

Fergus Byrne met Christopher Pike in Bridport

*Christopher Pike © Photograph by Robin Mills*

I was born around 3am on Sunday morning in the middle of a thunderstorm in Hitchin maternity hospital. My father, Edmund, was a microbiologist. He researched water quality along Chesil beach in the late sixties. When he passed away, I found copies of the Bridport News from that time including one describing “Keeping the beaches “golden” - Research Men to Visit Bridport”. I also found lots of local postcards and photos of me as a toddler at West Bay. My mother, Barbara, was a primary school teacher who taught me to read and do simple sums before I started school.

We lived in Stevenage, a new town built as a kind of socialist utopia of neighbourhood shopping and community centres, cycle tracks and subsidised buses, but also of underpasses full of broken glass and graffiti. However, the countryside was nearby and much time was spent building camps, sharpening sticks and making fires. Until skateboarding arrived ...

From the early seventies, family holidays were spent at a cottage at Tamarisk Farm, West Bexington. These were always taken during school term when the roads and beaches were quieter. My parents also felt it was more beneficial educationally to take children away somewhere different rather than adhering to school curricula. I vividly remember

Christopher Pike

dreamlike sunset walks with dad up to the 'little house on the hill' near Puncknowle. Tamarisk Farm organic produce tasted so good and inspired in me a love for growing and conservation, which continues to this day. I consciously buy most of my seeds from Joy and Michael Michaud at Sea Spring Seeds.

My first live music experience at age 14 was UK Subs at the punk club at Stevenage Bowes Lyon House, a somewhat terrifying experience with much aggressive 'ruck dancing' at the front. Undeterred, next up was Hammersmith Odeon, to see Motörhead, in their original line up. The Marquee became a regular haunt, their inspired policy to offer residencies to bands that they truly believed in played a pivotal part in the UK music scene for decades.

Film is a continuing passion. It's like oxygen to me. I remember BBC2 late night horror double bills and Hitchcock seasons. I regularly absented myself from secondary school to catch rarely screened classics on daytime TV. The ABC Stevenage was gloriously 1970s with vibrant turquoise (screen 1) or orange seats (screen 2). Later cinemas of choice included the Everyman, Hampstead, still with gaslighting in the mid-1980s, and Scala, Kings Cross and its unique 'arthouse meets grindhouse' programming.

At Durham University, I studied Chemistry. I found it straightforward, and it allowed more time for other things including chairing 201 Film Society. I then went onto Cambridge, to do a PhD in Quantum Chemistry. This involved doing computer-heavy, modelling calculations of small chemical systems on a giant computer, which occupied its own air-conditioned room. I often worked through the night since that was when computer time was most readily available. It meant that days were often free for other pursuits. Luckily, Cambridge Arts Cinema had great all-day programming. I became quite good at tennis.

I've always had an entrepreneurial streak and from an early age would set up stalls on our street selling stuff. At college, I ran the graduate bar. I do regret selling my collection of early 2000AD and Action comics. That was definitely worst business decision I ever made. In the early 90s, there was much talk about the UK losing homegrown technology value to foreign competitors. Intellectual property seemed critical, so I decided to combine my technology background and interest in entrepreneurship to train as a Patent Attorney, which proved to be a good move.

I owe a lot to my mentor, Tony Gibson at Procter and Gamble in Newcastle. His training in patent skills was rigorous and use of a red pen to correct drafting mistakes, prolific. Outside of the office, my go-to place was a small music club called World Headquarters, which operated under the tag "a smiling face and a pumping bass for the human race". They mixed up soul, funk, ska, reggae, jungle ... everyone dancing together as one sweaty mass, the floorboards palpably rippling underfoot. WHQ still goes strong in a larger venue named after Curtis Mayfield.

After six years in the corporate world, I set up my own practice in Marlow, Buckinghamshire. At the time I was the youngest Patent Attorney in the country with their own practice. The practice grew quickly and it was a joy to work with many engaged, creative and enterprising clients. For years, I handled most of the patent work for Glaxo Wellcome's world class asthma inhaler portfolio. I taught myself trade mark law and qualified as a Trade Mark Attorney. Until Brexit, I had the right to practice across all of the EU if I chose to. Somehow, I found time to write a book, Virtual Monopoly, on the business strategy of intellectual property. It led to lecture engagements at business schools like Insead and as visiting IP expert at the Royal College of Art.

Whilst professional life was going well, it came at a cost, the balance was not quite right. I took time out and joined my parents on a holiday they were taking in West Dorset, which felt like a return to a spiritual home. I decided to sell most of my practice and move to Bridport, keeping enough work for 'spare bedroom' type consultancy. Initially, the workload kept growing until I got strict about keeping it in check. I found in Bridport that people took a genuine interest in who you are. It was refreshing. I acquired an allotment and a polytunnel and started fishing off the beach. I joined a study group on Care of the Soul and undertook a two-year training course to qualify as a biodynamic craniosacral therapist.

Bridport Arts Centre (BAC) was one of first places I visited. Shabby but soulful. A place of nurturing. A place of meaning. I soon got involved with the brilliant Bridport Film Society, acting as its Chair for eleven years, and also the From Page to Screen film festival, which explores adaptation. Sometimes an apostrophe can make a big difference: I've consistently advocated that From Page to Screen also be promoted as Bridport's Film Festival, whose home is naturally at Bridport's Arts Centre. I'm now BAC Chair of Trustees and, along with fellow trustees and Director, Claire Tudge and her dedicated team, am proud to play a part in its ongoing journey of transformation.

I always try to look for the opportunity in every situation and find that orienting in this way allows positive energy to cascade. When a group or community orients in this way, great things can happen. I'm therefore really enjoying seeing how our Bridport and West Dorset community is enthusiastically responding to the [Come Together campaign](#) to raise funds to bring the historic Bridport Arts Centre building back into community ownership. So much generosity, so much creative energy and truly wonderful sharing of meaningful BAC stories. And I'm confident that as the campaign moves ahead, that joy of coming together will gather force. As a generous, creative and powerful community, we can achieve so much together.

To find out more, donate or support the campaign, visit www.bridport-arts/cometogether.com. 