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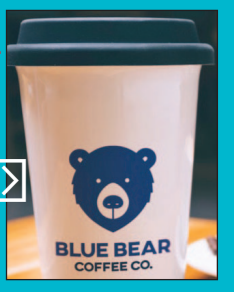
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Message of hope after nightmare accident

A Christian family in South Norfolk suffered their worst nightmare when seven-year-old Nathanael was run over by their own car and suffered catastrophic life-threatening head and brain injuries. **Keith Morris** reports.

The horrific split-second accident happened in April 2022 and changed the lives of Nathanael and parents Alan and Lindsay Howes for ever.

Despite a devastatingly traumatic past 18 months the couple are praising God and thanking Him for saving their son and for the miraculous healing journey He is taking them on. They, along with Nathanael and their two adult daughters,

Gabriella and Leila, are keen to share their story of suffering to offer hope and encourage to others, and have been doing so in churches across the region.

It was the end of just an ordinary Monday back in April 2022. Nathanael was running along a verge of a private road near their home in the South Norfolk village of Wreningham, when he tripped, fell and went under the back wheels of their car which was driving slowly down the driveway. Nathanael sustained critical injuries and was attended to at the scene by East Anglian Air Ambulance and the emergency services.

Nathanael was flown straight to Addenbrookes paediatric intensive care unit and major trauma hospital for the region, where he was put into an induced coma for four weeks and underwent two brain surgeries and many procedures. Nathanael's traumatic brain injury left him unable to sit, stand, walk, talk, eat or drink.

The family spent three months in Addenbrookes Hospital and were then transferred to The Children's Trust, specialist neuro rehabilitation centre for children with brain injuries, in Surrey, where they spent a further three months undergoing an intensive 12-week neuro rehabilitation programme.

During this time hundreds of Christians prayed locally, nationally and internationally for Nathanael.

"We are incredibly grateful for all the support of family and friends and many, many, Christians known and unknown to



Lindsay, Nathanael and Alan Howes at their South Norfolk home and, below, Nathanael with his new powerchair.

us," said Alan. "We have seen some miraculous answers to prayer as Nathanael has overcome every prognosis put upon him from quadriplegia to remaining on a ventilator. By God's miraculous healing and grace, Nathanael has relearned to sit, stand, play, drink, eat and is taking steps with support. In August he said 'mum' a first word we pray of many more to come."

In October, thanks to the overwhelming generosity of many friends and supporters, the couple were able to buy a powerchair for Nathanael, giving him some freedom and independence.

Back in July, after almost a year back at home and reconnecting with their family

and church friends at Servant's Church, Alan and Lindsay began to feel that their story of suffering should be one to share with others to offer hope and encouragement.

A Christian brother and friend offered to design and build them a website which launched back in July. Now they are writing weekly blogs on various topics, reaching out to others with their testimony and sharing questions and insights about suffering. They are beginning to speak and share their story together as a family in churches across Norfolk and beyond and are working on publishing a book to offer hope and encourage others who are in the midst of suffering.

"Our suffering journey is ongoing as we come to terms with the effects of Nathanael's traumatic brain injury, but God is with us every step of the way, His strength and mercy keep us moving forward and we pray and believe that Nathanael will continue to heal," said Alan.

"We are Jesus followers and suffering survivors, we want to share the hope, encouragement and strength we have personally experienced with others in need.

"Life isn't actually free from pain and suffering for the majority of us, and yet it is through these very experiences that we can find hope, encouragement and even joy from God who promises to carry us, sustain us and give us strength in suffering."

To contact the couple or read their blog visit: www.strengthinsuffering.com



Army's Xmas present appeal

The Salvation Army in Norwich and surrounding area is once again calling on the community to donate new toys to its Christmas Present Appeal and support families who will struggle to make ends meet over the festive season.

■ Every year The Salvation Army asks people to donate new toys and gifts for children whose families cannot put food on the table, heat their homes or pay their bills.

Last year, Norwich Citadel Salvation Army distributed gifts to more than 1000 children and the church and charity fears more people will need support this year.

Salvation Army church leader Captain Tracey Bale said: "Helping a parent provide a gift for their child is more than just financial support, it brings the joy of Christmas into their home. We have seen the devastating effect of the cost of living crisis. People are really struggling and so we are doing what we can to relieve the pressure this Christmas.

"The Salvation Army's present appeal is an opportunity for people in our communities to embrace the spirit of Christmas and give to families and individuals who have nothing. We have been humbled by the public's generosity over the years and hope this year our appeal will be able to bring some comfort and joy to people who are struggling the most."

Major Paul Robinson from Norwich Mile Cross Corps, said: "We are privileged to assist people throughout the year with food, clothes, and furniture. But at Christmas, there is an extra need for support. We view the Be a Star appeal, as an opportunity for the community to support the community. Each gift will find a home that values the community in which they live."

The appeal is again being supported by Wymondham-based Orchard Toys.

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GOOD NEWS

FOR NORWICH & NORFOLK

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Mina Youseff and his wife Charlotte Ashenden.

Egyptian Christian Mina Youssef is a highly-qualified breast surgeon at the Norfolk & Norwich University Hospital (NNUH) and also a hospital ship volunteer. **Helen Baldry reports.**



Norfolk surgeon lives out his faith

In 2008, following seven years extensive training at Cairo University, Mina relocated to the UK to qualify under the British system. With British citizenship, he has been working here ever since. Norfolk life began as a locum consultant in King's Lynn, but he soon had a permanent role at the N&N.

Mina and his wife (Christian portrait artist Charlotte Ashenden) greatly enjoy living in Norwich, a city with so much interest, culture and variety. He finds the British people to be some of the friendliest he has experienced.

