



Letters to the editor

Think about the staff

Dear Editor,

I was very sad to read about the second armed robbery at Iceland on the High Road. I have never known the staff there to be less than courteous, smiling, and helpful to their customers. They work hard enough without being subjected to these events not once, but twice.

It's equally sad to see any shop on our High Road targeted in such a way. These are desperate times, made more desperate by an uncaring government intent on turning the unemployed into beggars or thieves.

In such times, I hope the staff are aware that their customers support their daily efforts and respect the strength it takes to move on from the actions of a mindless few.

**Yours faithfully,
Gareth Brown,
Address supplied.**

Sort out our roads and buses

Dear Editor,

When the North Circular was going to be 'done', ages ago, various roads were railed off "to stop rat runs for those trying to evade the road works" for the North Circular. The main ones that affected us coming up towards Gravel Hill from East End Road were Windermere and Mountfield. We have daughters living in Beechwood Avenue and it is a short journey through Windermere, instead of the congestion and fuel wastage of coming all up East End Road and then left into the High Road. Even if we turn into Windermere, we cannot turn left at Mountfield. There are rumours that some powerful resident or residents in Windermere successfully petitioned the council to leave the rails intact long after the completion of the North Circular. The 143 bus used to go up East End Road into Gravel Hill; that made a shortish walk up, and took so much less time to get to Brent Cross. I did ask London Transport but they just said it would be considered. I wish more people used our lovely H3 and it might then run more often than once an hour instead of stopping at 2.30pm.

**Yours faithfully,
Lorna Roberts,
East End Road, N2.**

Happy memories of Helen

Dear Editor,

I was very sad to hear about the death of Helen O'Toole. From 2004, for a year and a half, Helen was one of our wonderful reading helpers who helped children with reading in Holy Trinity Primary School. She joined our scheme enthusiastically and was delighted to be placed at Holy Trinity School where she herself had been to school.

She had a lovely rapport with the young children who were always delighted to come out of their classes twice a week to read and play with her. During her time with them she was able to make a significant difference to the children's confidence which impacted on all areas of their abilities and personalities.

She was not with Volunteer Reading Help for very long, but in the time she was she made a wonderful contribution to the work we do and was a delight to have as part of our organisation.

**Yours faithfully,
Harriet Watson,
Volunteer Services Manager
London North West Branch,
Volunteer Reading Help.**

Look after our local traders

Dear Editor,

It is sad to see that a number of our local shops and businesses have closed down over recent months, no doubt struggling to hang on through the dark months of the recession. It is at times like this that people in East Finchley must show their support more than ever for the traders on their doorstep.

The shops that line the High Road and East End Road, and other local shops round our way, can only keep going if we go in and spend our money. Once they are gone they will never return, and our community will be a poorer place without them.

So next time you've got to pop out for a bit of shopping or fancy a meal, think first about the friendly faces in our neighbourhood who are looking for your business. Shopping and eating locally is more pleasurable, not to mention better for the environment.

**Yours faithfully,
Frances Cooper,
Kitchener Road, N2.**

A tribute to Helen

Last month, *THE ARCHER* reported the sad news that Helen O'Toole had died at the age of 33. Helen was a former member of our team and well-known in the local community. Here, we print an edited version of the tribute delivered at her funeral on behalf of her parents Mary and Charles.

Helen was a floppy baby and it was clear she had some problems. However, it was not until she was 18 months old that she was diagnosed with Morquio Disease. This was to dominate her life but it never overpowered her or prevented her from doing what she wanted to do.

She grew up at ease with her identity as a disabled person and never felt self-conscious about her disability, although she had some very powerful curses for anyone who patted her on the head. From the beginning, Mary talked to Helen about her differences and helped her to explain herself to other children. Helen loved Holy Trinity nursery and school, and remembered this as a very happy time in her life.

She had to endure a number of major operations during her life and accepted them all very courageously. She very seldom complained of pain. She knew from an early age that her life was at risk but this did not stop her from agreeing to treatments that were painful and prolonged.

When she was eight, Helen had a pioneering treatment for instability of the spine. This involved screwing a metal cage to her head, which had to be done without anaesthetic so that Helen could tell them when her neck was in the right position. The success of this treatment led to the establishment of this type of surgery for people with Morquio Disease in Britain and indeed internationally.

Helen made many friends through the MPS Society and was able to support other young people who were facing the same treatment that she had.

After leaving school, she took enormous delight in developing her wheelchair dancing, drama and other creative arts with Community Focus in North Finchley. She took a lead in a dance group called Free Wheels. When this folded due to lack of funding, Helen organised her friends to set up their own independent dance group called Happy Go Lucky.

Before long, Helen was desperate to live independently. Mary and Charlie investigated all sorts of possibilities, but eventually found that the only way to qualify for council housing was for her parents to evict her, so that she would be technically homeless. "Please evict me," Helen raged, and she also gave her parents other incentives to take this painful step.

After many setbacks, and much difficult negotiation, Helen moved into a wonderful flat off Nether Street, near North Finchley, with 24-hour support. She delighted in furnishing and equipping her flat and in getting her garden planted. She loved to invite her friends and to have parties.

Helen was a courageous, bright and vivacious person. She showed great strength and was an independent spirit who embraced life to the full. She had wit, bravado and gutsiness, as well as being bolshie and bloody-minded. She was generous in her friendship, with a quirky sense of humour. One of her t-shirts read: "I'm not small, it's an optical illusion".

Helen maintained her



An inspiration: Helen O'Toole independence to the end. To live the way she did was a great achievement. We are immensely proud of her. Helen, we celebrate your life and we salute you.

When Helen knew she was dying she asked that her money be given to charities that she was involved with (she didn't have any money, she was a great one for spending). Helen's family express their appreciation for the many messages of support and the donations in memory of Helen. The £2,000 raised has been shared between the Happy Go Lucky dance group and Community Focus. Read another tribute to Helen in our Letters - see left.

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