### Diving Dan (wearing swimwear, honest!) See page 5

### Letter from the editor

By Barbara Jennings: barbara.jennings@ctplc.com

"It was Christmas Eve, babe, in the drunk tank...". Yep, it's the holiday season again, and as the Christmas decorations go up and the Lido Minstrels practice *Fairytale of New York*, it's the last *Bec Chat* of 2019. Time to make yourself a big steaming mug of tea or mulled wine, depending on your preference, and snuggle up by those twinkling lights for a festive read!

We've got another great issue, kicking off with some Christmas gift suggestions on page 2. Team Mermaids have done a fabulous job as usual with their famous Christmas list, plus we've got all the Lido goodies and a few other suggestions too, so Santy really does have no excuse this year. And you have all been nice, haven't you (3)? Then turn to page 10 so you can ensure that you've got all the dates for the Lido festivities in your diary, including the traditional Lido carols on the last Sunday before Christmas. And of course, it wouldn't be Christmas without a Panto, would it? Fortunately we have that covered too, with a return to Lido Pantoland as we relive past glories with a showing of Swimderella Re-Ducks!, the film of Hilary Jennings and Sue Brearley's fabulous 2014 extravaganza. Gosh, has it really been five years?

Sue Brearley was of course the muse who wrote *Swimderella*, as well as the hysterical poem about it on page 10. As Flavio, author of "A Dip In the Life Of..." remarked to me, she gives a lovely interview, and you can read it on page 4, complete with stories of skinny dipping and a bigamous grandfather. Yikes! Turning to another Lido legend, 2019 was the year we bid farewell to Dan Abel, and I've composed a short tribute to the original Charming Dan from Swimderella on page 5.

There is no January edition as *Bec Chat* Towers closes down over the festive season as the editorial team heads home for the holidays, so we'll see you again in February. In the meantime, Happy Holiday Swimming!

### **November results**

**3 November**. Ruth Beaver took home the Past and Vice Presidents' Cup, the last cup until Christmas. Well done her!

**10 November.** Today was scratch relays between visiting club Brighton SC and SLSC, ably organised by Tom Butler – thanks, Tom ②. Facebook informs me that somebody won, so if you have more detail than that, do let me know!

#### 17 November.



Another annual event, the Serps Gala for the Doug Smith Memorial Cup, always a hard-fought event. This year was no exception, and it was our turn to win. Well done to Swim Captain Charles Hunter, both for organising and for leading us to victory!

**24 November.** Rob Hughes won in October, and he won again today, followed by Doro Stoffels and Rosemary Westcott in a tie for second place. Congratulations to all!

**30 November.** The ever-enjoyable Lido Crawl, this year ably organised by Natasha Broke and Gus Brooks – thanks guys!

December 2019 1 Bec Chat – lines from the Lido

### Water temperatures

By David Dunham

Autumn was fairly good this year with the water remaining acceptable until the last week in November when it felt chillier. We now wait for lower temperatures so that the Sunday morning race can only be a width. (That's when the temperature's below 40°F/4.5°C, racers! Ed)

	2016	2017	2018	2019
October	12.5°C	13.5°C	12.0°C	13.0°C
	54.0°F	56.0°F	54.0°F	55.0°F
November	7.0°C	8.0°C	7.5°C	7.5°C
	44.5°F	46.0°F	45.5°F	45.0°F

### Dear Santy...

By the Editor

It's Christmas! And what could be better than a Christmas list? Well... we all know we're in the era of repairing, reusing, repurposing and recycling, so maybe a swimsuit by the wonderful Batoko Swimwear, a small independent swimwear brand based on the North West Coast of Britain which makes swimsuits out of 100% recycled plastic waste that would otherwise go to landfill. You can see the fabulous Team Mermaids and friends modelling some of their designs here, and it's a pity the picture is in black and white as the colour of every suit is different. See more at https://www.batoko.com/.



