




Magic of Modern Metaphor

Walking with the Stars



Written and Illustrated by
David Hodgson
Edited by Nick Owen



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Contents

<i>Foreword</i>	<i>ix</i>
Part I: Introducing the Stories	1
Introduction	3
<i>The Angel of the North</i>	3
Ten methods for getting the most out of this book	5
Part II: The Stories	9
1. Swapping allotments	11
2. Birds that flock together learn together	12
3. Who is your favourite?	13
4. Blowing up balloons	15
5. Paper knickers	16
6. A sting	18
7. Dragonfly, frogs and toads	19
8. Gandhi visits the allotment	21
9. Barking (1)	22
10. Barking (2)	23
11. Gooseberry fools	24
12. Inside out	25
13. Outside in	26
14. Hairstyle	27
15. Walking with Freddie Mercury	28
16. Too small to make a difference	30
17. Mosquito nets	31
18. Not carrots and sticks	32
19. Billie Jean King	33
20. Negative or positive thoughts?	34
21. Curiosity	35
22. The Beatles at the allotment	36
23. A light buffet	37
24. The white horse	38
25. Choices and abilities	40
26. Greasy Alan	42
27. Present	44
28. Walking with Paul Daniels	45
29. What do big girls talk about?	47

30.	Travelling	48
31.	Ghost story (1)	50
32.	Richie Benaud	52
33.	FA Cup final day	53
34.	Leek sleepover	55
35.	Ghost story (2)	57
36.	Bruce Forsyth	58
37.	A focus of attention	59
38.	Real education	61
39.	Mountain climbing	63
40.	Doing the right thing	64
41.	Alan Bennett s last meal	65
42.	Bounty	66
43.	Beer mats	67
44.	Penalty shoot-out	69
45.	Walking with David Attenborough	70
46.	Walking through time	71
47.	Barking (3)	73
48.	Successive approximations	74
49.	Grandma s rugs	75
50.	Jack s favourite childhood toy	76
51.	Perception is reality	77
52.	Your hardest day s work	78
53.	The Hoppings	80
54.	Hatching time	82
55.	Building a pigeon cree	83
56.	The Merlin factor	87
57.	Sunday tea	89
58.	Tony Marbles	90
59.	Victoria Beckham	91
60.	My very last trip to Billy the barber s	92
61.	The rules of whistling	93
62.	Elvis and Marilyn	94
63.	An interesting lift	95
64.	Lisa	97
65.	Jumble sale	98
66.	Bazza the coach	99
67.	Cigarettes and alcohol	100
68.	Cheek to cheek	101
69.	Bonty night	102
70.	Answering Lisa	104
71.	Rainbows	105
72.	A night at the club	106
73.	A holiday in Cyprus	108
74.	Grandad s CV	110
75.	Get knotted buns	111

76.	Wedding day advice	112
77.	Important details	114
78.	Walking with cowboys	116
79.	A new Sunday tea	117
80.	Looking for the magic inside the familiar	118
81.	Expert or donkey?	119
82.	Values	120
83.	High standards	121
84.	Lost in IKEA	122
85.	Blackberrying	123
86.	Karate lessons	124
87.	Driving home	125
88.	Angel of the North	126
89.	Like or love	128
90.	Word power	130
91.	Fight club	131
92.	Switching it off and on	132
93.	Walking with the Stars	133
94.	The secret of a long life	135
95.	Leaving a vacuum	136
96.	Sign of the times	138
97.	Vote Ant and Dec	139
98.	Grandad s wild weekend with Madonna	140
Part III: Interpreting the Stories		141
	Possible interpretations and questions to accompany the stories	143
	NLP and the stories	181
	Ten useful assumptions to hold	181
	<i>Further reading</i>	187



Angel of the North

Introduction

The Angel of the North

On an exposed windy hillside in Gateshead an individual stands confidently over a community. When erected in 1998 the *Angel* divided local opinion; awe on one side and couldn't a million pounds be better spent? on the other.

