

A Bridge to Everywhere

By the P6 Class of Kildrum Primary School
with Mike Nicholson



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Chapter 1

Peacefulness and Panic

Peacefulness and panic. It was strange to have them at the same time. The calmness was right in front of him. Broadwood Loch. He loved it here. Although the great hammer-shaped loch was man-made, this was where he felt that he could get away from people.

He could hear the breeze in the trees and the distant calls of the ducks. Swans cruised past silently making their elegant, graceful way to their nest in the reeds. Above him other birds soared, wings outstretched, working the wind to hang in the sky.

There were a few others around the loch, fishing like he was. Some standing, some sitting. Just an occasional movement as an aching leg was stretched or a cast sent a line flicking through the air. Each person was like a statue coming briefly to life before stilling once more.

Around him was his gear for the day. His rod, reel and line. His bag of hooks and tools with a tub full of mealworms for bait. His piece, crisps and flask of hot coffee were close by too.

But it was not the perfect ordered scene it appeared, because in his head there was panic. Panic at the emptiness. Why was his mind so blank? There was nothing there. He couldn't even remember when he had last had a new idea.



He was Jeffrey MacDonald Jenkins. Town planner. He was supposed to have ideas and it had never been a problem in the past. Thoughts had come thick and fast on where to place shopping centres, houses, schools and care homes and how they could each be reached by roads and footpaths or cycle routes. He was proud of trying to make things work for people in Cumbernauld. Every day as he walked to work or looked out of his office window he was surrounded by the ideas which had created and shaped the town, from Kildrum to Carbrain, and from Seafar to Greenfaulds.

Cumbernauld had appeared over the years as though containers of all sizes had been placed box by box onto the green fields, connected up with ribbons of road and path. New shapes to live in and new ways of connecting everything together. 50,000 people housed and with opportunities to learn and play and work and shop. Grassland turned habitable and homely with bright new houses and pretty gardens as people moved in and each made their mark on their space.

But that was in the past.



SEAFAIR

CUMBERNAULD

KILDRUM

GREENFAULDS

ASDA

CALFRAN

Now it was as though his bucket of ideas had a hole in it and had run dry. Everything he'd thought of for the town was down on paper. The future was blank. He felt lost, even in a place he knew so well. He wished he was in a different job.

It struck him that at his age he might have dementia - he had seen it before. His wife Margaret passing away not long after the carers had started coming in. It had been startling to see how suddenly someone he knew so well could forget everything in her life and become like a child again.

His final and major worry was work. People had noticed that he was running on empty and Jeffrey was scared. Was he going to lose his job? His boss Mr Pickle seemed to be watching him all the time. He had already grown impatient with some other staff and sacked them, and at the end of last week he had said to Jeffrey. "You have a choice. Find some new ideas or start to look for a new job."



Jeffrey put his rod to one side. Even his fishing was proving unsuccessful today.

He picked up his paper instead and flicked through Cumbernauld's recent news; the demolition of the high rises with some of the town's earliest houses being replaced. There was a feature on the history of Cumbernauld's oldest tree. His eyes widened at the news that if Donald Trump visited Scotland he might include a trip to Cumbernauld, but it was a photo which made his heart miss a beat.

There was a plop as a fish jumped and the ripples in the water spread in circles closer to the edge, and in the same way, something began to shift in Jeffrey's mind.



Chapter 2

Doubts and Dabs

The photo showed a group of smiling children beside a big collection of containers and boxes. Jeffrey stared at the children's construction and at the headline: "Pretty City - Eye-Catching Ideas from Kildrum's Kids".

As he read on, Jeffrey learned that the Primary 6 class at Kildrum Primary School had been designing cities. Their two designs, Crudville and Jefflandia (he liked *that* name), had been made on a tight budget and created under a pressure of time, but each had succeeded in presenting ideas to house over 30,000 people. The children described the difficult decisions they had agreed on as they worked out what was most important in people's lives.

Jeffrey grinned. Planning for other people's futures. That was exactly what his job was. "Imagine being young again and having all those ideas and that energy," he thought.

He watched a nearby fisherman cast. His line soared through the sky. That was it. He needed to reach out in a new direction. If he could meet these children and talk with them about city designs then maybe something would happen. He quickly packed up his gear and went home to call the school and arrange to meet the class and their teacher Mr Young the next day.



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The next morning Jeffery woke feeling positive about the day ahead but as he left the house, he realised that someone was behind him. He turned to find the unpleasant figure of Mr. Pickle.

“Morning Jeffrey,” said his boss. “Not going to the office?”