If you're interested in ethical swimwear brands, this blog at Pebble Mag is a great read:

https://pebblemag.com/magazine/living/ethicalswimwear (albeit some of the designs are possibly more suitable for posing in the sauna than churning out the lengths – but at this time of the year with the temperature in the low zeros, there's nothing wrong with that!). Speaking of Christmas and Team Mermaids, their famous Christmas Wish List is now up at https://teammermaids.com/2019/11/10/teammermaids-christmas-wish-list-2019/. From environmentally aware changing robes and recycled swimbags to mugs, books and stocking fillers, via luxury holidays (well, a girl can dream!) it's got everything a swimmer needs. When your loved ones ask you "What do you want for Christmas, then?", you can just send them the link! I'll have the Fit and Abel Cook Islands Adventure please, thank you (plus a trip in Scotty's transporter to get me there without flying!).

That is, of course, once you've put one (or, heck, it's Christmas, ALL!) SLSC's fabulous gift ideas at the top of your letter to Santa. We've got the iconic calendar and new swimming caps: www.slsc.org.uk. At the time of going to press there were only four of the magnificent bobble hats left – only available from Sue Rentoul at the Lido.

Otherwise, if you want a truly wonderful, sustainable, and community based gift, how about asking your loved ones to buy you membership of the Friends of Grange Lido scheme? It's newly launched and is a group dedicated to restoring this Grade II listed art deco gem on the promenade at Grange-over-Sands. Grange Lido is the only surviving seaside Lido in the North West and one of only five in England. Save Grange Lido is working to ensure that it is fully restored as a community swimming facility and regional tourist attraction. The initiative is strongly supported by local swimming clubs, schools and swimming organisations, all of whom want to see the 50m long pool restored as a safe, accessible place to train and swim. The success of the refurbished New Cumnock Lido, which was saved from demolition and refurbished by a similar community group, is a wonderful example of what this sort of initiative can achieve; you may remember that Lizzy Johnson, who featured in last month's A Dip Into the Life Of..., helped to save New Cumnock and wrote a lovely article about it in one of our earlier editions. You can join the Grange Lido Friends group from as little at £2.50 per month or £25 per annum, and as a well as a welcome pack and a regular newsletter, you'll be part of a growing community supporting a great project! What could be more in the Christmas spirit than that? www.savegrangelido.co.uk



# A Dip In The Life of... Sue Brearley

By Flavio Centofanti

"I gave a cheery wave to the unexpected dog-walkers who appeared as I emerged from an early morning skinny-dip in the River Stour."



Like any other community, our SLSC has its familiar faces, its regulars and not so regulars, serious swimmers and less serious, perhaps more mindful, swimmers, members who are always in the thick of things and others more on the periphery. There are also the familiar faces who are still very much part of the family even if they've gone off to do something else for a while. Sue Brearley definitely falls into the last category and I was lucky to catch her, literally by the bike racks on her last day before she left for Oxford for the autumn term. I felt sure she would give a nice interview and I was right – her answers are brimming with the endearing mixture of thoughtful insight, sharp wit and reflection we all know her for.

# Although you're missed, we hope you've made a good start with your studies in Oxford? What are you studying and how's it going?

I'm one year and one term into a three-year BA in English Language and Literature. At the moment I'm reading the *Marprelate Pamphlets* – an important interlude in the history both of the English Reformation and Early Modern literature, and also hilariously scurrilous. They are a bizarre mixture of detailed theological argument and obscene personal abuse – a must-read!

# I don't doubt it! What made you decide to go back to studying?

Weirdly, listening to *The Archers*. An online friend asked me to attend an academic conference at which

she was giving an Archers-based talk. I enjoyed myself so much that I applied to do a university access course.

### What were you doing before?

Hanging around the Lido, mostly. Although in my spare time I ran a small home-based office looking after my partner's business admin, and between 2016 and 2018 I was doing a part-time Foundation Certificate in English Literature.

### What are you hoping to do afterwards?

Either spend six months reading detective stories on a bench at the Lido or apply to do an M.Phil. in Theology here in Oxford. Or possibly take the centre ground and use my newly-acquired research skills to write a book about my very badly-behaved great-great-grandfather. And another Lido panto.

# Oh yes you will! Tell us a bit about your early life and family.

I was born and raised down the road in Forest Hill. My Mum taught my younger sister and me to swim in what was then the new Ladywell Baths (now demolished) by tying a strap round my middle and towing me along from the side of the pool. As a child I swam there and at the old Forest Hill Baths, and in the summer at Beckenham Lido, which was a very rough place for the young. Gangs of boys used to grab girls and throw them into the water with all their clothes on. I was absolutely furious when they did it to me – I had a new transistor radio in my bag which was ruined. The lifeguards didn't intervene; I expect they were scared.

