

# Follow-up

AUTUMN 2002



## “Them that asks no questions isn’t told a lie”

In 1906, Rudyard Kipling published “A Smuggler’s Song,” a poem to some extent glorifying our ability to look the other way. In the Isle of Wight, where I grew up, smuggling was a way people survived through many an oppressive regime. It was a means to obtain some small luxuries: “Brandy for the Parson, ’Baccy for the Clerk.” The many “chines”—valleys down to the sea—provided safe havens from “the Revenue men.”

One of the better known chines is “Blackgang.” Located at the southern tip of the island, its name speaks to its earlier use. Today, it is no longer possible to reach the beach, but the romance of its earlier commercial activity lives on. Kipling’s poem supports this romance of the “Gentlemen” as opposed to the Revenue, as the officials were known. However, there is a dark side to the verses, and this speaks to us today, when we look the other way because we may find it makes our life easier.

If you do as you’ve been told, ’likely there’s a chance,  
You’ll be given a dainty doll, all the way from France ...

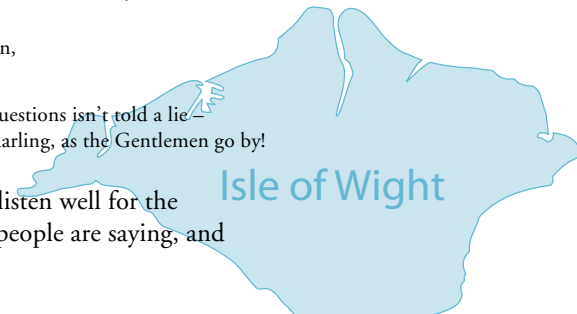
Our willingness to face reality, our willingness to stand up and be counted, our willingness to speak out—these have all been put to

the test over the last year, not only in the global arena but also closer to home, for the poor, the homeless and the hungry. Throughout history, in the face of misguided, state-sanctioned authority, to do what is right may take immense courage and personal sacrifice. The decision to do what is right is not simple—never more an issue than at this time, as we face some very difficult choices in our world.

Brandy for the Parson,  
’Baccy for the Clerk;

Them that asks no questions isn’t told a lie—  
Watch the wall my darling, as the Gentlemen go by!

Ask rich questions, listen well for the answers, hear what people are saying, and do the right thing.



**This issue includes the work of two other writers, who contribute their thoughts on Kipling’s message (see over).**

**We would be very interested to hear your views on “Them that asks no questions isn’t told a lie.” Send us your contributions — we may publish them ...**

### A Smuggler’s Song

Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936)

If you wake at midnight, and hear a horse’s feet,  
Don’t go drawing back the blind, or looking in the street.  
Them that ask no questions isn’t told a lie.  
Watch the wall, my darling, while the Gentlemen go by!

Five and twenty ponies,  
Trotting through the dark,  
Brandy for the Parson,  
’Baccy for the Clerk;  
Laces for a lady, letters for a spy,

Watch the wall, my darling, while the Gentlemen go by!

Running round the woodlump if you chance to find  
Little barrels, roped and tarred, all full of brandy-wine,  
Don’t you shout to come and look, nor use ’em for your play.  
Put the brushwood back again — and they’ll be gone next day!

If you see the stable-door setting open wide;  
If you see a tired horse lying down inside;  
If your mother mends a coat cut about and tore;  
If the lining’s wet and warm — don’t you ask no more!

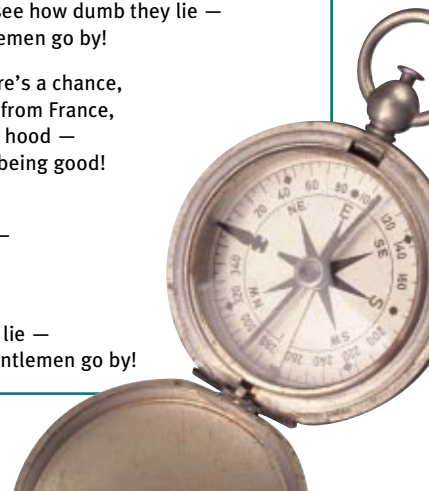
If you meet King George’s men, dressed in blue and red,  
You be careful what you say, and mindful what is said.  
If they call you “pretty maid,” and chuck you ’neath the chin,  
Don’t you tell where no one is, nor yet where no one’s been!

