

Creative Writing 2024



RURAL MUSINGS

Farmer sighs.
Another one down.
Looks warily at trees against house, against wall.
Seem sturdy enough.
Somewhat less exposed than this one was,
But it gave no clue that it was going.
Healthy.
Strong.
“What else are the capricious, unchecked elements going to throw at my land?
‘Diversification’.
That’s the ‘in’ word,

But where do you start with acres of arable land
And a head that isn't smart,
Not in that youthful, internet kind of way?
And it requires investment.
I barely made ends meet by March last year,
And now the storm of inheritance tax looms on the horizon.
I could sell up.
After all, there's a housing crisis.
I could make a mint,
Even put the youngsters into private education!
We could live in a nice cul-de-sac somewhere.

The very thought turns me cold.

I am the land, and the land is me.
I am the wind as it hits my weathered face,
Contesting, taunting, spitting blinding rain
Whilst some ewe bleats in troubled birth,
And I, with years of knowing,
Ease the little one into troubled world.
I am the sunrise,
As she flings uncontested arms across field and furze,
And cattle swing leathered haunches towards milking parlour.
I am the lonely buzzard,
Circling higher and higher on eerie cry.
Alone in vast and haunting sky.
I am the earth,
Sodden, rich and softly aromatic.

No.
Let it lie.

I am the land.
And the land will never die.”

Sue O'Higgins

A Cautionary Tale

Come, gather round and listen to this cautionary tale, a warning to those of you who scoff at the idea that trees have the power to hear, take heed and mark it well. I will take you to Redbarn where this tale begins. Redbarn is a beautiful village where, for more years than I care to count, life has carried on happily and quietly for all its residents. Redbarn has seen much since its entry in the Domesday Book, surviving wars, droughts, floods, storms and plagues to become a happy settlement, where its residents are able to trace their attachment to it through generations, going back many hundreds of years.

However, this was all to change. Isn't it strange how the inclusion of one person can alter the whole dynamic of a place or situation, causing everything that has always been, to be changed and not for the better? One such person, Ella Winters, was this catalyst of negative change. One of Redbarn's oldest residents, Miss Phyllis Timms, passed away at the splendid age of 93 and bequeathed her cottage to her distant great niece, Ella Winters. Passed away, that sounds more comforting than died, though all that lives must one day die. My own time is short so I must hasten and continue this tale of change.

Ella Winters, aged 48, unmarried and successful in her line of work looking after other people's money in some city financial institution, was more than a little surprised to learn she was now the owner of Chestnut Cottage, bequeathed to her by a great aunt she had no recollection of ever having met. Still, she came, she looked and decided she would not sell the cottage as she'd originally thought but make some changes and keep it as a weekend retreat. At first Ella Winters seemed the ideal person to become a part-time resident in Redbarn. She hosted small gatherings at Chestnut Cottage until every one of Redbarn's residents had been through her door and plied with refreshments and filled, not just with tea and cake, but the false sense of security that she was not going to alter anything. Before the new moon took its place in the star-studded night sky, Ella Winters had managed to become a governor at the village's successful little school,

plus somehow becoming elected as a member of the Parish Council, which was the heartbeat of the village. There seemed to be no stopping her. A division appeared between those who thought she was breathing new life into the village and those who were suspicious of her. I listened and waited for what might happen next.

No-one could have guessed what it was ... the splendid horse chestnut tree in the centre of the village green annoyed her. In autumn, its palmate leaves fluttered onto Chestnut Cottage's front lawn. Her tidy mind could not stand to see one curled leaf landing on its lush verdant surface. Even worse than leaves were the horse chestnuts, conkers, to be pierced and threaded with string, every boys' autumn past-time. It had to go, she was determined and placed it on the agenda for the next Parish Meeting.

I have heard, not being able to be there myself but people do talk, and I do listen, that this item on the agenda was met with disbelief by every member. The tree was almost sacred to the village, it had seen so much, it was the focal point, a meeting place. No-one knew its age, except it had been there forever and that's how it was going to be. The motion was thrown out with only one hand aloft for its removal, Ella Winter's. She fumed, she wasn't used to being beaten and this tree was not going to beat her.

