The View
by Phil Blakeman

MY DAD IS AN OLD MAN, housebound and suffering the many effects of age. I went to see him recently and as we sat down to a cup of tea, I cast my eye round the room. There was never anything to attract the eye: no magazines and no pictures. The TV, disapproved of, sits quietly in the corner along with the CD player we bought. My mum used to brighten the place up by moving things about or buying flowers, but in the three years since she passed on, not a thing has been moved. There was of course the obligatory Biblical calendar on the wall. My parents always had one. On each page there would be a picture of a mountain, maybe with a sunset and then there would be a devotional saying at the bottom, for example, "God's love is for ever, like the mountains and the sea", or "How little we are in it all". I smiled when I remembered how my brother and I would make up captions. You know the type of thing: "God is tremendous, he really is; sadly you are only a miserable wretch," Isaiah ii, 7.

In the late 60s and early 70s my dad was prone to dragging us kids up hills and on long walks generally. He would wear a shirt and tie under a V-neck Marks & Spencer pullover and would carry something on his back, which he called a haversack. The bag was war issue with rusted buckles. Being made of canvas, it offered little protection to its contents, most notably my jam pieces wrapped in greaseproof paper. Unbelievably, I would clamber up 3000 rain-drenched feet of rocky and boggy terrain in my parka, Wranglers and a pair of pumps, yet as far as I can remember I never sustained a significant injury or ailment.

Walking days, though, were always miserable. They would lurch from boredom and irritation to protest and hunger, spiraling upwards and onwards through dehydration, bitterness and cold, before finally reaching utter despair and disorientation. And although at home we spent every available moment playing football in the street and in the park and were therefore fairly fit, every step of those walks felt like Captain Oates' final moments, as he dragged his frost-ravaged body out into the blizzard for the final time.

The only other time I can recall a similar level of exhaustion and desperation was in later life, when a girlfriend took a notion to improve me by dragging me out to art galleries. To those of you who have never been, art galleries are sort of like church, where minutes transmute into hours and where the gullible imagine they are in the presence of something transcendent. Like in church, you can always spot the bored kids trapped in a meaningless adult world, although admittedly unlike church you rarely get to sing.

The only interest to be had on our walks was the cricket. My older brother would plod along, face like thunder, transistor radio squeezed up to his ear, and was thereby able to provide over-by-over analysis of the ongoing Ashes series from Lord's. The only time either of us smiled was if John Snow nipped one back and trapped Keith Stackpole leg-before-wicket, or if Knotty managed to slash his way to a brisk 50.

It was, however, usually well into the final session at Lord's before we would reach the summit. The summit to us was an arbitrary spot of God-forsaken desolation, made less brutal only by the fact that you got to rest for a few wretched minutes on a lump of cold rock to eat your damp jam pieces. Even then, my brother would usually cut short the blessed relief by insisting we returned to a lesser height so that his radio would work. He was always anxious to get back; didn't dad know that Boycott had just thrown away his wicket attempting to hook Lillee to midwicket *(some mistake, surely? — Ed.)*, and that Edrich and nightwatchman Snow were now battling it out against the new ball? For that matter, didn't dad know that this week's Radio Luxembourg Top 30 run-down was about to start? Not only that — there would be a game of football ongoing at Orchar Park, which would now be entering its fourth hour with Kenny Small's team no doubt winning by the staggering margin of 47 goals

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Crib Goch. It was a wonderful day's outing around the Snowdon Horseshoe, with Russ acquainting me with territory so familiar to him.

The following month we were on top of Sgurr na Ciche. Three months later we trekked to Nanga Parbat base camp. My new life in the hills had begun.

Adam Watson

THE FIRST HILL I climbed was Sgor Mor in Glen Dee when nine years old in July 1939. My parents, brother and I were staying at Ballater on holiday, and one rainy day I looked at magazines in a summer house. There I saw Seton Gordon's book *The Cairngorm Hills of Scotland*, and opening it changed my life. Often had I been in Deeside, but now saw the Cairngorms with a new eye. I wanted to be there and persuaded my father to take me.

His most energetic sport had been golf, but now he drove past the Linn of Dee to the White Bridge, and he, my 12 year-old brother and I climbed north. When we reached the horizon, another appeared beyond, then another, and another. The boggy slope seemed endless. We became tired, and I wished I had longer legs, but my father and brother also took rests. Finally there came the summit tors, where a dense haze augmented the impression of a vast wild landscape. As we walked back, I recall picking out stretches of short grass and running down them, until we reached the car and looked back at the great Sgor Mor. I wanted more and more.

Paul Hesp

FIRST HILL EVER: A dune known locally as "de Grote Berg" (the big mountain), Bilthoven, Nether-

to 33. I was sure they would be wondering where I was. Of course I would never be able to tell them I'd been up a hill.

