

2020. What a great year.

Saturday, 19 December 2020

2020 - What A Great Year!

Five reasons why I loved 2020. by Jonathan King.

It now seems conventional wisdom to say that 2020 has been an Annus Horribilis, to quote our dear Queen on a previous year.

But I thought there were lots of fabulous things about it. For me, anyway.

BEST - was the glorious spring/early summer, in London. I'm not normally in the country then. I love swimming outdoors in the sunshine so usually I'm in the South of France, Italy or Morocco. This year, due to the Lockdown, I had to stay in Great Britain.

But the weather was fantastic. Apart from sunbathing on my roof garden I went, every day, as my hour of exercise and food shopping, to the park and started feeding the birds on the Serpentine.

The walk there was always a pleasure, with total strangers greeting me, all complimentary and pleasant. Like me, they rarely strolled in Hyde Park so 2020 was a time for that majority, which has enjoyed my life silently, to express support in person. As I'm a dog lover, this also gave me an excuse to stroke and cuddle a vast assortment of hounds.

I believe I caught Covid19 in early March. Like flu except incredible night fevers and sweats. 5 days in bed, liquids and paracetamol got rid of it.

So in mid March, as we went into full lockdown, I started my hour long trips via the food shops to the park. The birds were delighted to be fed stale bread. One species in particular fascinated me. Tiny babies, they caught fragments of bread before they hit the ground, to the fury of the swans, ducks, pigeons, seagulls and geese. I took a photo of one and put it online. What is this bird? My site, KingOfHits.com, has been there since the mid 1990s and got around 10,000 visits a day.

Starlings! I always thought starlings, whose murmurations fascinate me, were black. Not at all. These recently hatched but magnificent little basketball players had a glorious rainbow of coloured feathers. They became my favourites.

So much so that, sitting there in a T shirt, I would open my palm with breadcrumbs in it and the babies would line up, ten at a time, on my bare arm. I loved the feel of their little claws on my skin. Bereft of any living contact (a social distancing) this brought life through my pores to my soul.

Amazingly, as one hopped from wrist into palm, grabbed a crumb and flew off, the remaining nine all moved up a slot, a new one joined up by my shoulder, then the next pounced and so on.

I became a tourist attraction. Various Japanese snapped shots of this. It became viral. Without knowing who I was, The Bird Man of Hyde Park with the line of starlings was a sensation.

The other birds, furious that they were getting no attention at all, started coming up to me, demanding food please. I took to buying delicious large fresh baked biscuits for them, crumbling them up. At one point a very large swan started pecking at my legs (having aggressively pecked other swans and geese away from me). I was tempted to smack him except he was almost as big as me and I also felt that Smacking a Royal Swan might be a criminal offence although it sounds more like some sexual perversion. In the end I scolded him verbally and refused to give him anything, reaching over him to other birds.

He got the message. He's now terribly polite and gentle and stands next to me, fully stretched (he is virtually the same height as me, standing up, his beak level with my nose). He's stopped pecking the others and is patient and well behaved, knowing that, as a result, he gets big chunks every now and again that he softly accepts from my fingers.

My starlings are now full sized and too big to sit on my arm so, instead, they line up on the back of the bench I sit on and do the same, one at a time, hopping onto my outstretched palm. Again, I'm the subject of massive camera attention. In days gone by I was a paparazzi target sitting in the park for fake News of the World stories. I have lasted longer than that organ.

As a result I've now opened an account with internet bank Starling. It is as good as the ghastly NatWest bank is bad. Likewise MONZO. In 2020 I closed all my Royal Bank of Scotland accounts. They are truly appalling.

SECOND BEST - Memories; the 40th anniversary of John Lennon's death. My birthday (6th December) was, in 1980, on a Sunday, as in this year. I was living in New York at the time, doing a daily morning show on radio talk station WMCA. I got a call from my friend John telling me he would buy me lunch that Thursday to celebrate. This was unusual. Normally I pay for all meals. I've dined with Rod Stewart 8 times over the years and paid every time, as I pointed out to him and his wife when I bumped into them in Morocco a few years ago. This amused his lady very much. Rod replied "I'll buy tonight then" to which I answered "why change the habit of a lifetime?". Mind you, he has done quite well financially since that meal, when he was a grave digger.

He is, of course, Scottish. Am I allowed to joke about that in this PC era? I know, if he was Jewish and I mentioned it, I'd be thrown out of the Labour party. I have to keep remembering, when with my many black friends, not to notice they are black. Or indeed brown or yellow.

On the Monday I was watching a sports game on TV when a news flash came on saying there had been a shooting outside the Dakota. I knew John lived there (two blocks away from me) and instantly guessed he was the victim. I phoned my friend Tom Brook, who produced my radio shows for the BBC there. He has given me credit for notifying him ever since, so once again I was all over the global coverage.

