

TOGETHERNESS

A Radio Play by

Richard Kay

Commissioned for a Badapple Theatre Podcast

Richard Kay

46 Scarcroft Road

York, YO231NF

richard@richardkay.net

07808 166726

Characters

BARRY Early Retirement, moved to the Village of Upper Singleton

JUDY Barry's late wife.

GORDON Local Historian/Head of Parish Council. Over familiar but well-meaning

SOPHIE Barry's neighbour. Shy but assured of her opinions.

MARJORIE Elderly Choir leader with an unfortunate tick. Sophie's Mum

AUTOMATED VOICEMAIL VOICE

THE CHORUS OF THE SONG
“TOGETHERNESS” FADES IN WITH
OPENING TITLE AND PLAYS TO END OF
CHORUS

ANNOUNCER: “Togetherness” by Richard Kay

RECURRING “BARRY (REC)” VOICEMAIL
MESSAGE BEGINS EACH NEW SECTION

BARRY (REC): (D) Barry Thrush cannot get to the phone at the moment. Leave a message and I’ll get back to you.

BEEP

BARRY: Um, well I can actually, insofar as this being me. So, here begins Barry’s audio diary. It strikes me that I should have a means of keeping a memoir these days and, not being one who is.....er.... of the persuasion to keep a written diary I thought that I should erm.....begin my memoirs – if that’s what this becomes - in the recorded format of.....um....of.....erm....this format....oh for heaven’s sake (HANGS UP).

BEEP

VOICEMAIL: (D) Thank you for calling.

BARRY (REC): (D) Barry Thrush cannot get to the phone at the moment. Leave a message and I'll get back to you.

BEEP

BARRY: So....as I was saying....more or less...this is my new resolution. To keep a log of my memories and thoughts. Having lost Judith, Judy, rather more quickly than we had anticipated it occurred to me what a great shame it was that she never recorded her.... feelings and experiences for, you know, for posterity. Now, I'm not planning on going anywhere but.... I suppose it has got me wondering about the fragility of memories and the fact that they can so easily be lost or forgotten. Perhaps if I were to one day become less.... sound of mind then these recordings may serve as a welcome reminder. Yes. Right. Well, I think that'll do for now.

BEEP

VOICEMAIL: (D) Thank you for calling.

BARRY (REC):

(D) Barry Thrush cannot get to the phone at the moment. Leave a message and I'll get back to you.

BEEP

BARRY:

Third attempt. I've had something of an epiphany over my smoked mackerel. This doesn't want to be anything formal. It is, after all, only for my ears anyway.

So, having decided to record my spoken thoughts, off the cuff as it were, I then thought...how do I go about that exactly. You don't really get tape recorders or Dictaphones these days and even if you did, you'd probably struggle to find a means of playing them once you got around to listening back. And anyway everything seems to be stored digitally these days in "clouds" or what have you so.....obviously I thought I could ask Jerry or Jo but they'd only bombard me with tech jargon, and that's all well and good if they were actually in the same country to be able to pop round and show me but.....and they'd probably just laugh at the whole idea of me keeping a diary anyway. So, I thought well how can I do this myself? I'm sure that there are voice recording "apps" or what have you on phones and computers but I'm damned if I know how to access them. So, then I thought....one piece of tech I can use is my

BARRY (CONT'D):

own answerphone. You simply call your number and the messages are stored there. So why not use it as my memory bank, as it were? The only other messages I would receive were Judy telling me I really ought to know where my phone is so I don't think my message cloud is going to be clogged up by any other extraneous..... voicemails. I'm sure they used to be called answerphone messages, when did they become voicemails? It's probably an American thing. Anyway, I seem to be getting the hang of this now. I must say this does feel a good deal easier after a couple of glasses of port.

So, here I am wondering what best to do with myself. If I'm honest, I wasn't totally bought into the plan of moving to Upper Singleton but I suppose I knew it had always been Judy's heart's desire.

TRANSITION TO FLASHBACK, BARRY AND
JUDY IN LIVING ROOM

JUDY:

You'd love it. It's not just the location, it's the air, the sound, the slower pace of life.

BARRY:

You have taken me there, you know.

JUDY: I know, but you haven't really experienced a place by simply driving through. There's something magical about it, a real sense of belonging. Like the familiar smell of...old boots.

BARRY: Who's old boots?

JUDY: Well, not yours! Alright, that was a bad example. But there is something reassuring about the place. Look, I know it doesn't have the same draw for you, and yes it may not live up to that childhood ideal I have in my mind but let's give it a go? We are, as you say, free to go anywhere. Why not make the most of early retirement and find somewhere anew to settle? And I'm so tired of the....pollution and the....anonymity. I bet that, within a year, you will be running the parish council and have all the ladies of the village wrapped around your little finger. You'll see.