Mina says, "I feel that God put me in this place. As a Coptic Christian in the UK, I feel so fortunate. This is one of most welcoming societies I could ever exist in."

Mina has found a genuine interest from people wanting to know, not just him personally, but also about his Middle-Eastern culture.

Mina is Coptic (meaning 'Egyptian') Orthodox, a branch of Orthodoxy that began 2,000 years ago when apostle St Mark brought the Gospel to a shoe-maker in northern Egypt! Since then, the Liturgy (their term for the Sunday service) has changed little. It is similar to the better-known Greek Orthodoxy with its symbolism, iconography and chanted, scriptural hymns. The wording is in English, Arabic and Coptic, each shown on a screen at the front.

Interestingly, the Coptic language – now only used within the liturgies – is directly descended from that of the pharaohs and based on the Greek alphabet.

Mina and Charlotte worship at St Athanasius Church in Easton, where Mina

serves as a deacon.

Mina is an unusual men's name here, but in Egypt it's more commonplace as Christian boys are often named after St Mina, a much-loved saint. Christianity is a minority religion in Egypt, and life is not always easy in a country where followers of Christ are persecuted. In 2015, in Libya, twenty-one young Copts were publicly killed by ISIS and footage was shown around the world. Mina says that Copts are defiant and brave. They celebrate their faith and persevere with good humour despite the many challenges.

Even in the UK, it is not always possible to be open about faith in professional settings, but Mina is a part of the Christian Medical Fellowship group (CMF) in Norfolk, its members offering each other welcome spiritual support.

Mina feels his work as a cancer surgeon is a vocation. He says "Being a doctor gives me a great opportunity to live a lot of Christian values, such as empathy, compassion and looking after vulnerable people. As a doctor you practice these every hour of every day. Whenever I'm with someone in clinic, all my focus is there."

Last summer Mina fulfilled a long-held dream: volunteering as a general surgeon for the medical charity Mercy Ships on a mission to Senegal. He was excited to find himself on their newest hospital ship, the vast Global Mercy. Mina has already signed up to join them in 2024.

In addition to his role at the NNUH, Mina also lectures at UEA Medical School and has a private practice at the Spire Hospital in Norwich.



Norwich Post Office is now a community hub

Just over a year ago, Adam Jackson and his business partner Pete Tyson took over the running of Earlham Post Office, and their vision is for it to become a hub of the community. **Helen Baldry reports.**

The Earlham House shopping complex just off Earlham Road in Norwich already had a sense of community, with a couple of busy coffee shops, a supermarket, thriving charity shops and other small businesses. The Post Office had been run for over 30 years by Martin and Beverly Baker, members of the Salvation Army, and Adam and Pete were pleased to continue the Christian values that had already been established.

Both committed Christians, Adam and Pete, see their venture as a way to serve God and demonstrate their faith in the way that they run the business. Pete said: "We feel strong confirmation that there's a kingdom expression going on. The day-to-day is worked out by making ethical choices in terms of our stock and how we treat our customers and our staff."

Adam said: "The whole area is a community. When we were setting up, all the shop keepers helped us. We are knitted in to the place."

The first year has not been without its challenges. They describe a "roller-coaster in terms of finance" when opening a business during a cost-of-living crisis, plus factors that were out of

their control. Such as 18 days of Royal Mail strikes last winter during the busiest time of the year, plus a cyber-attack earlier this year when lots of companies migrated to other providers.

Adam recognises that sometimes we have to battle to make something good. He said: "Doing the right thing is very rarely an easy choice."

Adam's background is as a sole trader in various enterprises, including website design and video editing, plus organising the annual Treehouse Festival in Norfolk. Pete used to work for Norwich Youth for Christ before an eight-year period working for the Post Office in various roles including corporate training and as a branch manager. The pair set a culture and tone to get things achieved, but are hands-off in the day-to-day running of the business, enabling the Post Office staff to take a front role.

The retail offering in the shop is mainly cards and packaging, but an area of the shop is dedicated to local craftspeople, mostly within a 15-mile radius, to sell their wares, giving them a local shop front to grow their businesses and keep the majority of the profit. The craft space is rotated every month and will be doubled over the Christmas period. Pete said: "You'll find something that will tick your Christmas gift list."

Army's Xmas present appeal

■ Continued from page 1.

Chloe Chambers, senior marketing executive, said she was delighted to be involved: "For more than 30 years, the Salvation Army has been transforming Christmas for vulnerable families across Norfolk. Orchard Toys are delighted to once again be supporting this initiative, and we hope that our donation of games and puzzles will help make Christmas fun for many children in our local area and beyond."

Donations can be dropped off at:

- Castle Quarter Shopping Centre management office on level 3 from Monday to Friday 8am to 5pm.
- The Salvation Army, St. Giles Street, Monday to Friday 8am-3pm.
- The Salvation Army Church and Care & Share shops on Boundary Road, Mile Cross Monday - Friday, 9am - 4pm.

The Salvation Army will sort and distribute the gifts to children and families through schools.

Gifts can include anything from educational toys, baby clothes, bath toys, books, including learn to read books (for babies and toddlers) to dolls and action figures, sports equipment, toiletries (please try to ensure non-allergic ingredients if possible), gloves, scarves, hats and hair accessories.

Meanwhile, local people are being invited to carol services being held at Norwich Citadel on December 3 and 10 at 6pm. On December 17, a service is being held at 3pm and 6pm. Come early to ensure you get a seat.

