

# WINNER

## GILWERN u3a SHORT STORY COMPETITION 2024

A Letter to Sal – by Hilary Lipscombe

Dear Sal

I am writing, after what I would say has been the worst day of my life! And to you because we have shared so many good and bad times that I am hoping you will understand why? Richard certainly doesn't and he says that I am over reacting and everything will be fine!

This morning, on my day off, the children went to school and Richard to work. Then we were all in separate places and I couldn't bear it if something happened whilst we were apart, I just wanted us to be altogether.

I had to get through this day until they were all home again. Not watch or listen to the news and not panic. Why was today different? I have been anxious for weeks now yet today seemed so much worse.

I wonder if this is how families felt during WW2, with Father's serving in the Forces, children evacuated and mothers left behind. Yet surely, we shouldn't feel so helpless now in the 80s. I think my problem is I am a doer and the fact I can't prepare or take care of my family is destroying me.

We haven't received any real information as to how to act in an emergency so it has been impossible to take any useful precautions. There is a leaflet in the house 'Protect & Survive' (1980) but even if we had followed those fairly pointless instructions, today with everyone else gone from home might I have been the only one to survive? How awful would that be? Or perhaps the children could be left with no parents and no understanding of what has happened, after all they are still very young.

Of course, I know that the chances for anyone surviving a nuclear attack, short or long term, are low. In fact, I think perhaps nuclear annihilation wouldn't be too bad if we were lucky enough to be directly under the bomb but, altogether not apart like this?

I looked it up and it seems I have a label 'nucleomitophobia', meaning 'an anxiety or even a phobia in the face of a potential nuclear holocaust'. Seems a sensible phobia to me and a shame more people in power don't have it! It was coined in the 60's during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Do you remember those marches when we were protesting with CND?

All those miles clearly didn't make much difference as here we are 20 years later in a similar position.

I tried all the methods I could think of to keep the gnawing anxiety at bay. Concentrated on brief tasks, mostly in the garden, which is looking beautiful by the way, and deep breathing. I went for a walk but couldn't go far as I felt the need to be close to home. It has been impossible to relax. Neighbours I met say I am seeing a problem where there isn't one and you can't live your life in fear and perhaps they are right but I am hoping you understand. Even if you think I am mad too, at least I have explained why to someone.

Sorry I really didn't explain why today started off so badly although I guess, even on the other side of the world, you have heard the same news. The attack by the Soviets on the Korean commercial airliner, with 269 people dead, created a visceral response in me. I felt sick and dizzy, helpless and angry because it just needs a distant politician with too much ego or pride to make a decision that will result in disaster for the world. Or, with everyone so trigger happy a nuclear war could even happen by accident?

As tensions have been rising over the months between the Soviets and the USA again we seem to be entering another Cold War. Our strong alliance with the USA, with a cowboy for a President, makes us so vulnerable. Three hard line Soviet leaders in as many years isn't helping and we have a female Prime Minister for the first time and she has balls – and, as you know, from me that is not a necessarily a compliment! No-one is prepared to back down. I feel we can only hope that with all those in power so old, with luck, they will be gone soon and perhaps a new generation will be better?

Finally, I was able to fetch the children home from school and Richard came home from work. The children didn't understand why I hugged them so much and Richard despairs of me!

The children are now fast asleep and we are off to bed soon and then the day will be over. We are still here. So far no retaliation, no triggers pushed, just posturing. The problem hasn't gone away and it could get worse, especially as we become a target with US Missiles coming to our shores and the USA plan for their missile detection satellites. But for a time hopefully we will all be safe together, I will have to learn how to deal with my anxiety and get on with life.

Thanks for listening Sal and hope I haven't raised your anxiety levels too much? Anyway, you won't receive this for weeks and tomorrow will be a better day.

Lots of Love Anne