“Err... no. I’ve got... an important meeting,” said Jeffrey.

“I’m pleased to hear it,” said Mr. Pickle. “Who exactly?”

“Some... er... young designers,” said Jeffrey.

“Very well,” said Mr Pickle. “But I expect you back at your desk soon. The ‘Designing the Future’ competition deadline is in two days. If you can’t enter something into that then there’s really not much point in you coming in again is there?”

With that Mr. Pickle walked off leaving Jeffrey feeling worthless. What had he been thinking? What good could possibly come from meeting a group of children? As he walked the tree-lined paths on the way to Kildrum Primary, past some of the grey houses which had been part of the town’s original plans, more doubt crept into his mind. Even the graffiti seemed to taunt him: “Why bother?” it read.



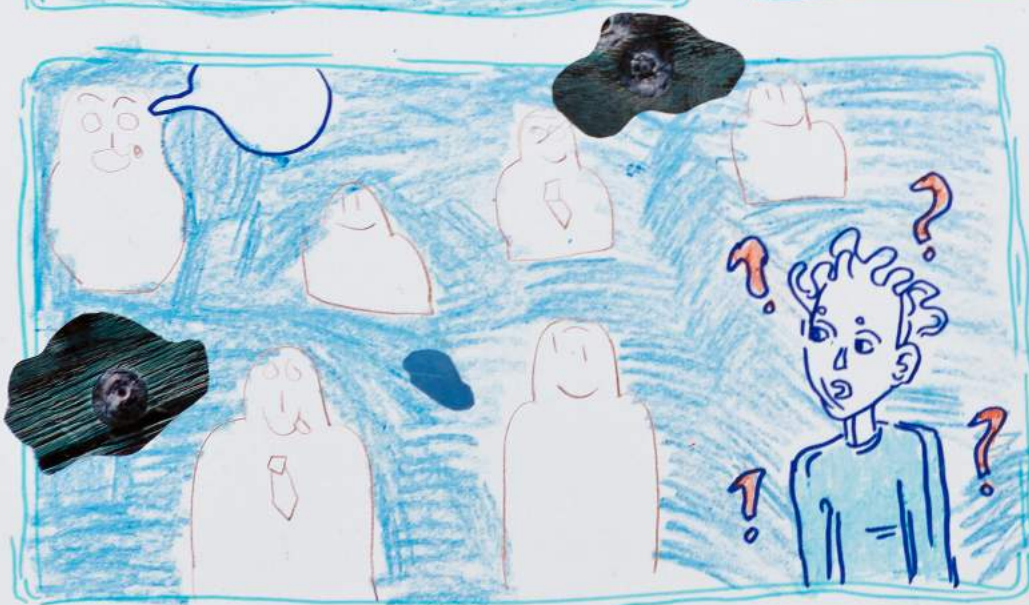
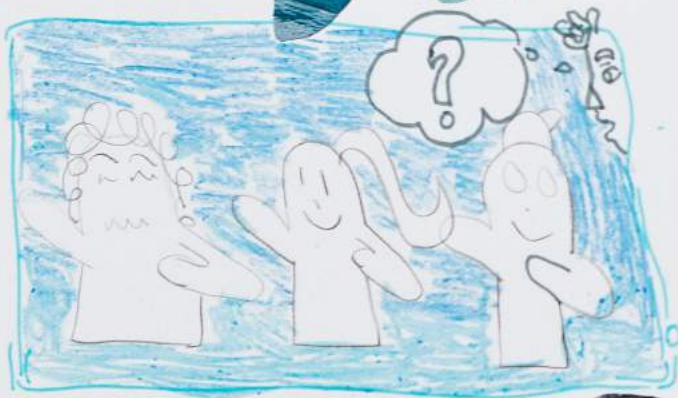
He heard the school before he saw it and immediately became even more nervous and scared about meeting the class. It was breaktime and the playground echoed with noise; shouting, laughing and the occasional cry. As he came round the corner he saw football, hide and seek and gangy in full swing as the children made the most of the short time before they would be inside again.

He saw some of them doing a strange action. They stood and ducked their heads into the crooks of their arms. It reminded him of the swans on Broadwood Loch tucking their long necks into their bodies.

“Can you dab mister?” A boy shouted at him through the railings.

“I’m sorry?” said Jeffrey, confused.

