

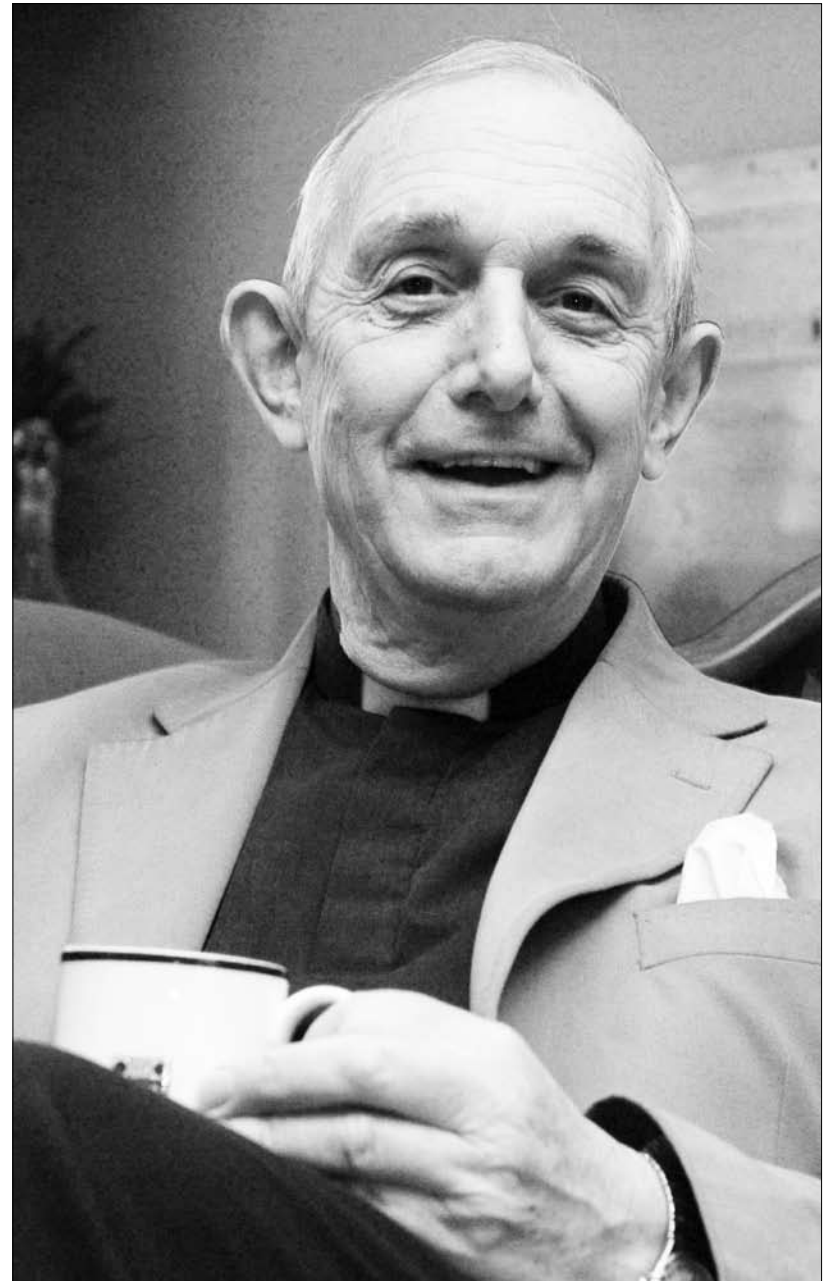
“They were afraid where no fear was.”

Canon Roger Royle is a clergyman, broadcaster, writer and occasional pantomime dame. He presented *Sunday Half Hour* on Radio 2 for 16 years until his retirement in 2007. He is a regular contributor to *Pause for Thought on Wake Up to Wogan* and can also be heard from time to time presenting *Good Morning Sunday*.

I describe myself as an “allsorts” with maverick tendencies. I am the son of a clergyman, but sadly my father died when I was one. Not having a father from the word go had an enormous effect. It was ages before I could spell the word “father” – I spelt it “farther”. I didn’t know how to cope with friends’ fathers, because I wasn’t used to having one around the house.

The loss stayed with me, but my mother was such a powerful person to me, so important and always has been. I was 18 when she died. I always steadfastly keep her anniversary – with rejoicing, with happiness, with fun; and yes, with tears, but it’s not a mournful day by any means. I think my parents were responsible for the two prime influences in my life – the Church and the theatre.