The *Angel* has stood for over ten years now and it makes a difference. Once something exists it can't not make a difference. It is part of the landscape but still seems to float above it. It can inspire and surprise each time you see it. I have driven by it many times on my way to a work event or on a family outing and its power is palpable. In my little bubble, in my little car, with my little worries I've caught a glimpse of the sun on a wing or the mighty silhouette against a huge tarmac grey sky and I'm taken out of my bubble, if only for a moment. A moment is long enough to contemplate better questions.

The *Angel* represents an investment in art and imagination over the practical and real. When combined, these two become a powerful force. Although the initial million pound price tag seemed excessive to many, an original bronze maquette (model) owned by Gateshead Council was valued at one million pounds on an episode of *Antiques Roadshow*, the highest valuation given to any object in the history of the programme. The true value of things is not always obvious. Time changes and places change and so can people, individually and as communities. People often feel threatened by change. Yet only when we change do we grow and develop.

The *Angel* changes slowly. Its rusty colour is mellowing with age. It was built to last for a hundred years. Soon after its installation, the *Angel* was adorned with a huge black and white striped football shirt bearing the name Shearer and the number 9, though only for twenty minutes until police arrived to remove it. The names of future North-Eastern heroes are as yet unknown but the *Angel* will be there as their stories unfold.

When Antony Gormley is asked to explain his *Angel of the North* he offers three thoughts: to remember the generations of coal-miners who worked in the darkness beneath the hill for two hundred years, to highlight the change from the industrial age to the information age and as a focus for us to explore our hopes and fears.

Gormley's overall theme of a community seeking an identity through changing times resonates with everyone at an individual level. As we grow up we search for our own identity within our community, and this collection of stories reflects our individual journeys.

As we immerse ourselves in information, as a species, we could do well to remember that our own senses bombard us with perhaps three million pieces of information per minute. As individuals we filter and use only a small amount of this information. Understanding this filtering process and using it wisely is more useful than gorging on information.

Occupational psychologists studying human performance have explored the impact of training in four areas: information, skills, attitude and habits. Their research suggests that business generally concentrates on information and skills when it is attitude and habits that have a greater long-term impact on performance. Although attitude and habits are more difficult to influence, stories can offer a gentle yet profound route to challenge and change them.

Education, too, has increasingly focused on squeezing information and skills into a crowded curriculum. Perhaps we should remember that schools were originally formed in Ancient Greece to allow students and teachers the opportunity to share their ideas and perceptions. Such a two-way process grows attitude and habits. The word education derives from the Latin *educare* meaning 'to draw out'. We are not blank slates, and stories are a rewarding method for drawing out the wisdom within all of us.

The majority of our attitudes and habits are formed as we grow up. If we are lucky children we are surrounded by angels influencing us in positive ways. Siblings, peers, parents, teachers, neighbours and communities are benign or malevolent guides. Grandparents, at their best, are the most powerful angels of all because their influence can spread through time, acting as a bridge linking the generations.

When we interpret stories we can't be wrong. We create meaning that is right for us in that time and place. The stories presented in this collection offer the reader an opportunity to explore their attitudes and habits. Once we are able to gain greater clarity in these areas we can better develop our knowledge and hone our skills to be effective individuals and valuable members of our communities.

Ten methods for getting the most out of this book

Stories are the most important thing in the world. Without stories, we wouldn't be human at all.

Philip Pullman

I'd like to encourage you to write your thoughts on the pages of the book itself (unless you're in a bookshop as this can annoy staff). This is a great way to personalise the stories.

And if you do turn out to be famous, the scribbles you make in this book could make it far more valuable to wealthy collectors in the future. However, any financial benefits will probably be enjoyed by your children or grandchildren some time after you're gone.

