

The Key in the Sky

by *Jaya Savige*

Or

The MINUTES of an EXTRA-ORDINARY MEETING of the NSTASS
to discuss the serious matter of
(CHILD) LANGUAGE-ACQUISITION DURING LOCKDOWN.
London, Late Spring, 2020

Call To Order

An extra-ordinary, isolated (as in *one-off*), far-fetched and crosshatched meeting of the NSTASS (No Such Thing As Society Society) was called by its (Acting) Chair and Secretsharey, The Author, to consider a serious and pressing matter: *the impact (or otherwise) of Lockdown on the English Language-Acquisition of a Young Male Child of 21-24 moons.*

The meeting was held in May, 2020, in and around the soil of the still-very-modest-but-a-damn-sight-better-than-our-previous-non-garden garden at the rear of OUR NEW ABODE [ONA] – to which the (Acting) Cheer, his Partner and their said male child-on-the-threshold-of-speech *relocated* in mid-March, mere days before Lockdown – as well as on the several pathways, purlieus and Commons of Our New Community [ONC], though this be but fifteen pedestrian minutes from Our Previous Abode [OPA] and Community [OPC] and still close by the Notional Physical Laboratory on the nether side of Bodgy Park.

In Attendance:

THE AUTHOR (father, housebound, Acting Cheer and Secretsharey)

X (The Author's son, 23 moons)

BURR, Queen of the Green Ring-necked Parakeets

RAH-TEE (also *Rusty*, but never *Horse*), Ambassador of all Quadrupeds, representing himself and those of his Equine peers who majestically appeared one fine day in the front gardens of diverse communal flats in ONC during Lockdown, where they graze for a part of each day – as well as the several Felines, Canines, Squirrels, *Vulpes vulpes* and Furze-Pigs of ONC.

NAIIRR, President of our extremely local branch of the SSSA [Snails,
Slugs & Slaters Assoc.]

PENG-UHN, Chancellor of the Duchy of Plushia

THE DARLING BUDS

ROUGH WINDS

In Absentia:

LELELL-UH (also *Ella*), X's Childcare Friend

GAKE (also *Jake*), X's Childcare Friend

THE HERO (X's mother, The Author's Partner, Green-thumb, Earth-
whisperer)

MR BOJANGLES (the small white hen in Christchurch, NZ, named by X's
maternal grandfather in honour of X, and nominally 'belonging to' X)

Guests:

*joining, as Apparitions and Figments, via Zoom, Vroom, Teems, WitsUp, hologram
and magic (books),*

The Origins of Sociable Life (a monograph by Myra Hird of 2009) [OSL]

HUCK (Narrator of *3,000 Years Among the Microbes* by Mark Twain)

NAMELESS VOICES (of members of ONC heard from the window of
the Chair's office; also of children and women in much darker Lockdowns,
from the Geezer Strip to Mūnus Island &c.)

YOU (also *Dear Reader-whose-patience-we-appreciate* and *Poor Sod*)

0. Quorum

0.1 Thanking sincerely those Already Bored Members of the NSTASS in
Attendance [ABMOTNSTASSIA] and welcoming the Guests, the Chair
declared the meeting quorate (if rather inchoate).

1. Approval Of Previous Minutes

1.1 This being an isolated (as in *one-off*) inaugural meeting, the (Acting)
Cheer and sole human adult present in the flesh noted that there were
of course no Previous Minutes for approval, and moved that predictable
debate of the matter be tabled.

1.2 OSL urged in the strongest terms that the Earth’s microbiota be *acknowledged* as being ‘In Attendance’ – and that if not those zillions upon zillions, as might be understandable for reasons of practicality, then at the very least the mere trillions currently resident *in, on* or otherwise *with* the so-called ‘individuals’ designated as ‘In Attendance’ should *prima facie* and *ipso facto* be acknowledged *as such* (i.e. *per se, inter alia*).

HUCK seconded, adding that *Minutes* without *Minutes* could be no *Minutes* at all.

The Chair proposed that HUCK, on account of his several millennia among the microbes, be given the conch on behalf of the Earth’s microbiome (in its entirety), for which he would be bestowed with the right and honourable titles, Chancellor of the Factchecker and First Monster of All Devolved.