TRANSITION BACK TO VOICEMAIL
MESSAGE

BARRY: (SIGHS) Yes, well, not quite the year we had envisaged. We hadn't banked on a terminal diagnosis hindering our plans. People aren't the most forthcoming with help and support in your time of need if they haven't yet had the

BARRY (CONT'D):

chance to get to know you first. Quite understandably. We were just the new people who moved to the village and immediately shut themselves away.

Judy tried to encourage me to join some local groups; said she wasn't quite up to immersing herself back into village life just yet but...in truth...I believe she was a little disappointed with how the village had changed.

suppose quite naturally, it has sprawled and lost much of its community feel. More commuters, more holiday homes, more affordable housing on the outskirts where it all used to be fields and more...rowdiness? No, it's still too quiet for my liking. Self-centredness. They just seemed to want a part of me. You know, what could I bring to the village?

TRANSITION TO FLASHBACK - BARRY
AND GORDON IN VILLAGE HALL

GORDON:

Hi. Gordon.

BARRY:

Er no, Barry.

GORDON:

Yeah, no I'm Gordon.

BARRY:

Oh, right.

GORDON: So, welcome. I remember your wife actually, we were at school together. Most of the class have

GORDON (CONT'D): moved away but I keep in touch with some. So, you want to know what we have on?

BARRY: Um, well my wife suggested...

GORDON: Well, we have the local history club on Tuesdays if that was your thing. Obviously it's more for those who already have some knowledge of the area – maybe your wife would like it? We've got a lady from the County Records office coming next week and I've got a few records to show her that might be of some interest. Anyway, badminton Wednesday is fully subscribed at the moment, Dorothy is the one in charge of that but be warned, she doesn't take any prisoners! Say, you don't play table tennis do you?

BARRY: Um, not really...

GORDON: Shame, shame, we've just had a table donated and need somebody to offer lessons at the school. Then scouts is on Thursdays if you were interested in offering any survival skills there

GORDON (CONT'D): and on Fridays the choir meet. Are you a singer?

BARRY: Not exactly.

GORDON: Well that's never stopped me! No? Pity, they could do with some more men. Marjorie, our MD, is a bit of a character! Deaf as a post, and has a tendency to sigh at you at regular intervals without even realising she's doing it! *(mimics Marjorie)* Bit disconcerting really. But we've all learned to just ignore her little oddities and on the whole it's a really rather fun little group. And then the big village project at the moment is raising funds for a new roof for the hall. The church is leading the way on that, but their congregation isn't what it used to be so I'm throwing the full might of the Parish Council behind it. We've got a beetle drive this weekend.

BARRY: A what?

GORDON: A beetle drive

BARRY: Oh.

GORDON: Personally, I'd like to raise enough to see a whole refurb where we can establish some sort of community pub again. It's never been the same at The Lion since it became a gastro pub, but it all needs time, money and commitment and we are, sad to say, short of people with the drive to see that through. Anyway, I'll keep chipping away at you! In the meantime, if there's anything you need to know about Singleton life, I am your man.

BARRY: Oh, right, that's...

GORDON: One sec, I just need to have a word with.....(CALLING) Paula, where are we at with the bunting for the May Day celebrations?

TRANSITION BACK TO VOICEMAIL
MESSAGE

BARRY: I think I learned enough about Singleton life from that one man to last me a lifetime. I was exhausted just listening to him.

I wouldn't say I withdrew. Maybe I used Judy as an excuse but... but I'm not that sociable and observant anyway. I just about recognise the lady next door but she and Judy seemed to

BARRY (CONT'D): get off on the wrong footing so I've not pursued any conversational relationship myself. I've never had brilliant observational skills to be fair. I remember at the old house I thought I was doing a nice thing welcoming a couple to the street only to discover it was the next door house that had new inhabitants and I was in fact welcoming people who had been my neighbours for the previous seven years. Still, you expect that in the city. In a village it should be more....

BEEP

VOICEMAIL: (D) Thank you for calling.

BARRY (REC): (D) Barry Thrush cannot get to the phone at the moment. Leave a message and I'll get back to you.

BEEP

BARRY: So, it transpires that you only get a maximum four-minute message duration. That's a good thing. I won't want to be listening to hours of me rabbiting on. And I don't intend to record my thoughts too frequently. I don't have that many thoughts! It is a couple of days since my

BARRY (CONT'D):

last message and I've been busy. Chatting with various family and friends, mostly over Skype or Facebooktime or whatever it is that Jerry set up for me. They have their set days and times to call me, regular as clockwork, I just need to turn on the computer and there they appear. I know everybody means well, but I can't get on with it. I seem to spend too much time looking at people, knowing that they're looking at me. I'm sure that when we used to see each other in person we never actually...looked at each other that much. It's unnerving. Plus, the internet here is far too slow so more often than not I'm staring at their frozen faces whilst trying to decipher their disjointed words.

Otherwise, life as a singleton in Singleton is rather stagnant. Of course I could move back or...anywhere in fact but....her heart was here so.....