A psychologist studied two Native American tribes that lived side by side. One tribe allowed their infants to crawl freely and the other tribe restricted their movements. The tribe that allowed their children freedom were more advanced in terms of arts and crafts, tools used, writing and performing as a group. When we interact with our environment we learn more. I recommend you interact with the stories that follow.

23. *A light buffet*

Jack mostly saw his grandad at the allotment or at the house for Sunday tea. The christening of a relative's baby neither of them knew was the first time they'd met in a church. The place was cold and unfamiliar and Jack sat next to his grandad. The ceremony was thoughtfully reproduced in shocking violet on a bander-copied sheet of A4 using a religious font style, so they could follow events along with the other relatives that rarely attended church. Neither sang along but they mimed respectfully. Jack thought his grandad looked silly in a shirt that appeared to have been ironed in total darkness, a suit that was probably a good fit fifteen years ago and a tie that he was sure he'd seen at the allotment tying up some sweet peas last year.

Afterwards they all went back to the relative's house and had a buffet that was very much like a normal Sunday tea but, as this was the posh side of the family, there was quiche and salad and it was called a light buffet rather than tea.

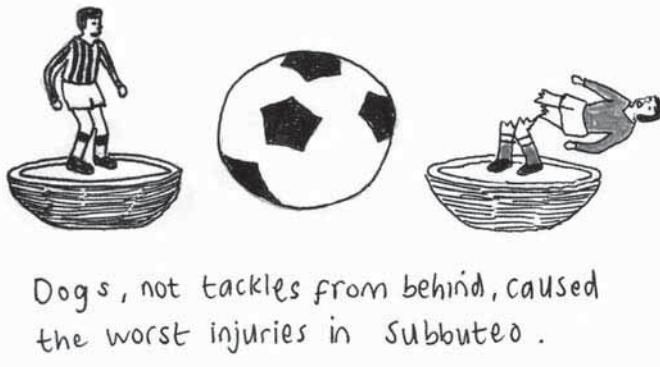
The next time Jack saw Grandad he asked him what he thought of the day. Grandad said he liked the improvised words spoken by the vicar. Jack sought clarification as he couldn't remember any of his words.

He talked about light and dark, Jack. Light illuminates us and everything around us. It means we can see the beauty and horror of the world and the beauty and horror of the people within it, including ourselves. We can only see the best of the world and ourselves in the light. In the shadows we don't see beauty and we might think we're protected from seeing the worst things but we are not. If we are in the shadows we actually see more to be scared of as we imagine far worse dangers than are actually there. What do you remember?

I remember your tie and your suit, Grandad, he giggled.

33. FA Cup final day

The FA Cup final was a really big event in the 1970s. Live games on TV in those days were a rarity and the build up to the final lasted a whole week. TV specials like *It's a Knockout* were filmed with supporters of the two finalists competing against each other. The whole Saturday was one of the best TV days of the year for Jack. By the time *Abide with Me* was sung just before kick-off the excitement was almost unbearable. Jack and his friends would have Subbuteo⁴ tournaments to help predict the score in the forthcoming final. Thankfully, real footballers never experienced the type of injuries sustained by Jack's table-top players. Two broken legs could be treated quickly with sticky tape to allow the player to continue. Two of his players had even lost their heads but they bravely played on. Modern players take note.



A popular PE teacher at school asked Jack and three of his friends for a favour. The school was competing in an athletics competition and needed students to make up the numbers in events for which the school had no entrants. The teacher explained that the school had some very talented athletes but to have a chance of winning they needed pupils to compete in all events as even a last place finish gave one point to the team. Jack and his friends were not exceptional athletes but they did play for the school football team and could

⁴ Like GameBoy, PlayStation or Xbox version of football games but it took far longer to set up and your dog could run into the room and ruin a game in seconds. My dog once ate Kevin Keegan.

probably collect a few points between them. The teacher reasoned that he did the lads a favour by giving up his time to run the school team in which they all played so they could give up one Saturday for him.