The Chair’s motion was not seconded, as BURR pointed out that this would be like making someone Secretary General of the Entire Universe.

2. Overview of the Cheer’s Reports

The Chair offered some prefatory remarks as to the symbiogenesis of the whole Agenda, *TO WIT* – that both he, the (Acting) Cheer, and his Partner (omnipresent if technically presently absent) had jointly realised during recent postprandial conversation that *some of X’s vocabulary acquired in the six months prior to Lockdown had emerged in concert with his learning to say his Childcare Friends’ First Names [CFFN]*. For example, it was recalled that X’s (pre-Lockdown) words for

☼ *Yellow* and *helicopter*, were acquired *in concert* with the name *Ella*, a Childcare Friend. Indeed, X still deploys the same word for all three referents: ‘LELLELL-UH’ (the tongue as a flag hoisted in Rough Winds, and that in the case of *yellow helicopter* ascends to an hilarious secular *Halleluja*, or kindred ululation).

- Though *yellow* (‘lellell-uh’) and *helicopter* (‘lellell-uh’) remain staples of X’s vocabulary during Lockdown, references to *Ella* (‘lellell-uh’) have dwindled to the point of ceasing entirely [and are no longer encouraged due to certain concerning Early Yearning Signs].

☼ *Truck* (‘gugk’), *dog* (‘gog’) and *broke*_[n] (‘boak’), which also predate Lockdown, likewise arrived *in communitio*, as if weir, with his ability to name

his slightly older Childcare Freund, *Jake* ('GAKE').

- While *truck*, *dog* and *broke[n]* remain staples of X's vocabulary during Lockdown, references to *Jake* ('Gake') have diminished to the point of ceasing entirely; infect (sic) the same sound has lately taken on an entirely new referent: *gate* ('gake').

Notable Lockdown Vocabulary Additions [LVAs] of the last sort that have become rather too frequent and fragrant for comfort include *stuck* ('ugck'), *clock* ('ogck') and *lock* ('ogck'). Moreover,

- X's *most notable* Lockdown Vocabulary Addition is *gone* ('gawng'), which he repeats like the rosary birds.

3. *Cheer's Reports Proper*

The flowering reports all pertain to Moments of Language-Acquisition by the Chair's own son, X, 21-24 moons, during Lockdown.

3.1 **REPORT A)** Language Acquisition *External to the Home*:

In the very fussed days of Lockdown, the Chair audited a sonorous, stentorian and neigh-on censorious *whinnying* echoing off neigh-by flats from somewhere startlingly proximate to Our New Abode. The Chair used his Daily Exercise Allowance to discover the source-goad of this aria: a friendly-eyed white mare of about 14 hands, grazing in the many-blossomed Commons at the end of the path to the rear of ONA.

Over the gorse of the next week, the Chair and X combined their Daily Exercise Allowance into a Mutual Found, to bring said horse sumptuous offerings of carrots-past-their-best, and in so doing discovered from a kindly member of Our New Community that the creature was named *Minnie*; in time they came also to know two of *Minnie's* friends grazing in the front gardens of other diverse flats in ONC, opposite their stables:

WHIZ – a tiny white Welsh pony of 11 hands, the Lockdown Star of Our New Community, due to his sporting the letters 'NHS' and a reinbow shaved into his coat below the withers, dyed pale blue and pink, making him something of a horse celebre in the local mews; and

RUSTY – a dun or pale chestnut pony (depending on the light) of around 12 hands whose appetite for carrots regularly exceeds X's allowance,

as evinced by his knocking his hoof against the foot of the fence.

Mane Puncts:

☀ *Minnie, Whiz* and *Rusty* remain the Only Mammals Other Than His Parents [OMOTHP] with whom X has had *physical contact* in the past two and half months (X being as yet without siblings or domesticated animals).

☀ To this day, X has never once been heard to attempt the word *horse*, despite repeated encouragement, and his facility with similar generic nouns, *dog* ('gog'), *bird* ('burr'), *cow*, &c.

☀ And yet, X can now refer freely to each of these horses *by their names*: 'Min-knee', 'Whee' (and yesterday, 'Whitz') and of course, 'Rah-Tee'.