Visit: www.salvationarmy.org.uk/christmas-present-appeal



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Choir gets them dancing on the pews

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Follow our adventures on:

In 2011, when Lolo Wynans and Andy Hudson were asked by a friend to form a Gospel choir, the intention was to do just one concert. Church friends and acquaintances from across Great Yarmouth were quickly recruited and the Joyous Praise Rockin' Gospel Choir was born.

Lolo and Andy had never coordinated a choir until this point and many of the choir members had never sung gospel music before. In the process of preparing for the concert Andy and Lolo learned not only to lead a choir, but also to arrange and compose music.

The concert was a success, and the choir enjoyed it so much that they persuaded Lolo and Andy to continue. The original name for the choir, Joyous Praise Rockin' Gospel Choir, was based on Psalm 100, which expresses the ethos of the choir. Andy explains: "Musically, Lolo and I are inspired by West Indian / black American gospel music of the sixties and seventies and the spirit of enthusiastic, joyful praise it embodies. Our aim is to bring that joy into the world."

Andy and Lolo believe that this is what draws people to the choir. There is a fun and friendly atmosphere at rehearsals, and for many of the 18 members it feels like a family. Lolo recalls how one member told them that being part of the choir had made a huge difference to him after his wife had died. Another member has shared how joyful she feels by the end of each rehearsal.

The choir is now known as the Happy Day Gospel Choir (the previous name having proved too difficult to remember!) Members include those from a range of Christian churches and denominations (including Baptist, Anglican and Methodist), as well as those who aren't believers. There are no auditions and everyone is welcomed and valued regardless of age and ability. They are drawn together by their love of the

music and the joy it brings.

The Happy Day Gospel Choir has put on many concerts, mostly in churches around Norfolk, contributing to raising around £10,000 for various charities. Concerts are very special for the choir, as they can really feel a sense of the joy being shared with those who come along. Audience participation is welcomed and encouraged.

Andy explains: "The more the audiences get involved (clapping, singing along, even dancing), the more they reflect back the joy, and the more it grows. That's a precious experience."

One particularly fond memory for Andy and Lolo is of a concert at a church where the vicar got into it so much that she was standing on a pew dancing.

Lolo adds: "For me as the pianist/conductor, I also love the experience of seeing the choir really enjoying singing, whether at rehearsal or in concerts, seeing their smiles, their enthusiasm, watching them having a fabulous time."

The choir has a wide repertoire of songs and styles. Some are gospel classics like Oh Happy Day, or Lean on Me, others are older traditional songs like Down by the Riverside and This Little Light of Mine.

They have also created their own versions of songs, for example an adaptation of Mary Mary's gospel song 'Shackles' which they have given a Latin feel and a rendition of Kumbaya which sets the original words to a newly composed tune, inspired by African music.

Most recently the Happy Day Gospel Choir performed at Great Yarmouth Minster as part of the Great Yarmouth Arts Festival.

The choir meets on Friday evenings at Caister Methodist Church and welcomes new members.

They are also glad to receive invitations to sing. Contact Lolo to find out more at lolobongo@yahoo.com or on 07982 232735.

Paul's 70km run to mark 70th birthday

To mark his 70th birthday, Norwich man **Paul Coleman** did not have a party or eat a cake – instead he ran 70km to raise £7,000 for a development project in West Africa. **Peter Bending** reports.

Paul runs to keep fit and wanted to mark his 70th birthday on Sunday October 8 in a significant way. "While on one of my runs in May this year, which was a 7k run, I realised that 7 was the predominant number. So, why not run 70k on my 70th birthday to raise £7,000," said Paul.

"I was well aware that I could not run 70k in my own strength, but, if I commit this challenge to God and do it for Him, then He would sustain me and He would get the glory."

So, at 5am on his 70th birthday, Paul set out from his home in Spixworth. He headed to Wroxham where he joined the Bure Valley path onto Aylsham on Marriotts Way, and from there onto Soul Church and the finish line.

Paul said: "Believe me when I say that this challenge pushed me to my absolute limits. To overcome the physical pain, I had to overcome the negative thoughts that tried to get in my head."

All money raised will go towards a new agroecology centre initiative in Togo which will help benefit many of the students and families sponsored through Soul Church, helping them learn to develop sustainable agriculture practices.

"I wanted to complete a challenge that the people of Soul Church could get behind and feel a part of. There are currently around 110 children sponsored by people who are part of Soul Church through Compassion, and the majority of those children are in Togo," said Paul.

The centre will become the heart of agroecology learning and development in the Maritime Region and will include: a solar-powered borehole, a training room/office and a dormitory with toilets, and a biodigester for turning organic waste into fertiliser.

The aim is to construct and implement an agroecological centre by June 2024 and teach a 3-year programme of agroecological techniques to 2,000 youth and 1,500 caregivers by December 2025.

"Our vision is to take a group of sponsors from Soul Church to visit the centre once it is up and running, so they can see first-hand the effect that their contribution has made and raise awareness in our local community and beyond," said Paul.

Paul and his wife, Linda have been sponsoring children through Compassion since 2007. In 2018 they were given the opportunity to visit one of their



sponsored children in Uganda. The trip was caught on camera and turned into the moving film, Meeting Violet.

"During that visit, God revealed more of His plan for the next season of our lives to get more involved with the work of Compassion which meant stepping down from our staff role at Soul Church."

They now volunteer for Compassion at Christian events, along with travelling the country speaking to churches which partner with Compassion, inviting them to sponsor more children.

"For Linda and myself, our commitment to God has always been Isaiah 6:8, and for us to fulfil that commitment, we realise that we both need to be physically fit and spiritually ready to respond when God says 'who will go for me?'. When God placed this challenge on my heart, I knew that, with my grey hairs, I could not do it in my own strength, but all He required was for me to say, "here I am, use me" and I knew that He would give me the strength to complete the challenge and bring glory to His name, not mine," said Paul.