It has been suggested that I may be depressed. People are infatuated with the thought that I will inevitably become depressed. I don't feel depressed, but neither do I feel particularly joyous. There is a lack of sound in the house, exacerbated perhaps by a quietness outside that I haven't quite grown accustomed to. I barely even hear the neighbour, despite the fact that we share a wall. Mind you she probably doesn't hear much from me either, save for the odd argument with Alexa (why Jerry bought me one of those I have no idea) and the sound of the news on the TV. Judy always used to laugh at the fact that we could

BARRY (CONT'D): never be bothered to turn off the TV at the end of the ten o'clock news and that we would contentedly sit and watch the steel band, dog walkers and lindy hoppers of the BBC "oneness" idents on rotation for a good five minutes. I quite look forward to that bit now. It seems infinitely preferable to being subjected to the local news, which is why we started watching the news on the digital box in the first place. Of course, I know what Judy would say to me now.

TRANSITION TO FLASHBACK, BARRY AND JUDY IN LIVING ROOM

JUDY: Perhaps you should give it a go.

BARRY: What?

JUDY: Singing. If they're needing men.

BARRY: Me?

JUDY: Why not? You had a lovely voice when you used to sing round the house. You could have just done with learning some of the words.

BARRY: I've never really sung.

JUDY: You do. Did. You may not have been aware but it was always a pretty good indicator that you were in a happy mood. Perhaps you should give the Singleton Singers a go?

BARRY: What is a beetle drive anyway?

JUDY: It's where you have to roll a dice and different numbers allow you to assemble different parts of a beetle's body.

BARRY: Why?

JUDY: Well, as I recall you get a prize if you're the first to complete a beetle.

BARRY: By rolling a dice?

JUDY: It's just a fun little fundraising activity.

BARRY: You have to pay to do it?

JUDY: Try singing. Please.

TRANSITION BACK TO VOICEMAIL
MESSAGE

BARRY: The problem is Mrs. Peters. She's got a lot to answer for, that woman. She singled me out in school assemblies, along with a few other boys, and told me I was a grunter. "We don't want any grunters" she'd say, and we were made to stand at the side and not sing. It doesn't exactly give you confidence to sing in front of people when you've been labelled a grunter at an early age. Maybe I should try to sing. On my own, obviously. Maybe it will put me in a happy mood, stave off the inevitable depression, imagining Mrs. Peters' face at being subjected to my voice!

BEEP

VOICEMAIL: (D) Thank you for calling.

WE HEAR BARRY CLEARING HIS THROAT
AND BREATHING, CURSING HIMSELF
PERHAPS, AND STARTING TO "DUM DE
DUM" A TUNE – THE TUNE OF THE SONG
"TOGETHERNESS". CUT TO:

BARRY (REC):

(D) Barry Thrush cannot get to the phone at the moment. Leave a message and I'll get back to you.

BEEP

BARRY:

So, this was rather unexpected turn of events. I took Judy's advice and sang. I must admit I felt something of a wally standing there and making a concerted effort to sing. I was reminded of a song I used to hum to Judy many years ago. Something about loneliness I think. I never did know the words, something she always found amusing, but then at least I never developed her skill of seamlessly transitioning into another tune entirely without even realising it. Anyway, I'm getting distracted from the point. You see, I wasn't the only one to sing.

TRANSITION TO BARRY SINGING AND
REALISING THAT THERE IS A FEMALE
VOICE SINGING ALONGSIDE HIM (OFF)

TRANSITION BACK TO VOICEMAIL
MESSAGE

BARRY:

I confess I initially considered whether I was hearing my wife's voice, for a split second, but no. I couldn't ever have sung with Judy anyway as you never quite knew when she was going to change song. No, I think it was coming from – I'm pretty sure it must have been – her. Next door.

WE HEAR THE SOUND OF HER VOICE
COMING THROUGH THE WALL
UNDERSCORING HIS RECOLLECTION

BARRY (CONT'D)

It was just a snippet. I don't really know the song that well anyway, but I was sure that there was this other voice singing along with me. But when I stopped she stopped, and then I began to wonder whether I had imagined it so.....I felt the need to try again. Just to be sure.

TRANSITION TO BARRY SINGING THE
SAME REFRAIN AND HER VOICE JOINING
IN, THEN SILENCE.

TRANSITION BACK TO VOICEMAIL
MESSAGE. HIS CONFUSION.

BARRY (CONT'D):

I didn't really know what to think or do. I couldn't exactly carry on or start again. But then it was quite a nice feeling in a strange way. Perhaps I should have acknowledged it, but you can hardly offer thanks through the wall of your own home to somebody you've never spoken to before. Somebody whom, in actual fact, you have gone out of your way to avoid. And she didn't say anything, so.....I thought the best thing to do was to.....make a cup of tea. But I also thought it was worth recording on here, for posterity. So, there we are. It's the sort of thing that would have tickled Judy.

BEEP

VOICEMAIL:

(D) Thank you for calling.