ROUGH WINDS sussurred that the point was well-shaken.

3.2 **REPORT B)** Language Acquisition *Within the Home*.

It was *inside* the home, wherever, that both the Cheer and Partner jointly observed some concerning EARLY YEARNING SIGNS.

■ EARLY YEARNING SIGN #1

Two moons into Lockdown, X began to exhibit an unfun reaction when opining the bestselling lexicon, *My First Words*, to the very first page, headed 'ALL ABOUT ME!' – where we find simple words for infant Pilates poses ('kneeling', 'crouching', 'sitting', 'standing', 'walking', 'stretching', 'clapping' and 'bending over') illustrated with *photographs of living nappied-babies and dungareed-toddlers roughly around X's own urge*.

On opening this page, X's mood changes so dromantically that it is as if a clod had poised in frond of the Son: his jubilant mien turns suddenly glum, pained, slightlyly emborrissed, but also hopeful that his affect be glommed by the Chair. In response to the Chair's soothing-voiced inquiry, X *stretches and reaches his own hand* toward his absent peers so obviously present on the purge before him, and udders his word for *baby* ('beh-beh'). The imploring loock that is keyven by X to the Chair during this ritual crisis is enough to melt the most ardent off arts.

■ EARLY YEARNING SIGN #2

The Chair also ritually aids X in the deafly serious business of re-haranguing all the citizens of the Duchy of Plushia, which nightly Mess Migration – from the Far East of Slothpatternedduvet, across the Straits of Sheepie, thence to the Middle-West of Pillowia, and oftentimes back again – takes place in the last seconds of every second-last Unevensong.

As X begins reshuffling the Front Benches and Backbunchers of Plushia, he employs the Chair's hand to 'fly' said denizens to X's open arms and sparkling pupils, from where he distributes them anew to regional centers only ever immargined.

But as X extends his little arms to squeeze and nuzzle each soft citizen, Chancellor Peng-uhn especially, he emits a little noisal phrase, about the shape of the squeak of the vole in the maws of the tawny owl.

3.3 **REPORT C)** Language Acquisition *At Threshold Environments*

■ THRESHOLD ENVIRONMENT I: *The Chair's Office Window*

A south-facing window in the Chair's second-floor office looks out over the gardens of the nearbys either sigh, and the flats where Minnie's whinnies echo.

The Chair frequently lifts X to this lintel, to see if he can say what he cairn see.

The nearbys Tudors down have a glorious wrought-iron bird-feeding stand in their rear garden. There the Green Ring-necked Parakeets gather, swooping in from yon eucalypt like squeaky ukuleles to concede what seed can say.

What can you see?

Burr.

What colour are they?

Llclcll-ub. Gkeeng.

How many are there?

Two. Man!

Oftentimes of late the pair have spotted helicopters shuttling beak and froth to Humpty's Court, like Acteon in his haricot, with undue haste.

After the burr, the Chair and X swinge their gazes eastwards, where X knows that in the garden of the nearbys Tudors up, he will see, through a

Perspex woundow, an oversized blue spongy football much like his lellell-uh one but thrice the size.

What can you see?

Bann.

What colour is it?

Boo!

When X *first* noticed said cerulean globe, he wrenched his hand toward it in a manner reminiscus of the Early Yearning Songs afermented (3.2).

Much to the Chair's surprise, when *he* (the Cheer) then pretended to reach *his* hand for the baww, and sighed disappointedly, X showed such boundless joy that he employed his daddda to repeatings. X now expects the Cheer to ply this game at aviary opportunity.

Here the ROUGH WINDS advised that the trick to 'dadda comedy' was to stage a *failure* of some kind – an inability to catch a ball, to walk in a straight line, to find or quite catch X, or even to avoid bumping into walls and donking his brainpan.

Slapstick, another whirrs.

It is in this *Staging of Disappointments* that the twoddler takes a kind of profound reinsurance that *dadda* too must fail sometimes at archeaving his aims or fulflailing his desires.