# Testosterone is an awful thing. Do you think boys are any better behaved these days?

Yes! My kids' generation seem to manage to combine fun and high spirits with care for others. I was very impressed this week with the young men in our choir, who refused to sing 'take the girls tonight' in a song we were practising and insisted on substituting a 'less rapey' phrase.

### I'm intrigued about this naughty great-greatgrandfather of yours... Tell us one or two things about him.

Well, he was a serial bigamist for starters... and a blackmailer and attempted murderer. But his primary characteristic seems to have been incompetence, as he failed at all these things. (I definitely want to read that book! Ed)

### When did you first start coming to the Lido?

Some time in the early noughties... I remember my children's school being involved in the centenary celebrations and I think I became a member soon afterwards. A group of us – parents and children from Fircroft Primary School in Tooting – developed a tradition of swimming at the Lido after the summer sports day, and having our tea there.

#### What do you like best about it?

The people! Although the Lido is without doubt the best pool in England by any objective standard, it wouldn't be the same without the friendly and inclusive SLSC. I remember clambering out of the shallow end after my very first winter swim to see an unknown man beckoning me over to join a group huddled outside the café. He welcomed me to the Lido and offered me a slug of whisky. It was, of course, the late, great Dr.Andy.

# What got you into swimming? Are you a serious swimmer?

My Mum was a club swimmer as a young woman (in the Ladywell Ladies) and she took us to the pool as babies, so I have always swum. Serious? I try not to be too serious about anything. I'm certainly not a competitive swimmer, as anyone who knows me will attest. But almost every bag I own has a micro-towel and costume in it somewhere, and I always keep wetshoes and a bespoke Helen Needham changing robe in the back of the car. I never want to miss the chance of a swim if I encounter a promising body of water.

### That seems to be something that links us all. What other sports/pastimes do you have?

I enjoy cycling and I have recently taken up running, which I have sedulously avoided for the last five decades, on the grounds that it is an entirely unnecessary activity (except in the case of fire or haemorrhage). At the moment I can't say I'm actually enjoying it, but it's less horrible than it was when I started. I also really like singing and belong to the choir here at college and to the Graveney Community Choir back home.

### What's important to you?

Family and community. The environment. Social justice. And, let's be honest, white wine and Netflix. Oh. and chocolate.

#### What drives you?

Nurofen Cold & Flu tablets and honey & lemon drinks with paracetamol chasers. We have a thing called Freshers' Flu in Oxford every Michaelmas Term and I've had it since the middle of October.

### Are you an optimist?

Yes! I can't imagine how anyone can live from day to day without believing that people are basically decent and that things can and will get better. One of the tenets I try hard to live by is 'assume goodwill'.

Although I have to admit that it sometimes takes a big effort

### What do you fear the most?

Essay deadlines.

#### Who do you admire?

The female MPs of all parties who put up with unimaginable abuse and threats just for trying to do their jobs, and yet have still managed to achieve reforms in the antediluvian regime of the Palace of Westminster.

# Have you ever changed your mind about anything you were convinced about before?

Running – see above. Although I'm not sure I'm entirely convinced yet...

#### What book had the greatest influence on you?

That's a tough one. I don't think I can name a single book. AA Milne's *Winnie the Pooh* stories probably established my love of language and wordplay at a very early age... then as a misfit teenager, sci-fi/fantasy by radical authors such as Ursula Le Guin, depicting alternative realities with different social values, helped me realise that you don't necessarily have to accept the world as it is – you can aspire to something different and better.

#### What's the last unabashed thing you did?

I gave a cheery wave to the unexpected dog-walkers who appeared as I emerged from an early morning skinny-dip in the River Stour.

# Presumably you weren't pushed in this time! What do you owe your parents?

I was mostly raised by my Mum, who always encouraged me to follow my passions and interests, and never said anything like 'girls can't do that', or 'you'll never earn very much doing that'. I always felt anything was possible.

### What advice would you give your 19-year old self?

Never be too embarrassed to tell a driver you feel carsick and would like to stop for a while. Believe me, puking all over the upholstery of a brand-new (borrowed) sports car is far more embarrassing. At least, I imagine it would be...

