident birdlife is stirring and marking out territories and looking for mates, their songs ringing out over the breeze. Squirrels chase about looking for those cached nuts to get them through the remaining chilly months.

There are also a good number of short eared owls about now, though I confess I have yet to see one! Still, they are something to look out for.

We've been fortunate to enjoy somewhat warmer weather just recently, so not much need to venture out feeling like a wrapped mummy. You



BRIGHTER DAYS: On your spring walks, you can lose some winter layers and feel the sun's warmth.

can lose some layers and feel the sun's warmth starting to increase.

You don't have to be in the depths of the countryside to enjoy such walks. Parks, gardens and side lanes can provide every bit as much joy, when you step out on a lovely spring morning.

While out in the fresh air, hearing the birdsong, seeing new growth emerging, you cannot fail to realise you're part of something so much bigger and more wonderful than yourself.

You are surrounded by that wonderful miracle that is the cycle of life that has continued since the world began. We may not always understand it, but nature does look after its own, and we

witness it in the yearly rebirth of life.

To step out and immerse yourself in such beauty and wonder, lifts your spirit and heals your heart. The spring breezes blow away the dross and the sunshine bathes you in warmth and joy. It's a wonderful antidote to life's winter blues.

I invite you to take the opportunity to step out into spring, feel the changes taking place and listen to the music that heralds the coming of the new season.



MMHS resident Di Wallace is a former therapist/counsellor, working in schools, occupational health departments and private practice. She plays the fiddle, facilitates a folk gathering and plays for occasional ceilidhs with husband Les, a retired Methodist minister. Together they cycle, motorcycle, canoe, ramble and nature watch.



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