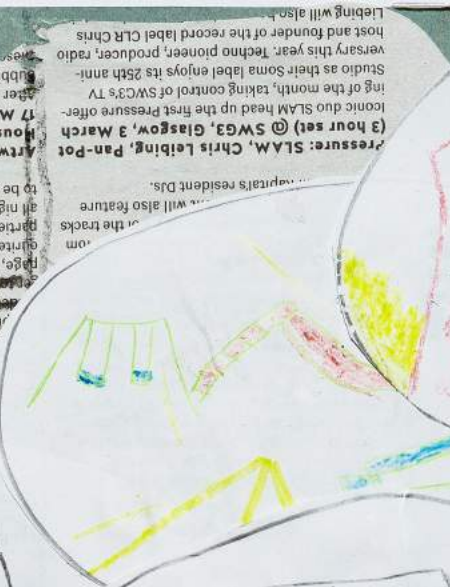
“Do a dab!” a girl shouted and did the quick jerky movement again. Jeffrey understood that must be what it was called and copied it. A small group of children cheered. Jeffrey grinned and started to relax.



Fifteen minutes later he was shown into a classroom. He recognised some of the P6 children from the newspaper photo. He began by showing the children a giant map of Cumbernauld and explained how towns were planned and what he had done over the years. The children got excited trying to spot the school and the streets where they lived, as well as the places where they liked to go, like the town centre, the fast food shops, Cumbernauld Field and the Glen where they told him there were old clay mines.

Then the children told him about their city designs. They had housed thousands of people, and chosen to have hospitals and schools and shops. They'd also made sure there were parks and care homes and a cinema.

But it was when they talked about their ideas for the future that Jeffrey got really excited.



Chapter 3

The Front Door Bridges

Their ideas started simply enough, planning to turn Cumbernauld's once-white houses different colours to brighten the place up and make it less grey.

But then their suggestions really took off.

"We could have hover boards for transport," said one girl.

"Robot doctors helping people to get well again," said another.

"Laser tools to instantly repair things that are broken," said a boy.

But there was one idea that really leapt out.

"I wish we had bridges on our doorsteps that took you anywhere," said one boy.

"Why didn't those get put in when all the houses were built?"



The idea took Jeffrey aback - he heard himself explaining that there was only so much money and that there were other more important things. And then he explained that when much of Cumbernauld was built there weren't even colour TVs or mobile phones or computers. The world of design and communication had been different. The town had seemed futuristic at the time but that was 60 years ago.

“Well it's 2017 now,” said the class. “We can design anything!”

Jeffrey frowned, and then smiled. “I love it,” he said. “Who says paths need to be paths and roads need to be roads. Why shouldn't we all have bridges from our front doors to take us where we want to go?”

the FUTURE (by P6)



A cheer went up and a crazy afternoon of planning began. Giant sheets of paper on the floor. Fabulous drawings of the amazing front door bridges, twisting up into the sky and crossing over like spaghetti before touching down again in various locations. Voice recognition software and a database of destinations linked to maps, enabled people to travel to wherever they wanted. Jeffrey helped with all the measurements and maths as the ideas flowed.

The class even worked through possible problems and how to solve them, like giving people handrails and special safe-spectacles if they found heights nerve-wracking, and making the bridges extra-strong to reassure those who thought they might collapse.

Meanwhile they worked out how many more hours of exercise people would get from walking, how much weight they might lose and how much less pollution there would be.

When it was time to leave, Jeffrey's head was so full it was overflowing. To think that yesterday he had been in a panic at Broadwood Loch. But now with his group of thirty planning experts, life felt very different.

"If you want to design the future," said one girl, "Ask the children of today."

"Designing the Future?" thought Jeffrey. "I'll show Mr. Pickle."

He turned and waved as he left, and completed his farewell with a perfect dab.



Exactly two weeks later Jeffrey was back at Broadwood Loch. There was peacefulness again but this time there was no panic. Something else had taken its place. Pride.

Jeffrey took a bite from his piece and glanced down for the hundredth time at the well-thumbed copy of the Cumbernauld News beside him. The photo on the front page showed him surrounded by a group of smiling children in blue school tops. The headline read "Planner Joins Forces with P6 to Claim Top Prize". Mr. Pickle stood at the edge of the group. He had either a smile or a grimace on his face. It was a little bit difficult to tell.

The article was full of words like "innovation", "vision of the future" and "unique idea". Inside the paper was a double page diagram of the front door bridges.

Jeffrey smiled as he thought of the tour of eating places he had gone on with the children as a reward; Burger King, KFC, McDonald's and Subway. They seemed to have visited one for most letters of the alphabet. He had already arranged to visit the children again at school for another planning session.

As he cast his line high into blue sky his mind was full of possibilities and as the float hit the water and the ripples spread, each one was like a new idea.