He reached his target of £7,000, and donations continue to come in. "Thank

you to everyone who has donated to this fundraiser that will ultimately bring huge relief to children and families in Togo, you are incredible," said Paul.

You can still donate at challenges.compassionuk.org

Serve Asia

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Has Christmas lost its sparkle?

Anna Heydon, Imagine Norfolk Together Development Worker and a Network Norfolk content editor, has started sorting through her Christmas decorations, but finds that some have lost their sparkle.

■ When I haul out my stash of Christmas decorations each year, there are always a few that look a bit tired: fabric that has become faded and baubles that are scratched in spite of the bubble wrap. Some I get rid of, others I hold on to for sentimental reasons. I feel a kind of affinity to those ornaments at times.

After decades of Christmases there are occasions when my sparkle also feels tarnished by less cheerful memories, and I feel like I might crack under the pressures that the season brings. There are times when Christmas doesn't even feel worth holding on to.

My daughter, on the other hand, is full of anticipation and eagerness about Christmas. She starts singing Christmas songs in October and begs me to decorate the house in November. I love her enthusiasm and cheerfulness about Christmas even though I don't always feel able to attain it myself.

It reminds me of Jesus' words that "unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the Kingdom of heaven. The greatest in the Kingdom of heaven is the one who humbles himself and becomes like this child," (Matthew 18:3,4).

Children often have an openness which allows them to experience life and relationships in a way which we sometimes close ourselves off to as adults. Having been hurt many times, we may build walls around ourselves to protect ourselves from pain, but they can also sometimes shut out joy and keep other people at a distance, even God. However, Jesus asks us to make ourselves vulnerable to Him; to be humble and break down our walls so that He can come in.

After all, at Christmas we celebrate the fact that God has led the way: He literally became a vulnerable child for us. In return, this Christmas as I put up the decorations, I'm going to try to open up my jaded heart and sing a Christmas song to Him.



Eldred Willey, right, with Joab, WASH field officer for International Needs, at one of the charity's boreholes.

Norfolk content editor returns to Uganda

Former **Network Norfolk** content editor **Eldred Willey** has recently visited Uganda with Christian development charity International Needs to support a safe drinking water project.

■ After more than three years serving on the website team, Eldred has reconnected with his passion for Africa. Earlier this year he travelled to Uganda to support a project to provide clean safe water to poor communities along the northern shore of Lake Victoria. He was working with a small Christian charity called International Needs which is drilling boreholes, creating covered springs, and installing tanks to collect rainwater from roofs.

"The poverty there is desperate," said Eldred. "Off the tourist route I encountered ragged barefoot children on rutted dirt tracks, a secondary school with just gaps in the brickwork for doors and windows, a primary school classroom built from wattle and daub.

"The people are so destitute that they cannot even afford to lay proper foundations, and because the ground is sandy, any substantial building like a toilet block collapses in the wet season, exposing the people to waterborne diseases like dysentery and cholera."

International Needs has been digging down three metres to lay solid foundations for its gender-segregated, disability-adapted and brightly painted toilet blocks, which it is giving to schools and communities.

It is also speaking up for justice. In nine of the fifteen villages where it has applied to drill boreholes, the government has refused permission. Instead, the government has erected what look like roadside petrol pumps, where piped water can be bought with a card payment. The most vulnerable people, however – like the elderly and single mothers – cannot afford to pay and continue to walk a kilometre with jerrycans to draw water from a swampy area. The government does not want competition from the charity's boreholes, because the water there is free.

Eldred also met children with a disability who are being sponsored from the UK through International Needs. They are attending Bishop West Primary in Mukono, a mainstream Christian school which has integrated an extraordinary proportion of children with a disability, including deafness, Down's Syndrome and autism.

For more information, contact Eldred on eldred@ineeds.org.uk. You can also find out more on www.ineeds.org.uk

Anti-slavery organisation disguised as a coffee shop

Ethical coffee supplier **Blue Bear**, whose sole aim is to combat modern slavery, has opened a coffee and doughnut shop in the heart of **Norwich** to progress its "mission from God". **Tony Rothe** reports.

Founder Bryn Frere-Smith explains, "Blue Bear Coffee Co was registered as a social enterprise in September 2018 and for the last five years, we have existed predominantly as a supplier. The risk and expense involved in setting up a coffee shop always prevented us from taking that step, choosing instead to remain as an e-commerce business. And so far, it's been an unquestionable success, with over £50,000 donated to anti-trafficking projects, and countless more impressions made on people wanting to lend their support to making slavery a thing of the past.

"However, at the beginning of July this year, we received the keys to an old jeweller's shop in the historic area of Tombland, Norwich, opposite the Cathedral. We have a three-year lease on the place. The plan is to turn it into an espresso bar and coffee merchants, expanding our range of single origins to a point of ridiculousness, and serving the best take-out coffee and doughnuts in the east of England! It also, more importantly, gives us the opportunity to fly the flag for justice, bringing our mission into the community and communicating the global issue of modern slavery and human trafficking to every latte-buying customer we meet."

Bryn clearly attributes the success of Blue Bear so far to God: "This is God's project not mine. God brought along my original business partner, Josh Clarke, the relationship with the coffee supplier, Clifton, and all the different people he put around me to do the website. God orchestrated all of that – I could never have made that happen. I had not even been back in the UK a year and in less than nine months we had a great company that was up and running. That's amazing and only the Lord's providence will allow that."