BARRY (REC):

(D) Barry Thrush cannot get to the phone at the moment. Leave a message and I'll get back to you.

BEEP

BARRY:

Twenty four hours since my last message and no further singing activity. As I suspected, I haven't heard her voice again, although in fairness I haven't sung again either.

I did venture out into the front garden this morning and saw the young lady from next door, but we managed to successfully avoid each other, as per usual. I was actually rather consumed with catching a pesky rabbit that has been eating my lettuce. I don't know whether a washing up bowl was the correct weapon of choice, but I have had some success with this method before. Unfortunately, on that occasion when I released the rabbit at what I thought to be a safe distance from my property it simply ran in a big arc right back to the garden. Judy found it hilarious. It was nice to provide her with a rare moment of respite. Anyway, on this occasion I haven't even caught the blasted thing. I became aware that I must look rather farcical stalking around the undergrowth carrying a washing up bowl so I conceded, for now. Plus, I was keen to avoid any discussion about last night's musical interlude so I... retreated inside. It's sometimes rather difficult to avoid each other when our front doors are adjacent to one another, which is why I often use the rear entrance. The problem is that from the rear of the house I can be spotted by Gordon the curtain twitcher.

I don't know exactly what went on between Judy and the neighbour when we first moved

BARRY (CONT'D): in but we have successfully avoided each other ever since and it seems only right for this to continue. It must have been her voice though. Unless she had a friend round, but I doubt this. She seems something of a loner to me. Perhaps she was drunk and has no recollection of singing along?

THE SOUND OF SOMETHING BEING PUT
THROUGH THE LETTERBOX (OFF)

BARRY (CONT'D): Oh, hold on, I have post. A strange hour to receive....and hand delivered! Um, well I can't easily open whilst holding the phone.....and it's hardly a riveting diary entry anyway so.....erm....

BEEP

VOICEMAIL: (D) Thank you for calling.

SOUND OF ENVELOPE BEING OPENED
AND REMOVING A LETTER

BARRY: (READING) You have a lovely voice.

UNFOLDING LETTER TO READ

BARRY (CONT'D): "One thing in life is meant to be,
 It's easier to flourish with the help of friends
 and family,
 Imagine if we took on all our battles
 independently,
 If we had never found each other first"

*(REALISING THESE ARE THE LYRICS TO THE
SONG HE HAD PREVIOUSLY BEEN HUMMING)*

BARRY (CONT'D): Ha!

HE SINGS. SHE JOINS IN (OFF).

Consider the whole reason we are here,
How we all came to be surely the explanation
must be clear,
The how, the why, the wherefore is an answer
I can volunteer,
It's because two people found each other first

We are all prone to loneliness,
Even when we've people all around,
But we all crave togetherness,
Hold onto the joyfulness,
The sense, the urge to gather us
Together for togetherness, once found.

SILENCE

BARRY (REC): (D) Barry Thrush cannot get to the phone at the moment. Leave a message and I'll get back to you.

BEEP

BARRY: I haven't recorded a diary entry for a few days. Events have somewhat overtaken me and I've had rather a lot to process. I can certainly confirm it was her voice. We dueted. I think that's the term. And then.....I....well, I left it. I mean I was thrilled really, I've been desperate to sing again to see if she is there ready to join in but I didn't hear any more so.....we left it there. Ever since I've had this gnawing feeling that there is somebody I need to share this news with, but then I realise it's Judy and...well....

And then today I had the slightly agonising situation where a conversation became unavoidable. Unfortunately I knew I had left a large bag of compost propped up against the back gate, so when I saw her sitting on her front step I couldn't deviate to use the back of the property as I would struggle to open the gate from the other side. I also couldn't exactly

BARRY (CONT'D): walk on and return home later because I, well, I needed to.....I needed the toilet. Too much unnecessary information however the fact is I had to pretty much pass her to enter my house. I didn't really expect a conversation to ensue, but it would have been churlish not to offer some form of greeting.

TRANSITION TO FLASHBACK OF
CONVERSATION BETWEEN BARRY AND
SOPHIE OUTSIDE THEIR HOUSES. KEY IN
THE DOOR.

BARRY: Morning

SOPHIE: Hello.

HE OPENS THE DOOR AND IS ENTERING
WHEN SHE STOPS HIM

I enjoyed our singing.

BARRY: Hmm? Oh yes. That was.....thank you for the....I've never been very good with...words to songs.

SOPHIE: Lyrics. I was worried I'd offended you.

BARRY: What?

SOPHIE: In some way, as there has been no mention of it.

BARRY: No, not at all.

SOPHIE: And not having heard you sing again.

BARRY: Well I....didn't know whether to.

SOPHIE: It was probably a strange thing to do it's just I've been wondering how to reach out and, well, we sing that song in the choir so I knew the words.

BARRY: And I clearly didn't!

SOPHIE: Sorry, I didn't mean....

