

Off the record

by Finnegan Flawnt

"It was all miserable: the weather, the health, the job, the relationship. everything seemed soggy and wet. I had a cold. I couldn't face one more day in the office or else. Nobody loved me or if they did, I had not met them yet."

These were the first sentences of my 1957 novel "*Misty Moods*" for which I received 1000 Pounds since the editor, who had lost her man in the war, developed a crush on me when I entered her office waving my paragraph like the flag of an unknown, brave nation. But I could never get past the beginning ... the 1960s rolled around, and throughout the decade, I had the most marvellous ideas where the story might go — never wrote them down, because I had so many ideas, you know. And I was busy building a writer's life in Camden Town. Which included reading what I had already written (the famous paragraph that had brought me a contract) to big-eyed young women looking for artsy types between the pillows of this party or that and subsequently taking said women to bed for a night or for weeks, but never longer, because I was not going to be jailed between a marriage license and a mortgage. Like so many of us, hopeful ones, hopeless ones, poets and petty penmen, who worked as bartenders, librarians, substitute teachers, anything.

Forward arrow in time ... at the end of that, I must say in hindsight, terrible period, I discovered, initially to my amazement, that I had not aged at all! When I looked in the mirror, my beard was full and black as it had always been, and my excesses had not left any trace around my eyes. My forehead was a little wrinkled from the continuous effort of thinking lasting thoughts, but these wrinkles I knew and they had been my trusty companions for many years. My body was trim and lean — only my spirit had put on weight over time.

I was looking for medical reasons at first but lacking the training

(for anything, really, other than making it sound to others that I knew something that, in fact, I did not know), I got no further.

Examination by specialists did not yield any new insights either — since I had not been a subject of interest to science before, no record of my state of health had been fixed, and science is nothing without record: it is, I must conclude, a human activity so dependent on fragile external memory and data as to be completely useless, at least when compared to the tangible power of spirit and the tender, but constant, pull of creativity that we feel with our whole being, not just mediated through tubes or borne away by bookishness, to rot on shelves.

So I found myself suddenly torn out of humanity because I would not age. And if I would not age, I could not fold my life up neatly near its end like old knickers, I could not die. And if I could not die, I could not look back at anything worth doing or at things undone and also worth doing in those last moments that we all anticipate unconsciously, all the time, awake or asleep. I had no longer a choice — short of suicide, my life might never end, so I had to give up nothingness and find something worth doing. This was only the beginning of my journey, the well from which my writing sprang like a yeasty fount.