The plan was fine until the lads realised the day in question was FA Cup final day. They discussed it among themselves and agreed football trumps athletics. What could they say to the teacher? On each day of the week preceding the event Jack's friends all went to see the teacher individually and gave excuses as to why they would miss the athletics event – weddings, christenings, funerals. When Jack went to see the teacher he decided honesty was the best policy. He told the teacher the real reason why he wouldn't be jumping into a sandpit littered with dog poo that Saturday, and the teacher was furious. He said he'd be very upset if Jack let him down. Jack did let him down and the teacher did not speak to him again. He was dropped from the football team whereas his friends remained on good terms with the teacher.

When he told his grandad he asked if he'd done the right thing. His grandad said only Jack could know the answer and it would come from inside of him and not outside of him in the reactions of others. Later Jack told his grandad he thought he should have gone to the athletics competition.

36. *Bruce Forsyth*

Jack's favourite programme was *The Generation Game* and he often chatted to Grandad about the families and the challenges they'd faced the previous night. He had suggested that Grandad and Aunt Joy could be contestants and they agreed that even Bruce Forsyth would struggle to make Aunt Joy laugh.

Inevitably, Grandad told Jack that he'd met Bruce on a couple of occasions. While touring theatres before he found TV fame Bruce had stayed in a B&B nearby. Grandad met Bruce in a department store buying underwear. He had confided in Grandad that as a dancer he needed very tight pants. He also stuck to a rigid fitness regime. He didn't drink too much and didn't like the company of people who needed to drink alcohol to be happy. He was tired as he hadn't slept well in his digs. He'd complained to the landlady that the bed was uncomfortable. But her reply was that she'd only recently bought the mattress and had no complaints from the only other person to sleep on it – a magician who specialised in lying on a bed of nails. Grandad said Bruce was a true gentleman and professional. He worked hard to nurture the skill he had and to make the most of it. I said to him, with your attitude, Bruce, you'll have a long career.

Bruce also passed on a thought to Grandad. He said he enjoyed hosting *The Generation Game* because it brought families together as well as the nation that watched the programme together. He thought the world was moving apart despite it becoming a smaller place.

Take dancing as an example, said Bruce. People dance apart now at these disco club places. In my time people danced together. They would hold each other and look at each other while they danced. They would have to get to know and trust their partner. There's too much dancing alone.

15. *Walking with Freddie Mercury*

- We can change someone's mood by distracting them, in this case using humour.
- We all wear masks to hide or reveal our true selves.
- The fun is finding out what's inside.

QUESTION

What masks do you wear and for what purpose?

16. *Too small to make a difference*

- We can all make a difference.
- We create our own reactions to information.
- Our moods motivate us to act or not.

QUESTION

When have you made a difference?

Source: Stephen Fry, John Lloyd and John Mitchinson, *QI: The Book of General Ignorance*, Faber and Faber, 2006.

17. *Mosquito nets*

- We can make a bigger difference when we learn how to influence others.
- When we do we are.

NLP and the stories

Neurolinguistic programming (NLP) was developed around forty years ago by Richard Bandler and John Grinder. They studied successful therapists who had achieved great results with those people they sought to help. NLP has become a field in which successful people across many disciplines are studied. The idea is that we can all learn from the behaviours, attitudes and beliefs used by the best performers in any area of human endeavour.

For example, how do people learn best? The natural way children learn is to copy those around them through role play without fear of failure. Children learn really well this way. It is estimated they learn around ninety new words per day before their seventh birthday. Children may not learn *best*; research shows that adults have more effective and efficient strategies for learning specific tasks or information. But it is certainly true that children learn *easiest*, at least until they begin formal schooling and start worrying about mistakes. The NLP Learning State was developed by observing the ways children and adults really learn best. By copying their techniques we can all learn more effectively. The Learning State is described in my book *The Buzz* (Crown House Publishing, 2006).