### When are we going to see you down at the Lido next?

Pretty soon – Oxford has ridiculously short terms and our Christmas Vac begins on 8 December.

### Just in time to get your copy of Bec Chat then!



### Au Revoir, Dan!

By The Editor

And so, after ten years, two of them, as Pip Tunstill so aptly put it in her beautiful farewell card, in the wilderness, and eight summers spent coaching at his spiritual home, we finally said goodbye to Dan, our wonderful New Zealand coach. 2019 was his last summer in Tooting, and a Lido mourned. At the end of this final year it seems appropriate to look back on his career at our cool blue pool.



The first time I heard about Dan I was sitting in the sauna at the Lido at the end of 2013 and we were talking about the SLSC panto, a version of Cinderella featuring "Charming Dan", who was coaching the Lido's Rio Squad to travel to the eponymous Olympics (for more on Swimderella Re-Ducks, see page 10!). In this case the "no reference to any persons living or dead" disclaimer would have been dishonest, as Panto Dan, charmingly portrayed by Vince as the swimmy version of the traditional prince, was clearly based on Dan himself, not least because Dan's own sessions included Rio Squad on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Everyone extolled the excellence of his coaching, so I duly signed up the next year and discovered for myself the joys of an early morning swim session accompanied by #DanRants™ delivered in a strong New Zealand accent.

When I first started the sessions, I was a fairly newbie open water swimmer, and I spent the whole of the first summer in a wetsuit, despite Margy's best efforts to lever me out of it. In future summers I found the willpower to remove it, at first halfway through the season and then later on from the very beginning. There's no doubt that my three or four sessions a week toughened me up and made me much more cold-tolerant, although Dan himself was always perfectly agnostic about neoprene and welcomed all, however they chose to dress (with the one small proviso that swimwear of some description should be worn (a)).

The main benefit, however, was in the massive improvement of my open water skills and overall fitness, both of which happened almost without my noticing as the sessions were so much fun in themselves. I found myself comfortable in almost any

conditions in open water – treading water, swimming in a pack, sighting, managing sorting goggles or other swimwear issues, all became second nature. During my final lesson with Dan he asked me to do something I'd never done before, to kick on my back with my arms over my head, hands clasping either end of a short piece of plastic pipe to keep my hands close together. I got on with it without a second thought, and when I'd completed the drill, was surprised to hear Dan say "Most people can't do that" (the Dunning-Kruger Effect in action, if you're interested). That was Dan's genius – he made you an open water expert, but he did it so cleverly whilst distracting you with fun that you never found it hard work.

Part of his USP was the camaraderie he fostered and encouraged. As new people joined they were welcomed into the group and became part of the squad. Provided you could comfortably swim 100 yards you were in, and the Squad rallied round to help you to understand some of the more arcane instructions (for instance, when he pulled his bandana up to his eyes and started to creep along the poolside; most newbies looked totally confused as experienced members of the squad grinned widely and set off smoothly resetting their stroke during "stealth swimming", at least until somebody explained it to them). After the sessions we would often sit around the nearest table having breakfast and chatting, and, as we did in the water, making room for new arrivals - it became pretty common to have twelve people crammed relatively comfortably around a table designed for eight. I think the most we managed on one occasion was about fifteen.

Often, before or after his coaching sessions, Dan would swim himself, with Nancy Shaw until she and her family moved to Australia, then with Team Mermaids, or on his own, ploughing doggedly up and down the lane despite it being, in his own words, batshit boring. He regularly swam 11k in the mornings during the summer he was training for the Channel, and it was a joy and a privilege to walk along the side and watch his beautiful, effortless stroke (or, rather, his beautiful stroke which looked effortless thanks to decades of hard training and a relentless commitment to improvement which never left him). This inspired a lot of people, including me, to say to him when they turned up for one-on-one coaching sessions "I want to swim like you"; Dan always politely made the point that this probably wasn't possible for all sorts of reasons and that the goal should be to swim the best you possibly could as you, a firm ethos which permeated all of his training. He didn't encourage anyone to try to swim like Katy Ledecky, or indeed to train like Katy Ledecky, but he was a big fan of looking at the likes of Ledecky and other swimmers and seeing what one could take from them to improve one's own stroke. Like many master craftsmen, his seemingly easy

mastery of his skill belied a great deal of hard work and a huge hinterland of training and learning to which he remained committed.

