

FROM WHERE I SIT

JOHN COONEY

Bumper-To-Bumper

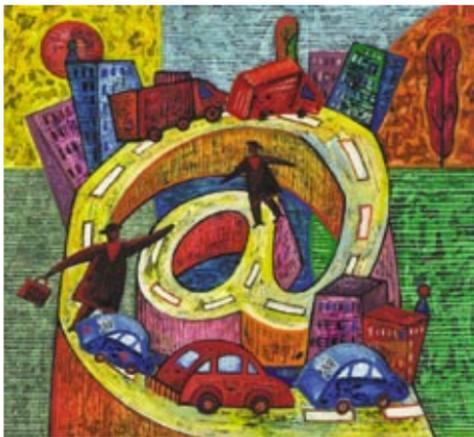
Got caught in a traffic jam on Wednesday. A rush-hour, hurry-up, late-for-meeting traffic jam. A wet road plus a prang had gummed up the motorway. Three-abreast we queued in nose-to-tail frustration – jostling for position, jumping lanes. Long lines of cars in search of off-ramps – motors smelling hot, exhausts belching bad breath, brake-lights glaring redly.

Thought about that today. Thought about a different traffic jam, a traffic jam that happens sometimes in my head. Thought about how, every now and then, I get bogged down with bumper-to-bumper questions – nose-to-tail WHY-WHY-WHYS.

Why in the world is the world like it is? Why the pain and the shame and the sadness? And why do really nasty things keep happening to really nice people?

The questions leave me feeling lost for words. I mean, who am I to string sentences, assemble paragraphs, pass comment on a subject like this? Somehow, through nothing I've done or deserved, the diseases and disabilities and disorders that visit other people have (so far) passed me by.

ADHD. Alzheimer's. Arthritis. Asthma. Autism. Bipolar. Blindness. Cancer. Cerebral palsy. Cleft palate. Cystic fibrosis. Deafness. Down's syndrome. Epilepsy. Haemophilia. Heart conditions. Huntington's disease. Intellectual retardation. Multiple



sclerosis. Muscular dystrophy. Paraplegia. Parkinson's disease. Polio. Quadriplegia. Schizophrenia. Spina bifida. Stroke ...

I look down the long, long list and wonder: *what do I know?*

I think of people I've met or read about or talked to or seen on TV. I think of special kids with special needs who arrive in this world needing limitless love. Of able teenagers who feel trapped inside not-quite-able bodies. Of healthy grown-ups

IF YOU SEND SOMEONE POLYSTYRENE, HOW DO YOU PACK IT?

who get robbed, ripped off and laid low by crippling conditions they can hardly even pronounce.

I think of 10-year-olds in special schools and 20-year-olds in psychiatric wards who are scared to step outside 'cos they can't get used to being stared at.

I think of the ordinary mums and dads and grandparents who cope so extraordinarily. I think of those who really can't cope but really can't let on because they feel it's really their fault that their child is less-than-perfect. And I think of those who cry themselves to sleep at night, knowing that the way their kids look or behave or sound will always earn them rejection.

I think of the unsung heroes, the doctors and nurses, care-givers and volunteers, who love/give/help without cost-counting or complaining, and are long-overdue for knighthoods. And I think of the rest of us, who are too embarrassed to look these people in the eye, and can't see past the crutches and gadgets, the wheelchairs and white sticks, the sign language and strange

features and awkward movements – to the hopes/fears/dreams/feelings that live within.

WHY-WHY-WHY? The questions won't stop coming. They ooze over the edges of my mind like a melted cheese sandwich.

God?

Is he there? Does he listen when we stare at the ceiling, punch our pillows, bang on his door, scream at the sky?

Lots of people I talk to say yes. He's there, for sure. Holding our hand in the dark. Not keeping his distance in some antiseptic heaven, but moving amongst us, doing God-stuff like only God can. And one day, they reckon, everything that's wrong will come right.

Hope they know what they're talking about ...



JOHN, GRAPEVINE'S FOUNDER & EDITOR, IS THE IDEAL WEIGHT (FOR SOMEONE 10 CMS TALLER) AND HAS IDEAL SIGHT (FOR SOMEONE WHO CAN'T READ WITHOUT HIS GLASSES)!

THORT



“When you go to court, you put your fate in the hands of people who weren't smart enough to get out of jury duty.”