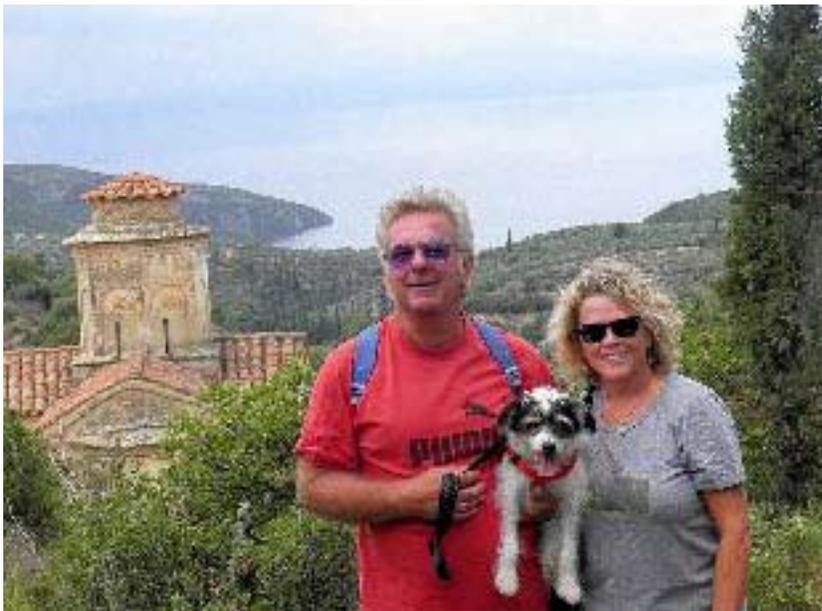


ART AND LITERATURE



Book up for Greek tales

Dollar couple Marjory McGinn and Jim Bruce (pictured) could hardly have picked a more inauspicious time to up sticks and move lock, stock and barrel to Greece in 2010.

Though things were tough in Scotland they were even tougher there as the country began to feel the first effects of the eurozone crisis that would eventually see the government accepting hundreds of billions in bailout funds - in return for stringent austerity measures impacting on jobs, pensions and healthcare right across the board.

Despite all this - and to be fair events were still very much unfolding at the time - Marjory,

Gregor White

who has now written a book about the couple's first year of a three year stay in Greece, says they were never really in any doubt that the move was the right thing.

"We're both journalists and a major restructuring in the Scottish industry meant things were more difficult for us here - I was freelancing and not getting as much work as before and Jim also was affected by the changes," she said. Added to that we're both in our fifties so there was an element of 'now or never' to it."

Setting up home in the Megali Mantinea region of Greece's southern Peloponnese - a region described as "untamed and remote" by Marjory - the plan

was to mix with the locals as much as possible.

"We did kind of 'launch' ourselves into it a bit, but it didn't scare us even though it did prove difficult at times getting to grips with village life and trying to make a living."

In "Things Can Only Get Feta" Marjory documents the couple's various adventures, particularly with eccentric goat farmer and quickly-established good friend Foteini and their own mad as a brush Jack Russell dog, Wallace.

The book is available from Amazon and other online retailers and more info about both the book and the region that inspired it are available at www.bigfatgreekodyssey.com.

Bloody winners

Gregor White

Winners of the Observer's recent Bloody Scotland competition are Louise Croser from Alloa, C Macnaughton from Cambusbarron and David Brodie from Cornton, Stirling, each winning a pair of tickets to see Eoin Colfer and Colin Bateman at this year's crime writing festival.

In Good Craic at the Albert Halls on Saturday, September 14 the pair will talk about their respective writings as well as the importance of story in all its forms.

While Eoin Colfer (pictured) is perhaps best known for his children's sci-fi/fantasy Artemis Fowl series he has also written crime novels Plugged and Screwed for adults.



Colin Bateman, meanwhile, is the writer of the BBC series Murphy's Law, which starred James Nesbitt, plus novels with titles like The Day of the Jack Russell and The Prisoner of Brenda.

He has also recently been commissioned to write a musical, and his novel I Predict a Riot is also being developed for the BBC, with a working title of The Devil Wears Primark.