The Blue Bear story starts back in 2014, however, when Bryn left his job with the police force and set up a security consultancy with a

Bryn Frere-Smith serving in the Blue Bear Coffee Shop in Tombland, Norwich, also right. Pictures by Sally Frere-Smith.



former colleague. He then took a sabbatical and spent a year working for the International Justice Mission, travelling to Santo Domingo in 2017 to investigate the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

Bryn takes up the story: "I found myself fully embracing the colloquial culture of the country, and I soon created my own, imperfect literary saying. "Siempre para ti." Meaning, "Forever for you." It became my maxim, my motto. So much so, that at my leaving party, friends and colleagues decked out the meeting room to look like a coffee shop, with stencilled brown

craft paper on the walls to appear as exposed brick, a display of different coffee brewing methods arranged on the table and our very own menu of hot drink options at the fictional coffee shop 'Siempre para ti.'

"That was the other thing I was known for, my plan to open a coffee and doughnut shop. I talked about it to the point of nausea. The Blue Bear teddy bear fund was six months old by the time my contract finished. Named Blue Bear as the result of the rescue of a child from sexual exploitation who only wanted her blue bear from her sad home. The Blue Bear Coffee

shop idea was percolating long before I returned to the UK.

"Why now? The space is small, but fantastic, and when it came on the market, we had to make an offer. We were one of a dozen businesses applying for the tenancy, and thanks to the fact that we could show the landlord almost five years of profit (which we donated), and a social mission, they chose us over all of the others!"

"What's the risk? Businesses are expensive. The rent, staff, materials and equipment all cost money, money that we have intentionally invested in the restoration of children and young people ill-affected by exploitation. We have not been stowing capital away for many years to fund this venture, so financially this is

definitely something of a risk. To offset that risk, we will be taking the order fulfilment part of the business away from the roasters and preparing our online orders from the coffee shop. This should also allow for speedier deliveries, a reduction in plastic use and growth in our online offering."

The Blue Bear Coffee Shop opened in Norwich on August 5, but Bryn is at pains to point out that they are an anti-slavery organisation that sells coffee, rather than a coffee business that gives some of its profits away. "We are thrilled to be stepping out in faith, bringing Blue Bear to the people, so please drop in and say hi any time you're in Norwich," he says. bluebearcoffee.com

Support charity and donations are doubled

This Christmas, Norfolk alcohol and drug recovery charity the **Matthew Project** is asking for support with its Big Give Christmas Challenge Appeal – a nationwide fundraising campaign that it participates in every year.

■ It hopes to raise £50,000 which will be vital in enabling the charity to continue life-saving work from the award-winning Next Steps hub in Norwich.

Today, its hub is busier than ever. Every week, it runs a bustling programme of activities, support, and events, supporting hundreds of marginalised people in our community each year.

"Our Next Steps hub is seeing higher demand than ever before, with people facing issues including substance use, mental ill health, social isolation, and barriers to employment," said Rachel Chapman Matthew Project Chief Executive. "These issues have been compounded by the financial pressures of the

cost-of-living crisis. At the same time, we are also seeing our staffing and utilities cost rise, with no associated rise in income and subsequent reduced financial stability for this vital service.

"Funds raised through the Big Give 2023 Christmas Challenge will be used to keep Next Steps operating at its full capacity, covering the core costs of the centre and allowing us to continue supporting some of the most vulnerable people in our community at this difficult time. It will also allow us to continue growing our burgeoning social enterprise programme, based at Next Steps, which combines skills training with traded income schemes."

The Big Give Christmas Challenge Appeal takes place from midday on Tuesday

November 28 and finishes on Tuesday December 5. The Matthew Project has already secured £25,000 in match funds from local supporters. This means that every donation made during the appeal will be doubled!

To support this great cause, please use the QR code on the left, or visit Next Steps recovery hub (biggive.org)



THE BIG GIVE Christmas Challenge

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Tues 28th November, 12pm – Tues 5th December, 12pm

Scan to donate or visit

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Christmas Challenge Big Give



Accident-prone Norfolk farmer lives to tell nuclear blast tale

Octogenarian Colin believes God not only saved his life from a nuclear explosion in the RAF, but also after serious farming, road and sporting accidents during his long agricultural career.

Colin recalls, with horror, a nuclear bomb exploding on Christmas Island in August 1958, when he was just 20.

Colin was helping to train paratroopers, which involved them jumping from a basket fixed under a barrage balloon. His job was to operate a winch to let the wire out for the hydrogen-filled balloons to go up to 1,000ft.

Then it was decided the balloons would be an "ideal means" to lift an atom bomb to a desirable height for a controlled detonation.

Without protective clothing, a group of about 30 sat with their backs towards ground zero – with their hands over their eyes – as no less than four balloons were mounted on the same wire rope, to take the bomb up about 1,200ft.

As countdown began, Colin's heart was pounding, and when the bomb exploded... "the fireball was like looking at hell, a mass of flames whirling around and around. Then the implosion took soil and debris up through this inferno.

"When the cloud formed it was a very anxious time; the cloud contains radioactive material which would kill if contaminated by it!"

In fact, Colin suffered damaged lungs as he helped reassemble their tents which had been blown down in the blast several miles away, but firmly believes God spared his life. Tragically, many men have since died of cancers and rare diseases caused by the radiation.

Back in civvy street, in January 1960, Colin had a bad farming accident when he severely cut his tendon with a hook while cutting cattle feed... his hands numb from pain because of the cold.

In freezing temperatures, he walked a mile to the surgery where he was bandaged up, before he drove himself to two different hospitals to finally be operated on.

Whilst hospitalised for ten days, his flock of laying hens contracted foul pest; he had to slaughter them with his plaster on, getting covered in blood.

But again the outcome for Colin could have been far worse; instead he went on to meet and marry Ronwyn whom he spotted singing in a church choir.