BARRY: No no, it's quite accurate. Judy, my wife, always laughed at my inability to recall lyrics.

SOPHIE: I'm sorry about your wife.

BARRY: Oh it's....you know....

SOPHIE: I'd be rubbish with words too if we didn't have them in front of us.

BARRY: I see.

SOPHIE: In our choir.

BARRY: Yes.

SOPHIE: You could join if you'd like? We're quite desperate for men. For male voices, I mean!

BARRY: Right. Sorry, I might just *(go inside)*

SOPHIE: Oh of course, sorry if I've *(spoken out of turn)*

BARRY: No no, it's just that.....it's just that I'm rather desperate....for the*(toilet)*

SOPHIE: Oh, of course. Sorry.

BARRY: I can come back, if you'd...?

SOPHIE: Sure. I'll be here. I've locked myself out.

BARRY: Oh, um..

SOPHIE: It's alright, my Mum's coming round with a spare key. It's the only time I can get her to come round to my house!

BARRY: Ah. Well, I'll....I'll just be....

TRANSITION BACK TO VOICEMAIL MESSAGE

BARRY: And so my first proper conversation with anybody in the village began. Perhaps if I had arranged Judy's funeral here I would have got to know people before now but.... all our nearest and dearest were still at home. Home, listen to me! Old home. Plus, it was more convenient for Jerry and Jo so it made sense. Anyway, here I was chatting with a local, with

BARRY (CONT'D): Sophie, interrupted briefly by a necessity to pay a visit.

TRANSITION TO FLASHBACK
CONVERSATION. HE HAS RETURNED
FROM THE TOILET.

BARRY: Sorry about that.

SOPHIE: It's ok. Still waiting for my key!

BARRY: Ah. What were we saying?

SOPHIE: I was putting in a rather clumsy pitch for the choir needing to recruit more men! Gordon is our only regular at the moment but to be honest he's more of an organiser than a singer! He's adamant we need to record a new CD, even though there aren't enough of us.

BARRY: Yes, I think I've met Gordon. So, you have family in the village? Have you lived here long?

SOPHIE: All my life. It's changed a bit.

BARRY: It's not quite how Judy, my wife, remembered it. She recalls....recalled...more of a tight-knit community. Everybody knew each other and looked out for each other, that sort of thing.

SOPHIE: It can still feel like that to be honest. Everybody certainly seems to know each other's business anyway.

BARRY: I'm sure they do if Gordon has anything to do with it. Sorry, he's not your family, is he?

SOPHIE: No, don't worry.

BARRY: Phew! It's just that he seems to be a bit of a busybody, if that's not too outdated a word.

SOPHIE: Gordon is Gordon! His heart's in the right place. You're right though. The village has changed.

BARRY: People are more wrapped up in their own affairs these days. Plus, with new developments expanding villages like this they are bound to lose a lot of their quaint appeal and sense of togetherness.

SOPHIE: The Singleton Singers used to be sixty strong. Marjorie, our MD, used to organise tours and festivals that we went on. These days people are more likely to join a rock choir ten miles from here. Our regular numbers are down to ten.

BARRY: Shame, such a shame. I hear she's slightly batty though. Prone to involuntary outbursts?

SOPHIE: She certainly has her own style, but you soon learn not to take her sighs to heart! Plus she manages to harmonise them with the singing when we perform.

BARRY: Ha! Is that not a bit off-putting? When you're singing?

SOPHIE: Actually, no. She's not really aware she does it anyway, but I've never known her make a sound at all when she's engrossed in her music. Anyway, she won't keep it up much longer, her hearing isn't up to it. Gordon is trying to get her daughter to take over but...

BARRY: If you're struggling for numbers maybe that would be time to call it a day.

SOPHIE: Or maybe we should stand up for what we believe in!

BARRY: Perhaps, but if the village has changed, as you say, maybe there just isn't a place for a small village singing troupe. You can't force a sense of community if it isn't there.

SOPHIE: So you propose we give up? Just like that.

BARRY: Well, if there isn't the appetite then.....

SOPHIE: Then those who have put their lives into it should just accept that times change?

BARRY: Look I don't know, I'm an outsider.

SOPHIE: You've lived here for a year.

BARRY: Yes, but...

SOPHIE: So surely you are now part of the village community that seems to be changing.

BARRY: I haven't exactly been taken in by the village to be fair.

SOPHIE: And how much effort have you put into that? I'm sorry but if the village is losing its sense of community then surely the responsibility lies with all the members of its community. Maybe we need more Gordons.

BARRY: Well, there's a thought.

SOPHIE: And perhaps we should all look to see what we can do to look out for each other, rather than criticising.

BARRY: I'm sorry if I've struck a nerve.

SOPHIE: No, no its just. Places only change if people change them.

BARRY: Yes, I suppose you're right. Well I'll (*be going*).....I didn't even know you sang. I'd never heard before.

SOPHIE: Your wife, late wife, complained about the awful racket one time, shortly after you moved in.