Sunday was devoted in its entirety to the glorification of God. There was morning worship, Sunday School, the gospel meeting and finally the youth fellowship, which all in all came to a cool 12 hours of solid deprivation. Please remember, however, that to arrive at the "Real Endurance Time" (or RET), this figure should be increased by a boredom factor of 3.5 and further by an "I can't believe it, I'm surrounded by retards" factor of 2.7, giving an excruciating and morbid RET of 37 hours and 32 minutes. So our being dragged up a hill on a Saturday was enough to destroy an entire weekend and effectively condemned us to many consecutive days of pointless labour. I still believe that this represented the utmost cruelty.

But our reward, to my dad's way of thinking, was The View. He loved The View. He took countless pictures of The View. We should all love The View. The View was what it was all about, and for him it more than justified the crushing of our youthful spirits.

IN LATER LIFE, I have come to value many aspects of hillwalking and have reached a fair number of summits in my time. I value the exercise, the air, the banter and comradeship, the personal challenge, and of course the pint of lager at the end tastes finer than the water of life itself. But the view, I suspect, passes me by.

I think I can see it, I really do, but then I listen to others rapping in grand and poetic terms and I start to doubt that I've actually seen anything at all. Remember the way your mum would attempt to enter your world by picking her favourite song from Top of the Pops, and how you thought that whatever appreciation she may have of the theme to Van der Valk, it must be of such an unsophisticated kind, compared with your life-changing love of Life on Mars or Pyjamarama. Well, I now understand how my mum must have felt; I see the view and I want to join in the chat, but I don't think I really get it.

Many years later, while visiting a friend in Toronto, I took my own kids on the Maid in the Mist to the foot of Niagara Falls to give them their first sight of one of the world's wonders. I thought it was exciting, but as we set foot back on dry land I asked one of the boys what he thought of it. He was silent for a moment, then the response came: "They could have made it better". I suspect he wondered where the 100ft sea monster was, which could have emerged from the foamy depths, then been shot down via some interactive capability. Or maybe he wondered why we had failed to come under attack from faceless, robotic, sea mutants. In other words, where was the story, where were the imagination and the soul of the thing? And how tiresome it was to have to provide it all yourself. Post-rock'n'roll, post-Godzilla, post-interactive gaming, I suppose the wonders of the world and The View in general are beginning to look a little shabby as forms of inspiration. (Maybe God needs to up his game. Clearly the hurricanes and the earthquakes are still pretty damned impressive, but who would bet against some IT nerd at Sony producing a convincing simulation pretty soon.)

Then there was our honeymoon visit to the Grand Canyon. I must admit for about five minutes the view was breathtaking, but pretty soon we started fooling around, I bought a hamburger and then we started making up names for the loud American tourists. Soon I was suggesting that we should make the arduous two-hour drive back to civilisation and the nearest available motel, in order to recommence the real honeymoon.

ALL THIS WAS FLASHING through my mind as I sat in my dad's house. As I returned to my cup of tea, I started thinking about what people actually get out of The View. It's not any of the animal pleasures that are excited, that's for sure, nor any of the social ones either, as everyone I ask confirms that The View is just as magnificent when experienced alone. I went through all the pleasures in my mind: creative, sporting, political etc, and eventually drew a blank.

Instead, I suggested to my dad that I set up his projector, so we could look at some of his old slides. I sifted through boxes of ancient photos and filled the carousel, carefully choosing as many pictures of us kids as possible, thinking that these would be the ones which would hold the most meaning for him at his stage of life. However, as the show progressed, I became aware that he was beginning to lose interest — until suddenly he came alive. "What's the name of that mountain?" he bellowed. "What a beautiful view." I looked up at the screen and realised that I hadn't even noticed that there was a mountain or a view. All I could see was a small boy in the foreground with a parka and a pair of Wranglers, looking a little lost.

lands, 1949. Halfway between home and St Theresia primary school. The highest point was about level with the roof of the vicarage, which stood between the 5m and 7.5m contour lines and had an upper floor and attic. So 15m above sea level would not be far off. Well over 1000 ascents while in primary school. De Grote Berg can no longer be climbed, as it was used to fill a gravel pit across the bicycle track.

First hill in Britain: Parliament Hill, London, December 1967.

First real hill in Britain: Hatterrall Hill, Black Mountains, Wales, summer 1973. On my first long walk in Britain, Chepstow–Bala Lake

First Munro: Lochnagar, August 1978. On my first long walk in Scotland, Blairgowrie–Aviemore–Pitlochry. During this, after a night at Corrour bothy and lunch at the Sinclair hut, by late afternoon I reached the Glenmore hostel. Beastly weather all day. When I arrived, the warden was telling two Israelis who had come by car that there was no room at the inn. They left, and I rather dejectedly asked the man

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