Soon after they wed in July 1961, accident-prone Colin was at it again: going in for a tackle in a football match on hard ground, he cracked his head after falling.

Playing on concussed, it was only when he got back home to Ronwyn that he was taken to hospital. It took about three months to get over the concussion, and again he could have died.

During recuperation, Colin was privileged to meet British Army officer John Hunt of Mount Everest expedition fame, who was staying at his parents' farm to escape the media after losing a friend in a climbing accident.

Later it was evident Colin still overdid

Retired Norfolk farmer **Colin King** literally has an explosive story of nuclear explosions, car and sporting accidents. **Ian White reports.**



things at times... "Once after finishing a long day's work I travelled to a meeting 120 miles away. It was about 1.30am by the time I got back, when next thing I knew I was going through the air in the car, landing on a grass verge, facing the way I'd come from.

"The roof was caved in and in front of me on the grass was my windscreen."

Yet Colin was relatively unscathed and was driven home by a breakdown truck driver.



Main picture: The Grapple 1 nuclear test on 15 May 1957. Hailed as Britain's first hydrogen bomb test, it was in fact a technological failure. Inset is nuclear test survivor Colin King.

Colin has seen many other miracles of God's protection and provision throughout his colourful 85 years.

He came to know God personally when aged just ten. Hearing ex-boxer Jimmy Day preach, Colin felt overwhelmingly convinced of his need to accept Jesus as his own personal saviour.

"I argued within myself that everyone knows I'm a Christian, but as God's Holy Spirit impressed on me the fact that Jesus died on the cross for my sins, I broke down and cried as I realised he died to pay the price for my sins. I repented [expressed my remorse] and prayed for Jesus to come

into my life.

"That experience has remained with me all these years, and my love and relationship with Jesus as my dear saviour has grown more wonderful and deeper."

When Colin was a child, Terry Rhodes – a cousin of the late Queen – encouraged Colin to share his faith in public. This put him in good stead for when adult Colin took the plunge in helping to lead an international Christian men's fellowship, through which he's preached and travelled far and wide.

Colin reflects: "My grandmother and mother's wish that I became a minister of the gospel has certainly come true!"

■ Article courtesy of Good News Newspaper: www.goodnews-paper.org.uk

Goff writes of Gospel hope through tragedy

Former Norwich church leader **Goff Hope** has written a book about the hope in the Gospel and the goodness of God, drawing on his personal experience of tragedy, losing his daughter and his own battle with cancer. **Keith Morris reports.**

In the face of suffering, hard places or death, Goff, who has been a leader at King's Community Church Norwich, for over 30 years, encourages in his book *Hope Wins*. "Hope is fundamental for human well-being but it is in short supply in our world," he writes. "We can quickly be robbed of hope by illness, personal tragedy or by the sheer oppressive nature of news headlines."

Drawing on his own personal experiences, including the tragedy of losing his daughter and his own battle with cancer, Goff shares how holding on to the Christian hope of an eternal future transformed the darkest moments of his life.

"Sometimes it takes difficult circumstances to wake us up to the bigger questions of life, such as our future hope," writes Goff.

"You never forget the moment you hear the words, 'You probably already guessed – you have cancer,' said the doctor. Amazingly, I hadn't. My mind was racing, trying to process the shock-inducing news that I had stage 3 prostate cancer. I was a fit and, so I thought, healthy 56-year-old who took pride in my fitness, enjoyed running several times a week and rarely visited the doctors.

"Here I was, still at least ten years away from planned retirement, facing the real prospect of dying what I considered to be a premature death. That was not in the script. The truth is, we tend to think that we are in control of much of our lives, that we can expect to live a long and relatively healthy life, thanks to medical science and the comforts of our modern, affluent lifestyles. When our comfort zones are rocked by something like cancer, however, we realize that in fact we are really rather frail. Being a Christian doesn't change that.

"In the days, weeks and months that followed, I learned some important lessons about the nature of fear and faith, the way we think, and the importance of having a solid, living, future hope," writes Goff.

"The second incident that caused me to draw more deeply on the subject of the Christian's future hope was when our daughter, Ali, suddenly became ill while away on holiday with her husband, Dan, and children, Annabelle and Luke.

"They were camping in Devon and Ali woke one morning feeling uncomfortable, and felt it was sufficient to seek out a doctor. A visit to the local surgery quickly led to being admitted to hospital the same day, the doctor suspecting that her discomfort might be due to something more serious than gallstones.

"We got a call from Ali and Dan that evening from her hospital bed, explaining the situation, saying that she would be having some scans



Goff Hope with his book.

and that they would know the results the following day. I am finding it hard to type these words even three years later.

"We of course set about praying fervently that the results would show that nothing serious was wrong. The call came the next day. The results of the scans showed that our precious daughter had secondary cancer of the liver and primary breast cancer. We were devastated.

"It had all happened so suddenly – one minute she was well, the next very seriously ill.

"Hospital appointments began almost immediately, and every time we drove the 20-mile journey to visit, Angie and I prayed all the way there and back. We didn't let up. But Ali got worse. That period of our lives remains a painful time for us to recall. Just two weeks later, on the Monday, we drove over to visit her again, now in hospital. When we arrived, she was clearly feeling uncomfortable, attached to various drips, and conversation was getting difficult. In the evening as we left, we kissed Ali goodbye, saying that we would be back in the morning. It was to be the last time we saw her alive," said Goff.

"It is now around three years since our daughter died and we continue to have moments when memories of her bring sadness to our hearts and tears to our eyes, even though we know the end of the story. Because that is then and this is now and right now we feel the sadness of being so suddenly separated from our daughter.