Much to her annoyance, she discovered the tree was covered by a Tree Preservation Order but that was not going to stop her either, she was determined, and the tree's destruction became her obsession. There were ways around that and one was to have the tree inspected by an independent expert to check its condition and general safety. However, the expert's hefty fee was wasted as the tree was in perfect condition and a danger to no-one. A predicted storm, with gale force winds did it no damage, it was autumn, not a leaf on its outspread branches was left to trap the wind and weaken its roots.

Then people began to notice something strange... large copper nails had been hammered into the tree's gnarled trunk. Why was this happening and

who was doing it? As fast as they appeared, they were drawn out, but the damage had already been done... the copper was quietly killing the tree, its poison seeping into the sap. Outwardly all was well but inwardly its fate was determined. Ella Winters came in the dead of night, every night to replace what had been removed and bide her time, her time would come and sooner than she knew. Didn't I tell you my time was short? Haven't you realised who I am? I am that tree, and Ella Winters is killing me slowly, but I am determined she will not go unpunished. My roots are dry and drained by the copper's poison. They will not support me for much longer and I know what I must do the next time the wind blows through the canopy of my outstretched arms, whilst Ella Winters is manically fixed on her task in the dead of night. I feel a breeze, its brewing into a wild wind on a moonless, inky night...my time has come and so has Ella's. The wind is up, and the time is now...where is she?

At last, here she comes, furtively looking about, checking she is alone, but she is not alone for I am here, waiting. She is hooded in black, hammer in hand and nails in her pocket... do your worst Ella but it will be your last. Hammer raised ready, she knows not what awaits her... one final creak and my desiccated roots give in and I am felled and so is Ella. It was instant, both when the sun rises. I, too, am done. There is crushed. They will find us, no more to be said.



Alix Scott Dec 2024

THE TREE

I've had a very long life and mostly a pleasant one, so I'm not complaining.

My name is Quercus Rober. I began as an acorn that some careless bird accidentally dropped here in this wind torn valley.

I'm happy not to know which end of the bird I was dropped from. Either way, I was lucky not to be taken up by any other creature and in time I was covered in natural debris which provided a suitable environment for roots to begin to grow from my acorn into the ground. Once I had some firm roots, I began to grow a shoot above the ground and that, in turn, began to grow leaves. I grew slowly into what is called a sapling. Oh! I was young and impatient then, eager to see what I could of the world from my valley. I relished the soil I stood in and the sun and rain that helped me to grow.

After about twenty years or so I began to produce my own acorns, and these were taken by woodland creatures. They were a special favourite of the red squirrels that were prevalent in this area, although they are sadly less so now. Anyway, this means I may well have some offspring, and I've filled many quiet hours wondering how many babies I've made, and they might be.

Anyway, although I've been in this same place for several hundred years, you'd be amazed at how much I've learned about the lives and times of men and women while I've been here. Everyone one who has ever rested against my trunk, hidden in my branches, climbed them for fun or picnicked under my canopy has, in myriad different ways, fed me with information. I believe I can safely be called a wise old oak tree, much wiser, I might add, than the barn owl who has kept me company for long spells over the years.

Unfortunately, I've seen some very unpleasant goings on during my life in this valley.

When I was very young there was much fighting with hordes from the North, called Reivers. It's amazing that I escaped with my life sometimes when they were looking for wood to feed their fires and wounding my bark with their arrows.

They were dealt with eventually by a king who wanted to unify this country with the one in the North.

Then came the days when they used to hang criminals, highwaymen mostly, from my branches. Even though I knew it was none of my fault I always somehow felt complacent and therefore guilty.

I used all my strength to keep the branches they were hung from as unbending as steel. I hoped this would accord them a short, sharp drop that would speed their demise.

In those same times men came and chopped my branches to make huge bonfires. After the first time, when I knew the fires were to burn women believed to be witches, I again made myself as hard as steel to try to prevent them getting my wood. It was no good though, nothing could prevent this wanton damage to me or the horrendous fate of those poor women. I could not help them, and it breaks my heart to remember them.

Oh, but in the time, I have left I must concentrate on the good times, and there were so many throughout my life.

Looking back, it seems the weather was always wet and warm, and I flourished in those conditions, growing a rich, spreading green canopy for friendly people to sit under, reading, relaxing and romancing.

With the beginning of the railways many of my species were chopped down to make sleepers but I, perhaps because my valley was not easily accessible, escaped this fate. And the railways brought many tourists to this beautiful part of the country. Many stayed at the big, newly built, white farmhouse across the fields from here. I was glad to offer the travellers my shelter from bright sunshine or soft rain.