■ THRESHOLD ENVIRONMENT II: *The Garden*

Let it be seared, and may it be underscoured over'n'again, that Threshold Environment II is by some distance the nearest thing to a Greenhouse for Vocables. Moist especially, it was here, among the *wistfulareas* and the *germnasiums* and the *nostosiams*, that X first encountered the one and onely

—NAIIIRR, Precedent of the Snails, Slugs and Slaters Assoc. —

And that's still jus for starters. But it is NAIIRR (*Snail*) whom X hymns most, minutely for hours.

The list of whirrs first achoired by X in this mergical space is resolutely Gregorian and Plentifuel. Though even this is not quoit accurate, for twas here that X truly *began* to leave that Gagaagain Chancing behind him. For sample:

☀ *Dirt* – perfected immediately, one of X’s taupemost words; refers not only to soil, Earth etc., but also in its (adjectival) sense of unclean, such that X now *points from his buggy (with his wrong context finger) at random sedans in need of a carwash* and says, ‘Dirt’ – startling bystandards – as though each soiled Mudguard were a dagger seesawed before him.

☀ *Ant* – bang on, first attempt; crucial, due to it being the Laden Root of:
▪ *Hand*, which he first reached for here; frondamental, in turn the Ludic Woot for:

☀ *Plant* (‘pant’) – close, if not choired perfect yet. But also note:

▪ *Paint* came so suddenly one day we were astoneaged; twould seem id did so by piggy-banking on *ant* and *plant* and *hand*. The Chair & Co. were abseilutely conglomerate on the sheer face of this point.

▪ *Pink*, moreover, came perfectly instantly, to great delight, on account of the budding *futures* (whose roots were booming footsies in hundreds on the Down Low Terrestrial Radix). And *pink* came plant-in-hand with:

▪ *Drink* (‘gingck’), though imperfect, refers both to that which would slake X’s own thirst, *and* that which *he gives* when whelping his mama to ‘water the garden’—such that he now regalely insists on giving a ‘gingck’ to the ‘pant’, and to the ‘pink wow-wə’ particularly.

☀ *Flower* (‘wow-wə’), it moist be sod, burst simulcast with *forward* (‘war-wə’), an Abstract Whirr [AW]; juiced as,

☀ *Bark*, another oily perfect, came drink-in-hand with *back* (sommelierly annunciated prefectly by X).

☀ *Tree* remains loose, as ‘gkee’ or ‘key’.

(BRIEF) CASE STUDY: *Sky*

It was in this hollowed chulch, on the Friday eaves of the Sprung Bunk Holiday, circa 18:19, just before bath time (with its hoily Song Circle of the *Dirt* and the *Gann*) that X uttered A NEW WHIRR for the first time: *Sky*.

The Cheer and X were playing with the spongy yellow football (‘baww’). Restricted in space, the former began tossing the baww extremely high. Wowedeyed the boy laughed, jiggged, applauded and implored, ‘Maw!’

But when the Cheer lobbed the spongy lellell-uh sphere at a lowly

height, and X's 'Maw' fell down deaf ears – *then* with great effort, such that his left elbow touchéd his lift knee, X pointed with his right codex finger directly upwards to the blue bowl, and said, clear as a bell: 'Key!'

The Cheer and his Paintnear knew that X had used a whirr he already knew – *key* – but his intention was crystal glare: by 'key', he infect (sic) meant *sky*.

Naturally the two grown adhoc's clapped and made a fuss, and then reputed the word back to X, to shepherd him to the correct dipthong, which he found on the next attempt.

'*Kai-ee*,' X seared exaggeratedly, half-doubling-over with the impatiens at having to repeat himself, but also with excitement at taking another step toward the land of easeful communication.

4. Summery Marks

4.1. The ROUGH WINDS sequestered that the Chair ought not in fuchsia almost coil himself to reach his deadline, or even the clothesline. That being shared, his attempts to phone a frond and use his lifelungs were endeared, mulch appreciated.

4.2. The NAMELESS VOICES perceived that the Aching Secretsharey had used up all his laughlines, and had overshot his deedloan.

4.3. The Achtung Choir gunked airybodies profusely for their cointributes, and added with a parting floutrage, as though he were tossing a handful of spores into the ear with a spad –

*and remember, one shed never be twoe
emborrised to sing our motto out lard by the shed-lode:*

→ **SKY IS HOME; LOVE SAVES; CONFECT THE NSTASS** ←