BARRY: I'm sure she didn't(*mean to offend*)

SOPHIE: It was a fair critique and I'm sure she didn't mean anything by it but....and I prefer not to cause offence so I....assumed you would rather I was a quiet neighbour. Anyway, I'm rubbish at singing by myself so I think it's best if I keep quiet.

BARRY: Please don't.

AN OVER-THE-TOP SIGH IS HEARD (OFF).
MARJORIE IS APPROACHING

BARRY (CONT'D): Ah, Marjorie isn't it? I'm Barry. We were just talking about you actually, how about that for a coincidence?

MARJORIE: (SIGH) Nice to meet you Harry. I'm just running an errand with a spare key.

SOPHIE: Thanks Mum.

BARRY: Oh, I see.

SOPHIE: Nice talking with you.

BARRY: Um, yes..I...

IMPATIENT SIGH FROM MARJORIE

Right.

TRANSITION BACK TO VOICEMAIL
MESSAGE

BARRY: And there I was, left desperately trying to recall if I'd said anything derogatory about her Mother. Judy would find it all rather amusing, I don't doubt. I can't help feeling though that I've just snapped an olive branch. *(Sighs)* There's only one thing for it. Like it or not, I'm going to have to attend a Singleton Singers rehearsal.

BEEP

VOICEMAIL: (D) Thank you for calling.

BARRY (REC):

(D) Barry Thrush cannot get to the phone at the moment. Leave a message and I'll get back to you.

BEEP

BARRY:

Well, I did it. I'm recording this as soon as I'm back to capture my initial thoughts. There's a very strange trepidation that comes with entering a room where everybody is already so familiar with each other and all have something in common. I had imagined it all all going silent and them turning to stare at me but, in actual fact, they all continued chattering and looking through their music folders. It was Gordon who spotted me first, inevitably, greeting me with a firmer than necessary handshake. He announced my arrival to the rest of them as though I were an old friend of his and then, rather excruciatingly, they all said hello to me individually, each expecting a response. I can't recall all their names, but a few stood out.

Dorothy is the sort of person who tends to smile and stare into your eyes a little more than is comfortably appropriate. She makes the teas at the halfway break and had a mountain of buns that she said just happened

BARRY (CONT'D):

to be left over from the coffee morning. I was initially sat next to

Paula who was very keen to fill me in on the background of every member. Unfortunately, I couldn't catch much of what she was saying, partly because she was speaking quietly during Gordon's ongoing announcements. But also, she chose to lean in and lower her voice even further when delivering something that I can only assume was intended to be a particularly juicy piece of gossip. I decided it was probably most polite to just nod and say "really" on occasion to suggest that I understood what she was saying. There was no need for her to whisper once the rehearsal began though as Marjorie seems to hear very little of anything that is said. Any questions about the music were either met with a vague "Mmm" or else just greeted with an impatient sigh as if it were the most stupid question they could have come up with. They all seemed well trained to ignore this though.

I was saved from Paula's inaudible commentary early in proceedings by the arrival of Ian, a sergeant major type who bluntly announced that I was sitting in his place, apparently oblivious to the fact that we had never met. I later discovered that Ian only occasionally attends and that there are no set places but that, being another man, they don't wish to offend him.

BARRY (CONT'D):

There were others but these are just first impressions. Oh, and there was Sophie of course; the reason why I am keeping my voice fairly low. I don't suppose she can hear through the wall but I thought I'd take no chances. She, well, she just sat in the corner and barely spoke to anybody. It was as though she had never met me. She simply said "thank you for coming" as we left. Apparently, some of them head to the Lion after rehearsal but I didn't feel that brave. Not this evening. Plus, the chances of hearing Paula or being heard by Marjorie in a pub environment are next to zero.

Still, I braved a rehearsal. I can't help thinking that Judy would be proud of me.

And then, there was the music.

CHOIR SINGING BEGINS AND THEN
UNDERScores THE FOLLOWING LINES

Now, I am no expert. In fact, my musical knowledge is severely limited. It was rather awkward really. As Gordon announced me as a new member, there followed an unenthusiastic smatter of applause and then he said that they should sing me a song. I managed to avoid his suggestion of moving my chair to sit in front of them all while they "performed" to me, but nevertheless I was instructed to sit and listen.

BARRY (CONT'D):

It was.....wonderful. Clearly there are some voices past their prime, if ever they had a prime, but....the power and intensity of the combined sound. It, er, it moved me. I'm not one prone to tears but I must admit I was struggling to hold them back. The silence after they finished singing, for a brief moment before it became awkward again, was just as powerful as the song itself had been. I struggled to look any of them in the eye, especially Dorothy whose eyes I could feel boring into me, searching for a reaction. I managed to wave it off with an animated nod and a "very nice" before I was saved by another Marjorie outburst. But the impact of that song, being in there amongst the singing of it, will I think stay with me for some time.

THE SONG ENDS. BRIEF SILENCE.

