

East Lothian Climate Hub

“Not just potatoes” by Tim Porteus

An imagined walk sixteen years in the future

“Can you come with me for a walk?” asked Josh’s granddad.

“Where are we going, what do you want to show me?”

“You’ll see” replied his grandad, being annoyingly vague.

Josh was nearly sixteen years old but still liked spending time with his granddad who was one of the town’s community allotment gardeners. He was part of a team, and his job was to work with other local people so they could make the most of the newly created community allotments as well as get advice and help in their private garden.

Josh was still at High School and normally didn’t like it much, but ever since part of the school car park and nearby unused ground had been turned into an allotment and school garden, he’d found himself almost looking forward to going in.

Every school day he spent some time with his pals working in the allotment and garden. At first, they saw it as a chance to skive, but soon he realised how much he enjoyed it; it was a different kind of learning. Even if it was for just one period, it made him feel connected to nature in a way he had never felt before.

He liked being outside, working, using tools, being useful and seeing things grow that he had planted. He knew that the allotment was for everyone in the school, but parts of it he’d created, it felt like his bit of the world, he wanted to care for it.

In the past he’d trashed an allotment. He wasn’t sure why he’d done that, but he wouldn’t do that now, because he’d be raging if anyone did that to his part of the school allotment.

But where was his granddad taking him on this day?

They walked past Cuthill park, and a woman recognised Josh’s grandad, and they started to blether. Josh got quickly bored, so he ventured into the park and headed for the orchard which was just beyond the community allotments.

He’d planted one of the trees there, when he was at nursery, and now it was bearing fruit. His tree had grown up with him and was taller than him now. The apples were not yet ready, but some unripe ones had fallen after the recent storm. He picked up two of them and put them in his jacket pockets.

His grandad was saying cheerio to the woman.

“Sorry Josh, she wants help with her garden, so I needed to find out what she needs. All sorted now. Let’s go.”



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“Where are we going granddad?”

“Just to the Community Pantry Josh, what I want to show you is there.”

The Community Pantry was at the other end of the town, next to the community garden, so they walked together along the newly designed coastal path, which was part of the John Muir Way. The upgrade of this section of the path had transformed the experience. It meandered along the shore bordered with low lying plants and shrubs, and a line of trees. The sea levels had risen during Josh’s lifetime, but the plants on the land bank mitigated the effects of coastal erosion. It was such a pleasant walk, full of colour and life.

There were viewing areas with boards along the routes explaining the history of the area and the wildlife and plants to be seen. Walkers passed them as they paused to let Badger their dog do his business, which they put in the nearby bin. There was very little litter on the path or beach, unlike in the days before.

Josh stopped at one of the boards which had an old photo.

“That was Cockenzie power station,” explained his grandad. I grew up under it, I remember it letting off steam, it’d roar like a dragon! My mother’s laundry sometimes got dirty because of the smoke.”

“Coal smoke? Wasn’t that really polluting?”

“Aye, coal was a big part of my early childhood. I loved a coal fire. It’s history now. The power station was coal fired, and part of me missed it when it went. Lots of people did, it was part of our community memory because it was such a looming presence.

But now we have the Country Park and the community eco-industrial hub. I would never have imagined that was possible. I wasn’t sure at first if I even wanted it, but I’m glad of the change now, it’s such a greener and healthier place now.”

Josh wasn’t really listening. He was on his phone to his pals.

“Sorry Granddad, gotta go. Can you just tell me what you wanted to show me? “

His granddad was a bit disappointed but understood.

“Tell you what Josh, I’ll find another way to show you later.”

Josh headed off to The Croft, a football sized piece of ground that has been reclaimed from the old power station’s coal store. They were making pizza in the open-air oven, as well as testing out the new mountain bike obstacle course built using recycled materials. They were helped to do this by members of “The Tool Kit Men’s Shed,” older members of the community with skills to share, paid from the community fund to pass on their skills and knowledge.



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The mountain bike course was now complete, it zigzagged through the recently planted trees, but Josh and his mates had some ideas as to how to make it better. When the trees are taller, they also want to make a treetop challenge, but that would be something for the future.

The area is a haunt for teenagers, but they look after it because it's owned by them under the Community Land Scheme. Not personally, but collectively. They often disagree on what to do with their "teendom," but everyone's ideas are listened to, and they try their best to ensure the visions are made possible. They had lots of ideas, such as a camping area, someone even wanted a swap.

Every teenager from the community is an "owner" of the land, until their twentieth birthday. When Josh reaches that age, he can have a different role in helping the younger generation to develop the land as a Community Land Guardian, maybe then he'd finally get that tree top challenge created!

As Josh's granddad headed for the Community Pantry he reflected on the changes since Josh's birth; small changes, but they all added up to a big change.

Like the wildflower maze next to the football pitch, the numerous community gardens with their ponds full of wildlife, bug hotels and hide and seek woods, all beloved by younger children. He'd helped make the wooden walkways by the ponds, so the children could view the pond life safely.

Other changes included young children playing in the side streets, reminiscent of his own youth, thanks to the new side street extra low speed rules. The Beach Bus passed by as he crossed the High Street, full of families returning from a day out. It linked all the local beaches with local communities, took them right to the beach car parks for free. The tree planting meant the town looked so colourful in the autumn.

He arrived at the Pantry and quickly found what he was looking for and went home.

When Josh returned, the table was laid and food was ready.

"You know what these are?" asked his granddad.

"Of course I do, they're baked potatoes"

"Not just baked potatoes Josh. I bought them at the Pantry; they're the ones you planted. That's what I wanted to show you."

"The ones we grew at the community allotment?"

"Aye."

"How'd you know they are the same tatties?"

"The ones you harvested I put in a separate bag, and I asked the staff at the pantry to keep them aside. They were labelled Josh's Tatties."



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Josh wasted no time to eat them with cheese and beans. The fact Josh had planted and harvested them himself seemed to add to the taste.

“I nearly forgot, ‘ve got something for you too,” said Josh.

He gave his granddad the two unripe apples he’s picked from the ground under his apple tree in Cuthill orchard.

“You said you needed some unripe apples to make something called pectin, whatever that is. If two apples are not enough there are plenty more on the ground because of the storm.”

His granddad smiled gratefully.

“Thanks Josh, I need pectin to make jam, maybe I can show you how?”

“Aye maybe later granddad. Gotta go now.”

Josh headed off on his bike to meet his friends, but if he had time, he’d swing by Cuthill orchard and collect some more fallen apples from the tree he’d planted and grown up with.

