

THUNDERBIRDS ARE GO!

It is one a.m. in the morning on Monday of this week. Following a confusing period of mental incapacity at work, around lunchtime, I find myself enjoying my tenth hour in the emergency department of Bournemouth General Hospital. As I am near the white board, I hear the nurses refer to me as "The neuro in obs". Strokes and heart attacks have been mentioned to me and I am still a little confused but strangely not unhappy in this busy environment. My lovely wife, who, like me, will fill times of worry or anxiety exercising her organisational skills, has left me with paper and a pen- to do my creative writing homework. I find myself thankful for the opportunity to test my mental faculties but daunted by what the results might reveal. The last sentence contains separate messages for my wife and son.

To a child Christmas means decorations, relatives and presents, but not necessarily in that order. My first memory of Christmas seems to be the acquisition of plastic models of the Thunderbird vehicles at the festively decorated home of my paternal grandparents in Swindon.

The Gerry Anderson "Supermarionation" classic that is Thunderbirds first aired in September 1965 when I would have been four and a half years of age. I was Scott Tracy. My friends and I would run around the playground with our arms swept back making the noises that only little boys do. We were International Rescue.

I am proud that I am of the very first generation to be enchanted by Andersons finest work, but perhaps just a little jealous that my son born more than thirty years later was to benefit from 'Thunderbirds on demand'. I had to wait years to watch my favourite episodes again, and then only if no *older eyes* wished to view the other channel.

Although the joy of unwrapping Thunderbird 2 remains with me to this day, there is a Thunderbird Christmas moment that I cherish more.

I was at the decorated home of my son's paternal grandparents on Christmas day 2002. Father Christmas had, as always, been quite generous to my son, Charlie. I think that the boy would have been content with just the vehicles from the 'Bob the Builder' series but there was more to be unwrapped.

The set that my son received that year contained all of the main vehicles from the episodes including the pink Rolls Royce (Fab1) and the space station Thunderbird 5.

I sat with my wife and parents and watched my little boy reveal these treasures. As he admired the little plastic models that surrounded him, he was overcome with joy. The gifts had come his way from an absent benefactor so Charlie had no one to thank. Without raising his eyes from the assortment of little toys spread about him, he cried out to anyone that could listen: "Oh- I'm very pleased with this!"

And I am very pleased with him.

Mark Harland, October 2009.