But all good things must come to an end and Dan, like all of us, treasured his own dreams of marrying and settling down to build his business at home in Christchurch, NZ. This dream came true when he met Penelope, the love of his life, and it was in his beloved Tooting that she accepted his proposal of marriage. And thus, it transpired that 2019 was his last summer at the Lido, as he prepared to return home and, in his own words, "build a fence" as well as a business. We waved him goodbye with great sadness, albeit mixed with joy because he was heading off to live his best life with the woman of his dreams. (NB for those who had family pets as children, "He's gone to New Zealand" is not a metaphor, for at least as far as I can tell from Facebook he really is in New Zealand and not buried behind the shed with Hammy the Hamster).

The friendships he made in Tooting endure and thanks to the miracle of social media it's possible for us to keep up with each other's doings, even on different sides of the world. I'm sure that I haven't seen the last of Dan; I have a plan (a Dan plan?) to head off to New Zealand in the next two or three years, hopefully to go on one of his Real Swim Cook Island holidays, which looks like the best swimming holiday in the world, ever. In the meantime, I have the actual sign from Rio Squad on my wall at home, a gift from Dan at the end of his farewell party and a lovely reminder of so many happy memories. Thank you, Dan! We will miss you. In case you're starting to forget, here are some other aide memoires:

Rio Squad

2020 squad

The Dodos

The Feathers

We named the ladders to avoid confusion

Kevin, Sheila, oh Sheila!, Lowry (that's the boy looking ladder), Vanissa

The Cone of Speed

The Blue Clock

The Cone of Danger

The First Black Line

The Second Black Line

Turn right, turn left, say good morning to someone you don't know

Shall we get in the water?

If you know what you're doing, off you go, if you don't, look at me blankly now

We're going to go in... and out. In... and out

On a scale of one to ten, where one is falling asleep and ten is climbing Everest without oxygen in your shorts and your jandals

Swim to the Blue Clock, duck under, mine clearance training, come up at the black line

Mackerel swimming

Kick set!!!

The Aqua-Lidge

Wonder Woman

Yay distance under

Duck-dive to the first black line

Don't blow your fufu valve!

Stealth swimming, for when you want to swim over to the other side of the pool and steal someone's ice cream cone

Kick on your back to Lowry

Off the wall, off the lane-line, off your swim buddy

Don't get water up your schnozzer

There aren't any lane-lines in the Channel

Lane Split!!!

I'm electrifying the black line.....now!

Dan Rant!

One behind the other behind the other behind the other

Synchronised Swimming to Lowry

Synchronised Swimming with High Fives

I want you to swim to the deep end and stop there. Don't go beyond the deep end

Swim at your own pace

Mind the hairballs. If you become entangled, stay calm, wait for another swimmer to assist you

If you get too hot, we'll put ice-packs under your armpits (generally said when the water temperature was 16° and the air temperature including wind chill considerably below that)

Every tool in the distraction box!



### The Very Early Morning

By Mick Shepherd



I have always loved the very early day the smell of dew and dawn. The air is chill and damp (brings memories of camping, as a boy and gathering field-mushrooms with my Dad, then cooking them for breakfast!). I never really liked the later sun (when heat of day can soar) and do not care for midday, not at all, with its oppressiveness but I am at the pool each morning in the open air when all is fresh and new with early sun and cold, cold water on my skin. Not for me the later heat, the midday furnace now I shun hot climes and holidays abroad but love the early morning with its dewy smells and promise of

new day!

### Ask the Librarian

Dear Librarian

I'm hoping you can solve a somewhat knotty problem for me. I and a group of very old chums were enjoying a friendly chat over a noggin or two of mulled wine but sadly the evening deteriorated somewhat and we nearly came to blows over a difference of opinion. I have long been of the opinion that the finest Christmas film ever made is clearly It's a Wonderful Life, and the cry of "Zuzu's petals!" can unfailingly bring tears to my eyes. However, my (erstwhile) best friend argued strongly in favour of A Muppet Christmas Carol, whilst a younger member of the party spoke at length of the merits of the pile of over-sentimental tosh that is Elf. Voices were raised in favour of White Christmas, of Miracle on 34th Street, even, if you can believe it, of Home Alone! Finally, the only thing which could restore peace was mutual support for the proposition "Only someone as erudite and wise as The Librarian can resolve this one!" I beg you, dear Librarian - can you save our friendships and ensure that our traditional Boxing Day turkey curry buffet party doesn't end in tears? What is the best Christmas film of all time?