Knocks and footsteps round the house — whistles after dark —  
You’ve no call for running out till the house-dogs bark.  
*Trusty’s* here, and *Pincher’s* here, and see how dumb they lie —  
*They* don’t fret to follow when the Gentlemen go by!

If you do as you’ve been told, ’likely there’s a chance,  
You’ll be given a dainty doll, all the way from France,  
With a cap of Valenciennes, and a velvet hood —  
A present from the Gentlemen, along o’ being good!

Five and twenty ponies,  
Trotting through the dark —  
Brandy for the Parson,  
’Baccy for the Clerk;

Them that asks no questions isn’t told a lie —  
Watch the wall, my darling, while the Gentlemen go by!



# Ask Me No Questions, I'll Tell You No Lies

Judges in the U.S. often tell jurors (who are sworn to HEAR and deliver a verdict) to keep an open mind. Remembering this admonition, I offer the following thoughts on the relevance of questions:

The importance of asking the right questions, and asking any questions at all, can mean the difference between connecting with others or alienating others. We can learn a lot about someone from what kind of question is asked, sometimes even more than from the answer itself.

It is so much easier to go on assumption or presumption, therefore making one's own view the deciding factor.

Questions can, when answered truthfully, reveal the deeper issues, and help bring about a resolution to a problem or query. Questions like: Do cliques in schools, sororities, clubs—or any group, for that matter—define who we are? How often does allegiance demand

By Bonnie McArthur

conformance? In the interest of pleasing others, can the bonding be against others, by limiting the freedom of preferences, deeper values, and respect for oneself?

Do most people want the feeling of closeness by having other people listen to and accept them for who they are and not for whom the other would want them to be? How beautiful are the words "I HEAR you." Is it possible to accept each other long enough to know each other's vulnerabilities and idiosyncrasies, yet still love, like or at least be willing to try understand one another? I hope so.

The right questions may get to the **heart** of the matter, barring an answer that is a lie **or** an answer of "no comment."

*Bonnie McArthur is new to having her writing published.*

# The Pink Carnation

Greg and I went to a reading by Wayson Choy yesterday; Choy talked about the creative writing class he took many years ago, in which he was given the word "pink" on a torn-up sheet of paper. Choy originally thought of doing the exercise as a throw-away—just mention a pink carnation in the story and he would have, technically, fulfilled his obligations.

He ended up writing *The Jade Peony*, a prize-winning novel that has as its central metaphor a distinctive piece of pale rose-coloured jade.

Waiting in the line-up to have books signed afterwards, I wished I'd brought my copy of the novel. Greg had his, of course.

He got the book inscribed, "Best wishes Greg—Your stories *will* matter!"

Later Greg said: "Actually, that was your copy of the book, Deb—I took it from your office at work, as you may recall." He smiled and rifled through the pages, "Look, here are your notes in the margins."

\* \* \*

"Why did you do it?" I asked.

"Because I could. What are you so upset about?" he asked me, looking at his watch. "It's not fair to bait the hook and expect someone not to take the bait. You asked me. What am I supposed

By Deb Blenkhorn

to say? I'm your friend, your best friend. Ask me no questions, I'll tell you no lies."

"Goodbye," I said. I thought, I need to try, at least, to turn a pink carnation into something precious and profound.

*Deb Blenkhorn lives in Vancouver. She teaches English at Kwantlen University College and at the University of British Columbia. Her current writing project is a book of autobiographical essays, two of which were published this year in the Queen's Feminist Review.*

*Follow-up* is published occasionally for clients and friends of Jane Durant. We hope it helps you get better results for yourselves and others. If you would like the opportunity to be part of a future issue, or if you would like to receive a copy, please click on web link, send e-mail, phone or write me at:

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