This year's Bloody Scotland crime writing festival takes place from September 13-15 with events being held in the Tolbooth and Stirling Highland Hotel as well as the Albert Halls.

Other authors taking part this year - the festival's second outing - include Val McDermid, Mark Billingham, Louise Welsh and Ann Cleeves, the author of the Vera Stanhope and Shetland crime series. For full details see www.bloodyscotland.com.

'Peter who?' prepares to appear at festival

What kind of reader would enjoy a Peter Carroll novel?

Well, according to the author himself anyone who doesn't "mind finding humour in dark places", is "not easily offended" and who enjoys "stretching their deductive brain muscles." Dunblane resident Peter is by his own admission a "late starter" when it comes to writing fiction, his working life to date including many years with the RSPB and now as a wildlife surveyor with ACE Surveyors - "you could say I'm getting paid to birdwatch," he says. However, in between times, he has also managed to produce three novels, with a fourth on the way.

First book In Many Ways is "a tale of gangland revenge, betrayal and buried secrets" set largely in Glasgow while Pandora's Pitbull is "a scientifically plausible 'zombie' book."

Third novel Stark Contrasts is a return to the crime genre and the start of a possible series centred around police officer DI Adam Stark, in this first outing pursuing "a sociopath with a social conscience."

"I read a lot as a child, including all the classics like Dickens, Treasure Island, The Hobbit and so on and, as a teen, I spent a lot of time in the company of Stephen King and James Herbert," says Peter.

"My reading as an adult has mainly been comic thrillers and crime novels - particularly by Scottish authors.

"I think my writing is definitely a melting pot of those influences as well as more modern ones such as Irvine Welsh, Iain Banks, Chris

Gregor White

Brookmyre and Cormac McCarthy." Appearing at this year's Off the Page book festival he calls the opportunity it presents "fantastic" and adds: "I can't pretend it's not daunting - I'm not an established author and most folk will likely look at the programme and think Peter who?"

"I have to come up with a way of persuading them to pay their money, come along, perhaps be inspired to read my stuff and, hopefully, have a few laughs while we're at it!"

"The chance to raise awareness of my work is massive for me.

"My publisher Dave Lyons will be there to help me out so I hope a few Observer readers will take a punt and come along!"

"I was published by a small independent publisher called Raven Crest Books.

"I have found it good for me as I don't have the time or the financial freedom required to

become a full-time writer as yet.

"However, I do have the freedom to pretty much write what I please - with a welcome and understandable level of input and editorial comment from Dave to temper my wildest excesses!"

Peter Carroll appears at Dunblane Library at 7.30pm on Friday, September 6.

More details about this and other information on him and his writing is available at www.petercarroll.ravencrestbooks.com.

Full Off the Page programme details are also available online at www.stirling.gov.uk.

Printed programmes can also be picked up from local library branches.

This year's eighth Off the Page festival takes place across the area from September 6-13 in venues all across the local area.

DON'T MISS

Circus comes to town



The Moscow State Circus is back in Stirling from August 14-18 with tickets available at www.moscowstatecircus.com or by calling 07721 565558.

Congratulations to the winners of last week's competition to win pairs of tickets for weekday shows at the city's Kings Park, including Sebastian Harmston

from Stirling, Fiona Clark of Kippen and Joyce Bennie from Bridge of Weir.

With the show titled Park Gorkogo (Gorky Park) it includes a feast of clowns, acrobats, jugglers, trapeze artists and daring roller skaters. Early booking is definitely recommended.



Creatively independent

Gregor White

Creative Stirling's contribution to the Scottish independence debate - 1NE4OURZERO2014 - was unveiled at the city's Old Town Jail last week. The exhibition, based on a Twitter campaign run over the past four months, launched with a gig at the venue on Friday and runs until September 14.

1NE4OURZERO2014 is a collection of

public contributions in 140 characters (a standard 'Tweet'), an array of which have been screen printed onto large canvases and installed around the former tourist attraction.

Entry to the installation is free, and guests can even add their own contributions through wood block prints that hung in the central room of the exhibition.