"But I am getting ahead of myself. We comforted ourselves with the thought that our daughter was no longer in any pain and that she was with her Lord and Saviour Jesus. Nevertheless we were feeling considerable

pain in our great loss, and before long the questions began.

"When it comes to grief and our grieving the loss of loved ones, I have come to see that it is actually helpful to express our questions. And it is biblical! In fact, there is a word for it: lament.

"I think that those conversations, those laments are good and helpful because they are not hopeless musings, more likely to leave one depressed than encouraged. They are honest, open conversations with a heavenly Father who I know cares deeply for us, and whose loving kindness towards us I am certain of, and like the psalmist, I usually end up worshipping," said Goff.

"As time has gone on, I have begun to realize that actually we don't want to 'get over' Ali's death and get back to busy normal. Yes, we certainly want to move on from feeling distraught, but we don't want to forget her; we want, every so often, to talk about her, to remember her and share memories and special moments.

Goff concludes in his book: "I am convinced that as Christians today we need to rediscover the importance of that clear and certain hope, what it means for us individually and for the world in which we live. Only then will we have the antidote to the epidemic of anxious fear that is in contemporary culture, rediscover 'inexpressible and glorious joy' in the face of life's challenges, and have a message of astonishing hope for an increasingly hope-less generation."

■ *Hope Wins* – How a Vision of Our Eternal Future Impacts Our Lives Today, published by Authentic Media Limited, at £10.99. Available from Revelation in Norwich and bookshops.

Christmas tree festival

■ The annual Christmas Tree Festival at St Peter Mancroft in the heart of Norwich opens on Wednesday December 6 until Tuesday December 12 from 10.30am until 3.30pm.

Organised by the Rotary Club of Norwich St Edmund, the festival will feature some 30 tall Christmas trees sponsored by local companies. Some companies choose to offer their tree to a local charity.

The two trees on the High Altar are the main beneficiaries this year: Norfolk and Waveney MIND and YANA (You Are Not Alone) a charity supporting those people who work in agriculture and rural businesses and who are affected by stress and depression.

Caroline Evans, President of Norwich St Edmund Rotary club said: "The Christmas Tree Festival is a very popular event bringing in visitors from far and near. It showcases the season and raises a lot of money. We are delighted that once again the team at St Peter Mancroft has agreed to work with us to give the public an opportunity to see this beautiful parish church decked out for Christmas."

Church warm hub reopens

■ Chapel Field Road Methodist Church in Norwich has widened its 'just come' group to be a warm hub, open to all.

The hub reopens this winter and will meet fortnightly on Wednesdays from November 15 to December 13, then January 10 to March 20, 2024.

Hot drinks will be provided and visitors are asked to bring a packed lunch.

Also, to bring something to do such as knitting or a craft.

Just Come is an open group where people come for conversation. Games such as Scrabble can be played. People can bring handicraft to do.

One lady sorts stamps for charity. A late member made model railway wagons. Draw or paint if you wish.

For more information contact the office at Chapel Field Road Methodist Church 9.30am - 12.30pm. Ring 01603 632535.





Norwich Lord Mayor James Wright opening the Original Norwich Charity Christmas Card shop in St Peter Mancroft church. Picture courtesy of ONCCS.

Norwich Christmas card shop opens in church

The well-known Original Norwich Charity Christmas Card shop will be running in St Peter Mancroft church for its 58th year of operation until mid December.

■ This year, 28 charities will be selling their cards in the shop which opens Monday to Saturday, from 10.45am to 3pm until December 14.

Organiser Liz Magem said: "All our charities are related to people. It has always been our aim to give every penny taken back to these charities which we are able to do by keeping our overheads as low as possible. All our team members are volunteers meaning we employ no salaried staff, team members donate gifts to make Christmas hampers which are raffled to raise enough money to pay the running costs.

"Over the years the operation of the

shop has depended on committed charity representatives, volunteers and a small committee. The fun and friendship generated lasts throughout the years and we are so proud that our efforts have to date raised a figure fast approaching two million pounds."

The Lord Mayor of Norwich, James Wright, officially opened the shop on Wednesday October 18. He said: "You have just got to look at the boards to see the range of charities represented and realise just how important this is for fundraising at the moment for all of those charities. It's great to have somewhere you can call home and come back to year in, year out."

Hundreds of different cards are again on sale, with every penny raised distributed between the 28 charities, including East Anglian Children's Hospices, East Anglian Air Ambulance, Norwich Cathedral, John Aves Education Project, St Martin's, the Matthew Project and Norwich Foodbank. Last year the shop raised just over £47,000.

oncccs.org.uk

Churches back Ukraine mission

Churches across Norfolk have been supporting the efforts of Swaffham road haulier **Scott Stone** and partner **Zoë Waites** to take humanitarian aid to the front line in war-hit Ukraine. **Gill Webster** reports.

When the war in Ukraine started in February 2022, we watched in horror," said Scott. "Then we heard that a local man, Ian Odgers, was looking for a trailer for the public to drop off donations, and which could then be taken to the Ukrainian Embassy in London."

The couple volunteered and it snowballed from there. They were contacted by Dorota Darnell who had co-founded the Polonia Group in Norwich and who asked that all items be taken to Poland. The first trip taken by Scott was on March 1. The image of mothers' and babies on television meant that the first container was filled with clothing, blankets and hundreds of packets of nappies and sanitary wear.

"It rolled from there. I started going direct to Kiev taking medical aid, electrical items, as well as the other stuff. Good food and medicine are in very short supply unless you have money. And the ordinary people and soldiers don't have money.

"I have been eleven times now and over that period I have seen small towns and villages decimated and turned to rubble. People killed and those that have survived living underground as best they can. Children living with grandparents as fathers have gone to fight, many of whom are probably now dead, and mothers who are either helping with the war effort or who also have been killed."