I do have a problem in that I’m not brilliant at commitment. Maybe it’s a result of losing parents at an early age, and a feeling of not wanting to be let down again.





When I was a child, my mother and I went to the pantomime at the New Theatre, Cardiff. I always tried to be the first to go up on stage, embarrassing my brother Peter terribly. I went to the twice-nightly variety shows in Cardiff and when I was older I took my mother to the cinema.

I loved the ritual of church, the splendid costumes – the vestments; it was very theatrical. So I went straight from school to read Theology at Kings College, London. I was ordained in the Church of England in 1962 and became a curate, one of 11, at St Mary's in Portsmouth. That was a brilliant experience, a marvellous training parish, and I still have friends there.

From Portsmouth I went to the St Helier housing estate and hospital in south London. For the first six months I didn't fit in at all: they didn't get my sense of humour and I didn't get theirs. The parish pantomime was my salvation. Drama came to the rescue.

One of the biggest eye-openers in my life was when I went to be chaplain of Lord Mayor Treloar School & College for people with physical disabilities.

The world of disability had a profound effect on me. I saw how parents and siblings coped with disability within the family and the colossal stress on all involved.

Coping with bereavement has always been very, very important to me. Having suffered it myself I never wanted people to think they weren't cared for at times like that. I

introduced a Thanksgiving Assembly for students who had died. It meant tears, but that's part of grieving. And, if the parents agreed, students who were mates could go to the funeral. Then back to College for tea, a celebratory wake. It did make a difference.

I feel the pressure of caring for people, particularly after a suicide. Worrying whether you're getting it right, balancing things properly. Preparation is hugely important and I get up very early in the morning. I need to check things through, sort things out. I can give the appearance of spur of the moment but it's been very well planned and packaged.

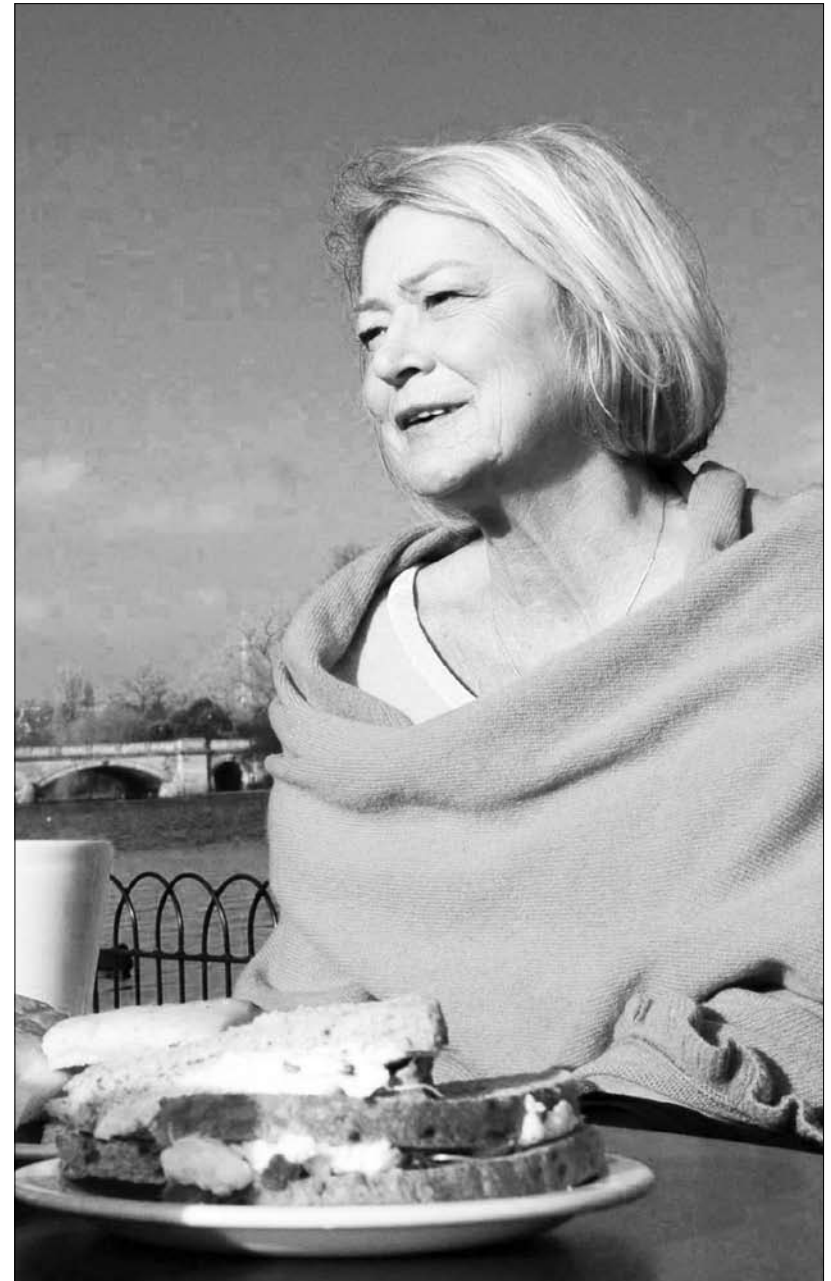
If I'm out of sorts with friends, it really drags me down. In adversity I need God and friends in equal parts. At times I have been afraid of things when I shouldn't have been. I think many of us are afraid of things when we shouldn't be. We turn them into huge problems when there's no reason to be fearful. I take comfort from the old prayer book version of Psalm 53: "They were afraid where no fear was."