The basic assumptions underlying NLP can be found in these stories. Richard Bandler asserts that stories are the best way to understand NLP and its applications. The assumptions are not proven but it is useful to behave *as if* they are true and notice the difference in the results you get.

Ten useful assumptions to hold

1. The ability to change the process by which we experience reality is usually more valuable than changing the content of our experience.

In his book *Man's Search for Meaning*, Victor Frankl describes his experiences inside a Nazi concentration camp with chilling honesty.

One of his many powerful observations was that a key reason why some people survived and others did not was in large part due to their attitude. The prisoners had little control in most areas of their life but they could control their attitude and the way they experienced reality. We can all choose our attitude.

Stories 5, 6, 7, 24, 37, 44, 57, 59 and 62.

2. The meaning of communication is the response you get.

The problem with communication is the illusion that it has been accomplished.

George Bernard Shaw

Rather than blaming people for not understanding us, we can achieve better results by noticing the response we get as we communicate. We can observe the non-verbal signals and other behaviours to check whether or not our message was received the way we wanted it to be. Most of us do this naturally when we communicate with babies. If they don't understand us we look for clues in their reaction to help us communicate more effectively the next time we try. We do not blame the baby for being *wrong*. We tend to be less forgiving with older children and adults. Indeed, a survey recently discovered that the parents of teenagers routinely criticise their children in 90 per cent of their communications rather than seeking clarity. If someone does not respond to us in the way we were hoping then it is more useful to change the way we communicate rather than label the other person as being resistant, stupid or awkward.

Stories 16, 17, 20, 33, 38, 51 and 60.

3. All human experiences are filtered through the five main senses (sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell).

For example, all of our memories are experienced using some or all of our five senses. Think of your best holiday and you'll probably picture the place where you stayed. You will recall the things you heard and remember how you felt as if you were there. Can you remember your first kiss? Most people can. They can usually remember what they were wearing, where they were, what was said

Magic of Modern Metaphor

is a wonderful collection of warm, funny and inspiring stories sharing ancient wisdom through a modern relationship between grandson and grandad. The grandad provides answers to the questions he is asked by his grandson with stories, challenges, games and questions. Questions such as 'How can I be more popular?', 'What should I do when I leave school?' and 'Why is Auntie Joan miserable all the time?' are answered partly through the grandad's extensive (imaginary) contact with stars such as Bruce Forsyth, Alan Bennett and even Ant and Dec. These stories are suitable for teachers, trainers, parents and thinkers and can be read individually or as a whole.

"... a treasure box of the most wonderful sparkling tales – light, accessible, humorous and elegant in their apparent simplicity; 'apparent' because, like all good myths, legends and fairy tales, they plant seeds in our psyches that in time will bear fruit in many delightful and surprising ways." **Steve Bowkett, author, storyteller, trainer**

"... an outstanding feat of innovation and creativity. He has provided a simple process that can release immense creativity, curiosity and learning for both teachers and students. He reminds us not only about the importance and power of stories but also about how our own families can provide endless opportunities for learning and wonder if we take the time to ask questions and listen to answers.

"I found myself strangely moved, if not a little tearful.

"Magic." **Roy Leighton, educator, author and values consultant**

"I found this to be an extremely enjoyable, interesting and thought-provoking book, which reminded me of the effectiveness of metaphor and the incredible power of storytelling." **Michaela Gill, hypnotherapist**



David Hodgson is a bestselling author and this is his fourth book. He is a Master Practitioner and Trainer of NLP, has the British Psychological Society Level A&B, a Diploma in Careers Guidance and a Diploma in Management. He is a Training Consultant in the North East who has worked with companies such as Orange, Walkers Crisps, the NHS, the Institute of Careers Guidance and Association of Graduate Careers Services. He works with young people and those who work with them on motivation, goal setting, life skills and employability. David is also an Independent Thinking Associate.



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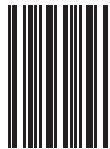


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