Corruption is endemic but Scott now has



Scott and Zoë.

learned who he can trust. He has taken six loads to Kiev but now goes directly to the front line at Odessa, Khershon and other places in the Donbas regions. He unloads his container and transfers items to small vans and then delivers where items are needed.

Scott and partner Zoë are passionate in what they are doing and want to do more. Initially they self-funded the journeys but now more people are getting to know about it and are fund-raising or just giving money, although there is always a shortfall. Many Rotary Clubs in Norfolk have raised money to help them, and have also supplied items for Scott to take with him.

Many organisations and churches also did collections and he received a lot of sanitary towels (used as dressings) and medication from the Salvation Army at Mile Cross, Norwich as well as support from Our Lady of the Annunciation in Poringland and St Mary Magdalen on Silver Road in Norwich. Also from churches in and around Swaffham.

Zoë's job is collecting everything and doing all the essential paperwork, otherwise Scott wouldn't get into Ukraine and be allowed to regularly cross the country.

You can contact them on 07824 505670, at enquiries@waitesandstones.co.uk or visit waitesandstones.co.uk

Hard times strengthen faith says new author

King's Lynn writer, **Georgie Tennant**, who has recently seen her 30-day devotional book, *The God Who Sees You*, published, knows how hard times can strengthen your faith after losing a baby one Christmas. **Peter Bending** reports.

The *God Who Sees You* features 30 days of reflections around a Bible narrative and they are designed to help you on your journey to feeling seen, valued and secure. Each devotional includes a song suggestion and some questions to aid in prayer and contemplation around the theme.

The book grew out of five devotional pieces which Georgie wrote for her church during lockdown. "I happened to mention those to Amy Robinson who is in my local Association of Christian Writers Group and works as a commissioning editor for Kevin Mayhew publisher children's section. She suggested I put a full 30-Day Devotional plan together and pitch it to them, which I did with much help from Amy. Many months later they got in touch and said they wanted to publish it. A dream come true," said Georgie.

Georgie describes herself as an "apprentice finder-of-hope in hard things". She believes that hard times and experiences lead to a deeper, steadier faith: "I think my younger, more naive faith, saw God as someone who should answer all my prayers and make my life straightforward and easy. Whereas now, I know that life isn't always straightforward and easy, but that I can trust God to carry me through the hard parts and bring some treasure out of it, somehow, eventually."

Georgie grew up in King's Lynn and became a Christian as a teenager through a youth group run by the Christian Fellowship, now King's Centre. Having no faith background, she was pleasantly surprised that they played football and had fun and didn't just "pray all the time". Aged 14, she was invited to a carol service with a gospel message and gave her life to Jesus.

After school, Georgie moved away to university: "I moved to Southampton then to Oxford for my degree and teacher training, but King's Lynn felt like home. My family live here and we loved the church here."

She got married and started a family. In July 2009, Georgie found out she was pregnant with her second child, a girl this time.

"Two days before Christmas, I had begun to feel concerned that I couldn't feel a great deal of movement. Trying to dismiss it as unfounded fear, I called the doctor. We waited anxiously and were called quickly. The doctor couldn't find a heartbeat and a scan at the hospital confirmed our worst fears," said Georgie.

"On Christmas Eve, I was given a drug to start the process of bringing a baby into the world in much different circumstances than the ones I had imagined. On Boxing Day night, I headed to the hospital.

"Our daughter, Grace, was born, just before 1am on December 27, tiny at 25



King's Lynn author Georgie Tennant with her new book.

riding on the crest of a faith-wave (hint: that's all of us). Georgie's devotional is balm to the soul." Lucy Rycroft, Author and Blogger

weeks of pregnancy.

"It's hard to really capture all of that and the weeks and months that followed, in a few words. I went through a lot of anger and disappointment. This was the first really hard thing I had ever had to face. I asked some tough questions and there were moments where I felt like giving up on God altogether.

"I know I have experienced layers of healing over time, but Christmas has always been a big hurdle for me, every year. It always feels like it contains incompatible opposites. The sparkle, cheer and jollity can be hard to face, alongside my traumatic memory. I know Christmas can be like that for others too."

Georgie and her husband went on to have another boy and moved back to King's Lynn and the King's Centre Church in 2011. They still attend the church where Georgie leads a Life Group and is involved with the ladies' ministry and Centre preaching. She teaches English part-time alongside writing and family life.

"Many people tell me that, despite going through so much, I exemplify an authentic faith, that acknowledges the tough times

and doesn't shy away from them with clichéd Christian phrases, but also doesn't descend into total despair. Like the rallying cry from so many Psalms when the writer is expressing his authentic misery, but rallies by the end to say 'And yet' I will trust God," said Georgie.

"That links to the book as it has been wonderful to receive so much feedback that says it encouraged people going through tough times. There are no clichés or empty promises in it, but what resonates throughout is the acknowledgement that we all – biblical characters and people today – walk through really tough things and they won't all turn out as we want them too. But there is a God who sees us, walks with us, strengthens us, changes us and somehow turns it all round for good, ultimately. But we have to live that to truly grasp it."

■ The *God Who Sees You* is available online from Kevin Mayhew, Eden, Amazon, and in some local bookshops. "I hope to do more author visits and book signings – if anyone local would like one I would love them to get in touch," said Georgie.

Find Georgie on X at [@GeorgieTennant2](https://twitter.com/GeorgieTennant2)

Advertorial



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Revelation Christian Resource Centre looks forward to welcoming you to its shop and cafe at St Michael-at-Plea Church at the top of London Street, Norwich.

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