“I’ve always been staggered by the number of strangers who have come to help.”

Kate Adie is the presenter of BBC Radio 4’s flagship programme, *From Our Own Correspondent*. Formerly the BBC’s Chief News Correspondent, she was named twice as the Royal Television Society Reporter of the Year and won the premier news award, The Monte Carlo International Golden Nymph Award, in 1981 and 1990. Kate was awarded the OBE in 1993.

When I joined the BBC, in local radio, I had no thoughts or desires of doing news, or being a reporter. I was the most junior person on the team, on £920 per year, nailing down the floorboards and feeding the station cat. I never opted to go and lie in a ditch and be shot at. Later, as a general reporter, you just took every story that was thrown at you – quite literally sometimes. Even in small disturbances you got stones, bricks, that sort of thing. And it’s horrible having gravel thrown at you, I can tell you.

In random violence people are both angry and sometimes





distraught – in a sense out of their minds with outrage, and often for very good cause; people would do anything because they were desperate. And if you get in the way, which is what the press often do, you just have to look out for yourself. Sometimes people become vindictive and you have to be very nippy on your feet. I used to be able to jump fences extremely well, and run. You're not there to take part in the fight, so if it means scarpering fast to prevent more trouble happening, you do.

This book is about facing up to danger – but about others, not me. I've been blessed and I've come through life amazed at how good it has been to me. I was born illegitimate, and I got the most wonderful adoptive parents. At the time when they slipped away, at a very dramatic and physically quite strenuous time, I was in between events in China in Tiananmen Square, and the Gulf War. Then I took the decision, and it was very quickly fulfilled, to find my own mother, and it worked out wonderfully.

Can you imagine? Thinking at one point, "I have almost no close living relatives", and then finding a tribe of them. I am acutely conscious, because a lot of people have written to me about their own experiences, that some people don't have such great good fortune. You hear from people who feel their life has been blighted. People who suddenly hit hard times, or thought things were going to be all right, and then it was not a fairytale ending and life has been very empty or bleak for them. I have been very, very fortunate.

It is terribly difficult for people who've been the victim of

unexpected circumstances or tragedies, but I think you have to look into yourself and say 'It starts here - in me.' It's a tough message but people do respond. You have to gather yourself together. It helps to have friends and I'm curious when people say that if they really got into trouble they would maybe have one or two people to talk to. I would like to think I have a lot. I'm constantly nattering with them and they, as well as your family, get you through. One of the ways you gather yourself together is to call on friends. That is what friends are for. And strangers can help, too.

I've been in lots of very nasty situations where other people, not usually because of hatred of you, have occasionally tried to harm you or kill you because of the circumstances. And I've always been staggered by the number of strangers who have come to help. That's why I called my autobiography *The Kindness of Strangers*.

I've found a lot of goodness and I regard it as something very powerful in life. I don't believe everyone is perfect, or that there are saints out there. I'm not a Pollyanna. But I do think people are extraordinary, especially at bad times. I've seen amazing efforts of people giving help when they've got nothing, when they themselves have been struck by the effects of war or natural disaster. Their first thought is to go off and do something for their neighbour.