BARRY (CONT'D):

It occurs to me that music has the potential to be a better indicator and reflector of feelings and recollections than several hours of my wittering into my phone. That being said, I'm sure this voicemail journal will save me from forgetting any of this.....transition period into Singleton life.

Actually, I may need to find alternative means of recording my journal as I had a text message this morning telling me that my voicemail inbox has nearly reached capacity. Perhaps it's a sign to stop recording and start living again.

BARRY (CONT'D):

Whatever, I'll always have this spoken record of memories, and that's a reassurance.

(OFF) DOORBELL

Oh, hang on. Somebody at the door. At this time?

PHONE PLACED DOWN, FOOTSTEPS,
DOOR OPENING AND VOICES (OFF)

BARRY:

(OFF) Gordon!

GORDON:

(OFF) Barry, Sophie here tells us we simply can't take no for an answer. We're heading to the Lion, do join us....

CUT OFF BY BEEP

VOICEMAIL:

(D) You have now reached your voicemail capacity. All messages will be deleted after 30 days. Thank you for calling.

SILENCE

(After 30 days)

BARRY (REC): (D) Hi, it's Barry here. Sorry I can't take your call. Leave me a quick message and I'll get back to you. Thanks.

BEEP

SOPHIE: (D) Hi Barry it's just me. I thought rather than just knocking on your door I'd give you warning that I'm heading to the launch at 6.30 if you want to come then? Just knock, or I'll knock or whatever.

BEEP

VOICEMAIL: (D) Thank you for calling.

TRANSITION TO VILLAGE HALL, PEOPLE
GATHERING.

GORDON: Alright then, evening everyone. Thank you, attention please.

LARGE SIGH FROM MARJORIE AND THE
SOUND DIES DOWN.

GORDON (CONT'D): Thank you, Marjorie. So, welcome to the big launch. I had hoped that this would one day be achievable but, I must be honest, even I thought it was a touch optimistic just a few months ago. However, before we listen to our opening track, I'd just like to invite one of our newer members to say a few words. Let's face it, without him we wouldn't have had the finances to get this off the ground. Oh, and just to say, he is insistent that any monies from the sale of this CD will go towards the roof appeal. So, our thanks and now over to, Barry Thrush.

BARRY WALKS TO THE FRONT OF THE
HALL

BARRY: I'll keep it short. I'm not one for prattling on. Not in front of people anyway. When my wife died, I started to make a journal, of sorts. Recordings of my voice. Unfortunately, these seem to have now disappeared. I was so concerned with the human memory being temporary that I hadn't realised digital ones could be as well. Initially I was rather distraught, but in losing that I found something altogether more special. And I have come to realise that the first track on this CD; something of a favourite song of my late wife's and the accidental reason for getting to know my neighbour Sophie – this track serves as a greater record of my feelings and experiences than I could have hoped to achieve in many

BARRY (CONT'D): hours of my ramblings and musings. With thanks for a newfound friendship and sense of purpose...

SIGH FROM MARJORIE

BARRY (CONT'D) ...and of course to Marjorie for her excellent leadership, it gives me great pleasure to play the first track of the new CD from the Singleton Community Singers.

CHOIR SONG – “TOGETHERNESS

SONG: *One thing in life is meant to be,
It's easier to flourish with the help of friends
and family,
Imagine if we took on all our battles
independently,
If we had never found each other first.*

*Consider the whole reason we are here,
How we all came to be surely the explanation
must be clear,
The how, the why, the wherefore is an answer I
can volunteer,
It's because two people found each other first*

*We are all prone to loneliness
Even when we've people all around
But we all crave togetherness*

SONG (CONT'D):

*Hold onto the joyfulness
The sense, the urge to gather us
Together for togetherness, once found*

*Few of us will tend to thrive alone
Choose a life solitude but don't feel that you're
on your own
So reach out with a letter or by talking on the
telephone
Let us strive to put each other first*

*We are all prone to loneliness
Even when we've people all around
But we all crave togetherness
Hold onto the joyfulness
The sense, the urge to gather us
Together for togetherness once found*

*Putting others first can sometimes feel like so
much work
Thinking beyond your safe life requires a
certain sacrifice
Collaboration, toleration, starting simple
conversation
Benefit us all, so surely effort worth
consideration*

*We come to dust when all is said and done
One thing is life is certain, it's the same ending
for everyone*

*But a life full of togetherness is better than a
lonesome one
It pays for us to put other first*

SONG (CONT'D):

*We are all prone to loneliness
Even when we've people all around
But we all crave togetherness
Hold onto the joyfulness
The sense, the urge to gather us
Together for togetherness once found.*

ANNOUNCER:

In "Togetherness" Barry was played by Richard Kay, Judy, Marjorie and Voicemail were played by Rachel Watkinson, Gordon was played by Thomas Frere and Sophie by Francis Tither. Special thanks go to The Ryedale Voices for their choral contribution. "Togetherness" was written directed by Richard Kay and was a Badapple Theatre on your Desktop production made possible with thanks to funding from the Arts Council of England.

