

Holt WI

Having opened the year learning about the life of the first female paramedic in Worcestershire, a breathless experience of happenstance and sheer grit, we changed key this month to settle in to something of a mystery. Can you imagine how £2 could change your life? No? Well, nor could we until this month's speaker enlightened us. And if you have just looked at the pictures that accompany this piece and are thinking, what on earth...? Well, read on and see.

Lynn, alias Phil, alias Steffi, started out with the story of walking over Worcester Bridge in 1979 with a friend. On her commenting that the gulls seemed to be a long way from the sea, the friend's riposte that they only had to come straight up the motorway tickled her sufficiently for her to write it up as an amusing comment and send it to a woman's magazine letter page. The prize of £2 and the excitement of seeing her name in print was the trigger for a long career in magazine journalism. But there was nothing orthodox about her approach to this profession; it seemed to be based on an astonishing level of nerve and imagination.



Lynn bluffed her way to a regular slot on the local publication, turning in historical pieces based on her daughter's history homework, and being prepared to become an instant expert for whatever was required. Property? No problem; her job at the sleepy Leamington spa Building society gave her raw material. Roof insulation? No problem, "a roof without insulation is like a teapot without a cosy". Knitting? No problem; no matter that her teenaged son's matinee jacket lay unfinished in her work basket. Be a witch? No problem. Spells can be made up just like horoscopes. But it didn't take us listeners long to realise why she was so successful: witty and self-deprecating, Lynn (alias Phil, alias Steffi) had us enthralled. It was often the turn of phrase that did the trick. "I've killed my in-laws regularly," she said when talking about finding inspiration for tales to tell. And indeed nothing seemed to be sacred; her own mother expostulated with her on her using her own husband's cardiac arrest as the raw material for a lurid ghost story.

Lynn (alias Phil, alias Steffi) painted the most amusing scenarios as well, such as her first interview with Radio Wyvern. We were left with a vivid imprint of a hot studio, her facing her interviewer, a man in shorts with very hairy legs, and a girl who had crawled under the table and proceeded to pluck said hairs from said legs. Why? Who

knows, but the picture does stick, doesn't it? Then there was the story that was based on her aunty's stair-lift and the racing competition between her elderly mother and aunt that stopped abruptly when the grandchildren wanted a go. "Stair-lifts are not for playing on!" Not to mention the story of the postal stalker. He hove into Lynn's life after she wrote a piece about the perils of sitting still too long, trying to write a novel. Hinting at an unfortunate abscess on her bottom, she received detailed instructions by post for treating said abscess. Being civil she thanked her correspondent for his concern, but broke off the correspondence when he then instructed her to tie a plank underneath her bosom to keep her posture correct and avoid any further abscesses.



Interviews were where the aliases started to come in; after all, you can't really interview yourself convincingly even in print unless you adopt an alter ego. It opened out a whole host of other potential subjects that might be more masculine in tone. This was fine until she found herself contributing so much to some magazines that a third persona was needed and Steffi was born.

Although Lynn has been predominantly a magazine journalist, she has books to her name too, including a sports book about cycling and a book about writing. The latter gave rise to her brief incarnation as a tutor for distance learning courses in writing, a phase that did not last that long as she became inundated with the likes of Andrew, who could turn any short story into one about aliens. Branching out still further, Lynn has worked as a ghost writer, starting out ghosting a best man's speech and ending up too closely involved in an unsavoury rags-to-riches story.

Lively speakers have started our year well and despite the inclement weather, we have welcomed back most of last year's members and some guests for our first two meetings. Lunch club is up and running again and our entry is in for the county quiz. Skittles next month and some plans for visits further afield later in the Spring have got the group underway again. New faces are always welcome on the first Thursday of the month, 7.30 for 7.45 pm in Holt Village Hall.