Lesley-Ann Jones has written a terrific book about John. Sadly, she didn't ask me about him. We were very close in the 1960s; indeed, we had sex together in 1965. We'd picked up two beautiful Scandinavian girls in a club and gone back to my flat in Dorset Street. It turned out they were far more interested in each other than in us, so we decided to enjoy each other. The one and only time. I was under 21 at the time but back then ANY gay experience was illegal. We could both have been sent to prison.

I felt slightly bad about this as Cynthia, John's wife, was a friend too. She, myself and Jane Asher, Paul's girlfriend at the time, were the only three who didn't do drugs. We'd sit together in the Scotch of St James club going "what on earth they on now?". We didn't drink either. All the clubs carried bottles of milk in their fridges marked FOR JK ONLY.

After my first TV show in 1967 John and I had dinner. Heâ€™d watched it, along with millions of others; back then there were only two channels; BBC and ITV. Together our early Saturday evening shows were watched by 26 million people. My Good Evening Iâ€™m Jonathan King show was on opposite Simon Dee and The Monkees. One of my guests was an unknown Japanese â€œperformance artisteâ€• called Yoko Ono. She had done â€œmind dancingâ€• inside a tent. After interviewing her (live) I stepped out of the tent to sign off and slipped on the dry ice; signing off lying on my back. Painful but great TV.

John was not at all interested in my mishap but asked me all about Yoko, who heâ€™d briefly met. He questioned me about her husband - an American who I had not liked called Tony Cox. About her daughter. Why, I wondered, was he so fascinated. â€œDidnâ€™t you find her attractive?â€• he asked. â€œGod noâ€•. Especially compared to Cynthia.

But later they got together and I remember that all the other stars on Top of the Pops sent them to Coventry a few years later. I stayed next to them throughout rehearsals and the show (I was also on with a big hit of mine - I think Let It All Hang Out) chatting away to show solidarity - I was disgusted by everyone elseâ€™s behaviour. It was considered, in media, that their relationship had broken up The Beatles.

Back in those days there were many young girls called â€œgroupiesâ€•. Something else conveniently forgotten about in these PC days.

Jimi Hendrix stayed in my flat for his first nights in London. I had inherited my grandmotherâ€™s old flat which my father had used for Tootals, his company; it had four bedrooms in it for executives. Jimi once insisted on showing me his substantial organ and asking me whether he had VD. After I confirmed it he said â€œI donâ€™t believe it; she canâ€™t have been a day older than I. I had spent many hours urging him and many other music pals to make sure they never went with anyone under 16. But then I also tried to warn them about drugs. Quite a few are not around now. Iâ€™m 76. Iâ€™m still here.

But I never preached. Tell others what is right for me and why; let them decide what is right for them. I organised Jimi a session with our private Clap Doctor.

THIRD BEST - Travel. After the Lockdown ended I shot off to the South of France and then onto Rome. Many weeks swimming in the sunshine. Got a suntan. Wrote a new book Not A Knee On The Neck (how British police kill people) which has been flying off the Amazon shelf.

FOURTH BEST: Baby Car. I have two cars. My Rolls Royce and my little Suzuki Cappuccino, which Iâ€™ve owned for 25 years. This year the clutch went but was immediately mended; the only problem ever with Baby Car. I fill it up - Â£25. On that it does 5 trips down to friends in Surrey. Thatâ€™s Â£5 each for a round trip of 100 miles. Cheaper than a bicycle and, with the roof down, a total joy when itâ€™s sunny.

FIFTH BEST: It has been a good year legally. After the debacle (HHJ Taylorâ€™s word) of my 2018 trial, loads of fresh evidence emerged showing my 2001 trial had been totally unsafe too, proof of my innocence of those equally false claims. Not only did I not commit the crimes but they had never even taken place. Several independent investigations by police and others decided that all kinds of behaviour by bent cops, crooked lawyers and corrupt PR people had produced attempted miscarriages of justice. Even the independent body examining police conduct had UPHOLD my complaint - that Surrey Police did not properly examine my case in 2018. My appeal against my wrongful conviction in 2001 is still ongoing.

But, as a result, the new Director General of the BBC - Tim Davie - has lifted the ban on me and they can now play my music again and interview me. The previous DG, Lord Hall (only those around in WW2 will understand that) ordered censorship. Hopefully they may even show all the Top of the Pops shows removed if I was on them - or Jimmy Savile or Dave Lee Travis or Rolf Harris, Gary Glitter or others.

Friends such as Paul Gambaccini showed me evidence of the crooked nature of his False Accusers. Ditto Cliff Richard and several others. One of my false accusers had been accused by his sister of raping her several times when she was 10 and he was 20. With luck, events of 2020 will stop police using criminals to prosecute innocent men and women in the future.

And to top it all off, the Metropolitan Police, convinced by the fresh evidence, removed me from the Sex Offenders Register. So I am now, officially, no danger to any living human being.

Nor, it appears, to other species, such as birds.

Just ask the starlings.