The names of many of these visitors will be familiar to you. The poets Wordsworth and Southey were frequent recipients of my shade in Summertime and Miss Potter often leaned against my trunk for a rest as she rambled around the countryside. John Ruskin bought a beautiful property overlooking a nearby Lake and often brought friends to picnic beneath my cooling canopy.

I learnt much about art and literature from all these visitors.

When a world war occupied the hearts and minds of the country, I learned about combat and weaponry. My valley was churned up by the training of tanks. Once again, I was fortunate not to be cut down to make way for these fearsome metal giants. I worried though about the fate of all those cheerful young men, all of them training for warfare and ready and willing to fight for their homeland. I often wonder how many of them survived.

In more recent times I have seen and felt the power of great fighter planes and bombers close up, although thankfully, in training, not getting ready for combat. They come thundering down from the North low between the mountains and into the valley, their engine noise deafening, and then sweep upward at the last moment to avoid hurtling into the peaks at the Southern end. They seem only inches above my highest branches, their downdraught shaking me to my very core.

For many years now I have sensed the change in the climate. I know it is warmer and considerably wetter. My leaves, of their own volition it seems, have begun shooting from my branches before the Spring Equinox. The vicious gales then cause them to fall prematurely, covering the valley floor with Autumn colour earlier each passing year. The valley has been flooded many times and many times too I have seen stranded walkers scrambling frantically up the steep side slopes to escape the water. I make myself believe they were all successful.

The gales, I think, have loosened my roots, the roots that have held me firm for so many years. And is it too fanciful to wonder if those powerful airplanes have some part to play in this weakening? Who knows? The floods have washed away much of the soil, which has never had much depth in this land, and have left little for my roots to cling to.

And last night was the culmination of all my problems. I held on, I fought as long and as hard as I could against the brute forces of nature, but at last I was defeated. My roots, which had held for so very long, simply and suddenly, gave up the fight in a paroxysm of weakness. One moment I was a tall, healthy specimen, the roots loosened and the next moment I had crashed helplessly to the ground. There I lay, a mighty oak, utterly beaten and betrayed by its protector and staunchest ally, Mother Nature.

So here I am this morning, broken and defeated in a world of silence. The wind and the rain have ceased, there are no creatures, no birdsong, nothing just an occasional creak from my weary body. Is the world in mourning for me perhaps? Or has it just moved on?

I'm not too sad really, as I said at the beginning, I've had a good life. And in truth I'm tired, I'm ready to bow out.

The space that was occupied by my roots is now a huge pool full of stagnant rainwater. Some of those roots are still quietly taking in small amounts of that water and that may sustain me for a little while, but I know it won't be enough to save me.

I shall occupy my last hours or days dreaming about what might happen to my dead body. Maybe I'll be fashioned into strong, solid oak furniture and be bought by sensible people who know about quality and comfort who will give me a place by a warm wood-burning stove. I'd like that.

Or I wonder if they still use good English Oak to make ships? I wouldn't mind that, a life on the ocean waves.

Maybe I'll just be chopped up and sold as firewood. Well, it'd be comforting to know I was keeping folks warm and dry when they needed it.

I'm pretty sure they use wood in paper making. I'd be honoured to be made into books, giving pleasure to people all over the world.

I might even just be pulped and spread on the land as mulch. That would be lovely, helping my fellow trees and plants to grow and flourish.

Oh yes, I've got plenty to dream about in my last hours. And though to you I may look like just a sad, broken, dead old tree, I'm not complaining

Mary Talbot Dec 2024



The Old Tree

“It’s been here a long time,” offered Fred. We were leaning against the bonnet of his ancient Land Rover surveying the fields, and more particularly the old tree.

“I reckon we should take it down before it falls. With all that ivy growing through its branches, it’s vulnerable in a strong wind, and a not so strong one maybe. At least if we do it, we can control where she falls and it won’t block the driveway or land on someone,” he added.

I hesitated, not because I didn’t agree with his assessment, he knew far more about trees than I did, but because I was rather fond of the old tree. As kids, it was part of many games; a base for hide and seek or rounders, a

finishing post for our races. We'd even used it as the mast for our pirate ship as we sailed the oceans looking for desert islands and buried treasure.