END

Togetherness

R. Kay

$\text{♩} = 80$

SOPRANO
One thing in life is meant to be____ It's ea si er__ to flou rish with the

ALTO
Ooh_____ ooh, ooh_____

BARITONE
Ooh_____ ooh, ooh_____

4

help of friends and fa mi ly Im a gine if we took on all our ba tles in de pen dently if

Ooh_____ Im a gine if we took on all our ba tles in de pen dently

Ooh fa mi ly Im a gine if we took on all our ba tles in de pen dently

7

we had ne ver found each oth er first____ Con si der the_ whole rea son we are here

Ooh_____ ooh, ooh_____

Let's put each oth er first ooh_____

2

10

How we all came to be sure ly the ex plan a tion must be clear The

ooh, ooh ooh The

ooh, ooh the ex plan a tion must be clear The

13

how, the why, the where fore is an an swer I can vo lun teer It's be

how, the why, the where fore is an an swer I can vo lun teer

how, the why, the where fore is an an swer I can vo lun teer

15

cause two peo ple found each oth er first We are all prone to lone li ness

Ooh Ooh We are all prone to lone li ness to lone li

Let's put each oth er first We are all prone to lone li ness lone li

19

E ven when we've peo ple all around But we all crave to ge ther ness

ness peo ple all around But we all crave to ge ther ness so let's hold

ness peo ple all around But we all crave to ge ther ness hold

23

Hold on to the joy ful ness_ the sense, the urge to ga ther us_ to ge ther for to ge ther ness, once

on to joy ful ness_ hold on to ga ther us_ to ge ther for to ge ther ness, once

on to joy ful ness_ hold on to ga ther us_ to ge ther for to ge ther ness, once

26

found Few of us_ will tend to thrive a lone_

found Few of us_ will tend to thrive a lone_

found Ooh_ ooh, ooh_

29

Don't feel that you are on your own so

Choose a life_ of so li tude but don't feel that you are on your own so

Ooh_ ooh_

31

reach out with a lett er or by talk ing on the te le phone Let us strive to put each oth er first

reach out with a lett er or by talk ing on the te le phone Let us strive to put each oth er first

Reach out Reach_ out_ let's put each_

34

— We are all prone to lone li ness Even when we've peo ple all a

— We are all prone to lone li ness to lone li ness peo ple all a

oth er first We are all prone to lone li ness lone li ness peo ple all a

38

round But we all crave to ge ther ness Hold on to the joy ful ness_ the

round But we all crave to ge ther ness so let's hold on to joy ful ness_hold

round But we all crave to ge ther ness hold on to joy ful ness_hold

42

sense, the urge to gath er us to geth er for to geth er ness,_ once found

on to ga ther us_ to ge ther for to ge ther ness, once found

on to ga ther us_ to ge ther for to ge ther ness, once found

45

Putt ing oth ers first can some times feel like so much work Think ing be yond your safe life re

Putt ing oth ers first can some times feel like so much work Think ing be yond your safe life re

Putt ing oth ers first can feel like so much work Think ing be yond your safe life re

48

quires a cer tain sa cri fice Co lla bor a tion, To ler a tion, start ing sim ple con ver sa tion

quires a cer tain sa cri fice Co lla bor a tion, To ler a tion, start ing sim ple con ver sa tion

quires a cer tain sa cri fice Co lla bor a tion, To ler a tion, start ing sim ple con ver sa tion

51

be ne fit us all_ so sure ly eff ort worth con sid er a tion_ We

be ne fit us all_ so sure ly eff ort worth con sid er a tion_

be ne fit us all_ so eff ort worth con sid er a tion_

54

come to dust when all is said and done_ One thing in life_ is cer tain it's the

Ooh_ ooh, Ooh_ it's the

Ooh_ ooh, ooh_ it's the

57

same end ing for ev 'ry one But a life full of to geth er ness is bett er than a lone.some one, it

same end ing for ev 'ry one But a life full of to geth er ness is bett er than a lone.some one

same end ing for ev 'ry one But a life full of to geth er ness is bett er than a lone.some one

6

60

pays for us_ to put each oth er first_ We are all prone to lone li ness

Ooh_ ooh We are all prone to lone li ness to lone li

Let's put each oth er first we are all prone to lone li ness lone li

64

E ven when we've peo ple all around But we all crave to ge ther ness

ness peo ple all around But we all crave to ge ther ness so let's hold

ness peo ple all around But we all crave to ge ther ness hold

68

Hold on to the joy ful ness_ the sense, the urge to gath er us_ to

on to joy ful ness_ hold on to ga ther us_ to

on to joy ful ness_ hold on to ga ther us_ to

70

geth er for to geth er ness_ once found

ge ther for to ge ther ness, once found

ge ther for to ge ther ness, once found