

NOEL'S ARK

I guess I've always been a worrier. I must have got it from my mother. She was just the same. She couldn't go to bed without checking that all the doors and windows were locked. Then she would float her hand over the gas rings to make sure they were off. Plugs would be pulled out of their sockets, so that I had to keep resetting the video clock. She'd finally get to bed, then pop out again to see if her keys were in her handbag.

I'm not as bad as she was, but all this stuff on the news is starting to concern me. There was that tsunami – that big wave caused by the earthquake – crashing ashore and drowning all those poor people on Boxing Day. Then a hurricane caused the banks of the Mississippi to burst, and made thousands of folks homeless.

It makes me wonder what's happening to the world.

People keep saying to me, "Don't concern yourself, Noel. It won't happen here."

The hell it won't.

The BBC did a programme about the recent floods in Britain. I remember it well, it was so horrifying.

First they showed that little town in Cornwall, Boscastle I think it was, where cars were swept down the street and out to sea. Whole houses were washed away. Nobody was killed – thankfully. Three inches of rainfall hammered down in just two hours, more than they usually got in the whole month of August.

In North Yorkshire, the following June, in what should have been a lovely sunny month spent watching tennis and girls in mini-skirts, a river burst its banks after days of rain. The TV cameras showed car owners climbing trees to escape the deluge.

Then I read in the papers about whole streets being flooded in York, or a roof being torn off a railway station by gale force winds.

The news readers tell us we've had the hottest day on record. Or the wettest month since seventeen forty something. Then the coldest March since records began. Or the strongest winds for a hundred years. All this in the same year!

Something is obviously wrong with our planet.

Now, to add to my worries, scientists are warning that the ice-caps are going to melt due to global warming. The seas will rise and flood the land. I was just watching it on the news.

Me and my partner Angie do our best to be green and help the planet but it doesn't seem to be enough. We recycle all our papers, bottles and cans, drive a little Citroën 2CV that does about sixty to the gallon, and walk wherever we can, but nobody else seems to bother. We just get forced off the road by some big gas-guzzling four by four.

It's the kids I worry about more than anything. We've just had our first grandchild. Well, strictly speaking, Angie's daughter, Shawnee has. Shawnee isn't mine. Angie had already been expecting her when she moved in with me.

One of my mates said I was being stupid at the time. "There's not many blokes who'd take on another man's pup," he told me.

It didn't matter to me though. I'd fancied Angie from my school days. She was the prettiest girl in the school. She had, and still does have, a lovely heart-shaped face, blue eyes, blonde hair, and a stunning figure, with long slim legs that go all the way up to her ass. I can picture her now in her leather miniskirt and the tied-front blouse, that she often wore, that pushed her pert breasts upwards.

I had erotic dreams of her on many a summer night. Angie looked like a younger version of Blondie, the pop star, (who I also had many erotic dreams of back then). But Angie would never even glance at me.

I asked her for a dance once, at the youth club, but she just smiled and walked away. Every boy in the class fancied her and she could have her pick of them.

She wasn't going to be seen dead with a geek like me. I was tall and slim then, had long black hair, and I was in pretty good shape. But I wore glasses, the sort with round frames. They were all my mother could afford.

I was a couple of years younger than Angie, too. To top it all, I suffered with spots through most of my early teens. Asking a girl to go out with me was a sure-fire way to get a boil to erupt on the end of my nose.

Yes, Angie had the pick of the town to choose from, but she chose Mark Campbell, the biggest low-life to walk the planet! He was always in trouble; beating up us younger lads, or pushing drugs to school kids, or mugging some old lady, or stealing cars.

It was the excitement of it all that Angie loved. She told me that she'd experimented with a bit of whizz and stuff, but, thankfully, never got in too serious with it.

Campbell made enough from his drug business to take her to Majorca and Ibiza. He even took her to the Caribbean once, giving her the high-life she'd dreamed of. After he found out she was up the duff, he dumped her. Now he's in jail again somewhere. Manchester I think.

Angie was in a desperate situation. So desperate that she agreed to move in with me. I still loved Angie, and I think of Shawnee as my own, and I have brought her up as my daughter.

It's pretty obvious to people who see us together that she's not mine, but that doesn't matter to me. It doesn't matter to Shawnee, or Shaz as I call her, either. She calls me dad.

Why call her Shawnee, I can hear you ask? Well, back then me and Angie became 'New Age Travellers'. It was the only way we could afford to live. The only shelter we had was a wigwam, shared with two other couples and their kids. They

wanted to share partners too, but I wasn't in to all that. I had finally got my dream girl after all, and, thankfully, Angie seemed content to just be with me.

We've got two daughters of our own now, Sioux who's just turned fourteen, and Dakota, a bubbly six year old. The names sound a bit naff now, and I wonder if we did the right thing back then. The girls don't seem to mind though; it makes them different than all the other Beyonceys and Britneys out there.

Anyway, I digress. I was watching TV with Angie and had just heard about the ice-caps melting. It was the night before Shaz was due to go home with her baby. What on earth would our family do then, with a baby to look after, if we were flooded out? We hadn't even got a boat to get in.

Angie said I was daft fretting about it. "They'd get the army or somebody to help us," she said. "Besides, I don't see it bothering us here."

She didn't let much faze her. I told her she was wrong though. "In nineteen fifty three, this whole area got flooded. You know that people were drowned on Canvey Island."

"But they've built the sea wall up," Angie argued, "to stop it happening again."

I should have told you before, that we now live in Maldon, Essex, at the head of the Blackwater estuary. Maybe Angie was right and the sea-wall would stop another flood. The Council seemed to think so.

Then another thought came to my head. "Remember when we went on that trip to Derbyshire a couple of years back?"

Angie nodded absent-mindedly. I could see she had one eye on the dance programme that had just started on the TV.

"Well, in that old quarry where we stopped for a picnic, there were all those sea creatures."

Angie looked blank.

"The fossils," I continued. "Of fish and shells and stuff."

Angie still looked blank.

"But that quarry was hundreds of feet higher than we are here, yet it was under water at some time."

Her look told me that she still hadn't got it.

"If the ice does melt all those places will be flooded again. And so will we."

She didn't look convinced. I must admit it was a hard thing to grasp, even for someone as pessimistic as me.