I'd climbed her many times and my brother Michael and I had competed for who could go higher. We'd marked the trunk each school holiday with the point reached and tried hard later to surpass it. Our lives, growth and youthful ambitions were all there, marked on the trunk. We'd festooned the branches with garlands and coloured lights for Christmas, for birthdays, weddings and family celebrations. In short, this tree had been part of my life for as long as I could remember. It had always been there, a part of the family and now I had to let it go.

"I reckon," Fred continued, "we can take off the big lower branches with a chainsaw. If I bring in the pickup with a ladder in back, I can get a good rope fairly high up the trunk, hitch it to the Land Rover towbar, then we'll be able to haul her down with not too much bother."

Reluctantly, I agreed. It would be like saying goodbye to an old friend but, for safety, it had to be done. And the next day, it was. It fell so easily I did wonder if I'd leaned too hard it would have gone any way.

I was sad to see it on the ground, but the shallow exposed roots clearly exposed its vulnerability. The wet ground, we'd had so much rain of late, was unable to hold it.

Soon the wood was sawn into pieces. Logs were set aside to dry in the wood store later to emerge as fuel for winter fires. Smaller branches and twigs were fed through the chipper. The tree's useful life would continue when we spread the mulch on the flower and vegetable gardens.

Even after I'd filled in the hole and it had grassed over, I missed it. We'd think about a replanting somewhere close by but in the meantime, I'd had enlarged an old photograph of it in all its former glory. This now proudly hung on my study wall, where I could look at it every day.

Pat Buckley

Conker Day

I wonder what idiot decided to start road works on one of the busiest roads in Essex a week before Christmas. Probably someone who hates life and decided to get their kicks out of upsetting the motoring public.

Yep! Starting road works on the A13 outside Lakeside, one of the largest shopping malls in the UK, and about 1/2 mile from the Dartford Crossing would do that.

My daughter asked if I would take her and her friends to Lakeside so they could do their Christmas shopping - the plan being I would take them and one of her friends' mothers would collect them and bring them home.

I got as far as Gray's, when it was obvious it would take us hours to go any further so it was decided I take them into Town so they can catch a train. It's only two stops. Everyone was happy with this arrangement, so I dropped them off and made my way home. It was slow going.

I was inching my way to the main road thinking how so much had changed over the years. The road I was trying to get to was just a side road once but now it's a double lane dual carriage way and the spinney that ran alongside the road had been felled with houses taking its place even the quarry had been developed to accommodate Lakeside Shopping Centre and the Chafford Hundred housing estate - although it's more 1000 homes rather than 100. Progress?

As I grew up around here, I knew a shortcut through the estate where I used to live - that way I could avoid most of the traffic. In the distance, the sign for South Ockendon appeared and with that a flood of memories assaulted me making me grin - the day of the Conker.

I was about ten years old and me, my friends, Melinda and Cherry together with my brother Chris and his mate Peter decided that on Saturday we were going conkering and the best tree to gather our conkers was located in a farmer's field just along from where we lived.

The weather that week was atrocious - heavy rain, thunder, lightning day after day if it carried on, we would have to abandon our plans. It's funny though. No matter how hard it rained it was always "Diane, Chris get your coat and shoes on its time for school". If it snowed it was "Diane, Chris get

your coat and shoes on its time for school. I'm sure if there was a tornado it would be "Diane, Chris get your coat and shoes on its time for school". BUT on the weekend if there was just a slight drizzle it's "Diane, Chris where do you think you're going in this weather. Get back inside this minute you can't go out in this weather".

Yep, didn't make sense then, it certainly doesn't make sense now. But this Saturday God must have loved us because the heavy black clouds vanished, and a bright autumn sun shone overhead. Conker day was here.

Armed with plastic bags to gather our precious cargo we made our way to the best conker tree ever. There were a few obstacles to overcome namely: the tree was located behind a hedge in a field and we couldn't just climb the tree to pick said conkers because rumour had it that if caught by the farmer he would shoot you first before asking questions and, worse of all, the farmhouse and barns were haunted - goodness knows where that came from.

So, as we made our way to the tree, we collected sticks and stones to throw at the branches in the hope that we would hit the conkers and they would fall to the floor and, quick as lightning gather the conkers before we got shot!!!