Yours Clarence Odbody (decd)

Dear Mr Odbody

Once again, The Librarian is baffled that this question even needs to be asked. And frankly quite insulted. Have you actually watched It's A Wonderful Life (or 'It's a Sucky Life' as Phoebe Buffay so wisely called it)? The film is set in the, allegedly, ideal small town of Bedford Falls which appears to not actually have a library(!). And where the night consists of watching The Bells of St Mary's and wondering when the next train to New York is. And yet, when George Bailey is transported to the delightful town of Pottersville, which has a fine library open late on Christmas Eve plus some charmingly cosy bars, he seems to think he's in some sort of dystopian nightmare. Plus, and frankly, Mr Odbody, I'm shocked that you could have missed this, the noble profession of Librarian, rather than being admired by the film makers, is seen as second best to marrying a dreary building society clerk. In what world is this film going to cheer anyone up?

The Librarian is genuinely amazed that there is any doubt about the identity of the best Christmas film ever. What could be more festive than ruthless terrorists, Alan Rickman being furrin, and Bruce Willis crawling through a heating duct in his vest? Ladies and gentlemen, I give you *DIE HARD*!

### FORTHCOMING ATTRACTIONS

### TRAINING AND EVENTS AT THE LIDO

#### It's Christmas!

### Carols and festive songs in the Lido Pavilion

Come and sing along to music by the Lido Minstrels Sunday 22 December 10 to 11am

### **Sunday 5 January Lido Pavilion**

Long ago in Pantoland The Lido crew got out of hand They thought they'd recreate their pool In a church hall, behind a school And stage a show with dance and song For what could possibly go wrong With ducks and bears upon a stage And dames and villains in a rage And Swimderella chasing Dan And Dive-in Belles upon dry land? They hired some lights and learned each line And like a dream it all went fine The audience it clapped and cheered Each time the characters appeared And arty folk with cameras three captured it for posterity But what has happened? Have we found Not all that film was shared around? It's true! There's footage yet unknown And now it's ready to be shown So why not meet in January And help refresh your memory Of those carefree pre-Brexit days When we were young and put on plays? We'll be in the Pavilion At three o'clock, so come along On Sunday: that's the fifth of Jan

-uary which is when we plan

To show the film of Swimderella

And how she hooked her charming fella You must be there – it's your good luck To watch **Swimderella Re-Ducks!** (And if you bring a cake or three



### **Festive Season Opening Times:**

Christmas Day 8am - 12 noon; Races at 10.30am Boxing Day 8am - 12 noon; Race at 10.00am New Year's Day 8am - 2pm; Race at 10.00am

**Sunday 6 January 9.30am –** after the Sunday race The Lifeguards' Tankard one width race for past and present lifeguards.

### **Normal Winter Opening Times**

Members only of course! 7am or sunrise, whichever is the later, until 2pm. The lifeguards must be able to see across the pool to allow people to swim safely, so weather conditions may affect the light.

Last swim: Please be considerate to our lovely lifeguards: Leave the pool by 1.45pm and be off the site promptly at 2pm.

Sunday Morning Races at 9.30 come rain or shine! Two widths until the water temperature drops below 40°F, 4.5°C, after which it's one shivery width.

**Save the Date:** Sunday 2 February 1 to 4pm **Cupboard Club Knees-up in the Lido Pavilion** Featuring members of the lunchtime crowd and our own Lido Minstrels. More details to follow.

### **Exercise in the lovely Lido Pavilion**

Classes for all in Yoga, Pilates, T'ai chi and Qi jong, dance with Solasta Dance Academy for adults and children, and gym for tiny tots with Benchmark Gym. **Visit www.slsc.org.uk/open-events/** 

### Calling all Green-Fingered Members!

Amanda Sitto is doing some wonderful work clearing and weeding around the retaining wall behind the Lido Pavilion. Monday mornings 10.30 and 12.30, all tools provided. Please come along and help if you can!



Before (background) and after (foreground)