It took us ages to get to the tree, running through the woods, side tracked by the playing field. We were laughing and joking so much that we didn't notice that the tree had gone - vanished - disappeared. But where?

We got to the hedge and looked over it to see that this mighty conker tree had been felled. Its roots torn from the ground leaving a great big muddy crater filled with water. We were horrified not because nature had been so fierce and strong it blew the mighty tree down, but the tree had fallen away from the hedge and the conkers were even further away than if the tree had been upright. What to do?

Looking around there were no signs of anyone. We could see the farmhouse in the distant. The farmhouse was called the White House because, well, it was white. So, decision time.

It was decided, me, Melinda and Cherry would be the lookouts even though it was just empty fields and away from any roads and Chris and Peter would

gather the fallen conkers. So, armed with plastic bags they belly crawled, commando style, towards the fallen branches. They collected two bags of conkers and belly crawled back to us. By this time, me and my friends were so excited we forgot about being lookouts because – well look at all those conkers!

Chris and Peter scrambled back through the hedge and we ran all the way home. We went back to my house because dad had a hammer so we could break the conkers out of their shells. Then we would soak half of them in vinegar and bake them to make them stronger and we would "practice" with the other half before the main conker challenge began after the baking.

What we didn't account for was mum's reaction to the sight of my brother. He was covered head to toe in mud and I mean covered. Peter's mum thought it funny - so did I secretly - but mum not so much.

I suppose when I thought about it, years later I don't think I would have been happy either. The house didn't have instant hot water. I'm not sure how the water was heated but we were only allowed a bath once a week on a Sunday the rest of the time it was to boil the kettle and wash in the sink. Also, there wasn't such a thing as an automatic washing machine. Mum bought out this square thing with a mangle every Monday to do a week's wash. Basically, it was washing by hand. Thank God for modern appliances.

I didn't win any conker games that day I only got bruised knuckles where I kept missing the other conker and the string whizzed around my hand to smash into the bones - happy days.

Getting lost in my memories nearly made me miss my turning. At the top of the slip road was a hotel. The White House Farm had been turned into a hotel and was now called The White House Hotel. I wondered if it was still haunted. On a whim I decided to pop into the hotel for a cup of tea in the lounge and read the paper.

Driving through the gated entry I glanced to the right to see if there was any evidence of our tree. Of course not. It was too many years ago. The field had been turned into a golf course with lovely pristine grass. I drove down the pebbled driveway which opened out into a large turning circle with the obligatory water fountain in the middle. When I was a child, it seemed that

the farmhouse was miles away from the lane when, in fact, it was only a few hundred yards. Things certainly change with the perspective of time.

Just as I was about to park, I noticed a huge log situated by the front door and on it was a carved the word and painted black. It said "Welcome".

Was it the log from our tree? Surely after all these years the log would have rotted away or cut up for someone's log burner. Was it even a real log?

For some reason it made me sad. I was sad because not so long ago it was part of a tall imposing horse chestnut tree - its branches reaching up to the sky displaying beautiful blossom in the spring and multiple green fruits in the autumn hiding those delicious conkers which made us happy as children.

From a tall, erect, imposing horse chestnut tree to a welcome signpost - yes definitely sad. I turned around and drove home.

Diane Marsh Dec 2024



I think that I shall never see, a poem lovely as a tree

Joyce Kilmer. 1886 - 1918

The Horse Chestnut tree in the picture once stood in the middle of a field on the Isle of Wight which, by a strange coincidence, was the island where the first recorded conker competition was held in 1821. The tree was 90 years old by then and produced some magnificent conkers. The tree eventually died in 1985.

Horse Chestnut trees could live for 300 years so its 254 years of life was about average. Despite dying in 1984 it eventually blew over in 1987 after Michael Fish told England that there wouldn't be a hurricane.

Back in the late 1700's, when it was just a sapling, a lad from one local village, John Smith, and a girl from another village, Jenny Mason, used to meet by it every Sunday afternoon come rain or shine. They were teenagers and they were very much in love. Jenny was upset one Sunday afternoon when John wasn't at the tree to meet her. She later found out that John's mother was seriously ill and, as his father had died some years before, there was nobody to look after her, but him. It was a few weeks later that John's mother died. Before she was taken from the house for the funeral, he removed her small gold wedding ring from her finger as he had plans for it.

It was the 1st of August when he and Jenny next met at their tree. He showed it to her and, going down on one knee and with a smile on his face, he asked her to marry him. The loving hug she gave him in response was her answer. John then explained that he wanted to delay their marriage for two years as he'd heard that there was plenty of money to be made in the New World and he wanted their married life to start with some money behind them. Reluctantly, Jenny agreed. To keep the ring safe, they buried it on the north side of the tree trunk on the basis that the tree would always be there and north would always be north. On John's return they would dig it up on the day they planned to become man and wife. John set off early the next morning. He never came back, and Jenny never knew why. In her

heart she knew he'd been faithful to her but not knowing what had happened to her true love was torture. She said a prayer for him every night until her death many years later. She'd never moved from the village as she hated the thought that, if she did, and John came back looking for her, they may never have met again. On the 1st of August every year until the day she died she would walk to their tree and stand on the north side. It was as close as she could get to the ring she knew, deep in her heart, she'd never get to wear.

Years later, the tree would be used for archery practice. A rough target had been painted on some old cloth which was tied around the tree and served perfectly well for men and boys to aim at. Some of the arrows shot by the boys bounced off the target but some others, shot by the men, pierced the cloth and stuck in the tree. Generally, those arrows could be pulled from the trunk but not those shot by the local blacksmith. His strength meant the arrows were stuck in the trunk never to be pried loose.

Every autumn, the same boys who'd practiced their archery by shooting arrows at the tree, would collect conkers from around it and play with them for hours. One of the boys, a strong, good looking lad called Gerald, decided he'd climb the tree to get some of the biggest conkers from the topmost branches. Sadly, a branch he was standing on gave way, and he fell onto the hard ground under the tree, and onto the top of one of the roots growing from it. He broke his knee and ankle so badly he was never able to walk again without a crutch.

When his younger brothers took the King's shilling to go fight for their country, he couldn't go with them. Every day, from the day they both died on the Western Front until the day he died, he felt crushing guilt. He should have been with them, to look after them, but he wasn't. Every time he looked at the tree he hated it more and more.

After the war, when things started to get back to normal, some of the children from the local villages found some rope and a board and made a swing from one of the lower boughs of the tree. There was lots of happy laughter then but, as the children grew up and moved away, the swing was

left to rot. In the way these things happen, it was the first bough to hit the dirt and break when the hurricane blew the tree over. One of the ropes had rotted away but the other was found by the men who'd come to cut it up, still tied to the bough by an unknown boy so long ago.

During the second war, a German fighter plane was shot at by anti-aircraft fire, The plane was badly damaged and, despite the pilot being severely wounded, he'd tried to make an emergency landing in the field by the tree. As the plane neared the ground, he saw the tree through his cracked, blood-spattered windscreen and, just before he passed out, wondered if he was going to hit it.

Luck was with him as the plane missed the tree, hit the ground hard and slithered to a stop. The pilot was pulled from the plane in a very bad way but was looked after by some local villagers who took pity on him. He moved back to Germany after the war to be re-united with his wife and children. However, before he went, he insisted on having a photograph taken of him and the people who'd nursed him back to health so he could show his wife. In the background of the picture was the tree he thought he was going to hit.

In the 1960's a pop concert was held in the field and two young lovers carved their initials of J and J into the bark of the tree. It was the second time the tree was involved with young lovers with the same initials. The men who been given the job of cutting up the dead tree noticed the initials and spent a few moments wondering who they were and what'd happened to them. Of course, nobody would ever know. Like the time a girl's kite had become stuck in the branches and the time a boy, learning to ride his bike, wobbled into it and fell off.

It was all in the past.

One of the workmen cutting up the tree found some small pieces of metal lodged in the bark but had no idea what they were so threw them into the trailer to avoid them going through the shredder. He couldn't have possibly known but they were the misshapen arrow heads from the blacksmith's arrows he'd shot at the tree during archery practice all those years ago.

As the tree was being pulled about, John's mothers wedding ring, the one he always intended for Jenny, dropped from where it was tangled in the roots of the tree into the pond of dirty water that'd formed when it blew over. Now, it's buried deep in the mud used to fill the hole, it's still there and still waiting. Maybe, in time, someone with a metal detector would find it but the ring itself could never convey to the finder the years and years of sadness it'd endured.

George Clarke Dec 2024

