



## S61 Mini Reunion 11 - 13 September 2020 - Manctopia - The Covid Reunion

### Overview

This year's mini reunion was held in central Manchester over the weekend of Friday 11 to Sunday 13 September. Hosting the event was Joe Dagnino, ably assisted by his partner, Anne Vitkin, and in attendance were the following stalwarts:

Pete and Sandra Bellamy  
Eddy Calvert and Lorraine Copping  
Dave Lenton and Carolyn McIntyre  
Jeff and Linda Marshall  
Al Trusler



The 2020 Reunion Bubble!

In accordance with what has by now become tradition, proceedings for the first two days took the form of an initial gathering for convivial banter, drinks, and a bite to eat on the Friday, followed by the ever so slightly more formal reunion dinner on the Saturday, featuring the solemn ceremony of the handing over of the priceless reunion decanter from the incumbent host to next years' Duty Chief. In a departure from the normal routine, made possible by the limited attendance, Joe hosted a much appreciated brunch on Sunday lunchtime before everyone went their separate ways.

## **Joe 90 - Mandarin or Marionette?**

When the going gets tough, the world cries out for heroes, and never was that need greater than when any prospects of there being a mini reunion during this years' Covid 19 pandemic lay in a smouldering, virus laden heap. Things were looking utterly hopeless, when out of the ashes strode a colossus; Super Joe Dagnino!

Gripping the nation tightly, the fear of Covid 19 created a much higher workload than normal for this years' host, and nigh on insurmountable problems. Such obstacles could have crushed lesser mortals, but not our Joe, who met all the challenges head on, with his inimitable good humour, and lashings of northern grit.

Joe was ruthlessly thorough in his preparations, as illustrated by my experiences when I visited him at home, in order to take advantage of his kind offer to park my motorhome on his drive for the duration. I was a little taken aback when Joe, in full decontamination suit and AGR, ushered me through a temporary airlock into his hallway, and beckoned me to sit on a small aluminium bench. It was when he started to use a large pair of scissors to cut the clothes off my back that I began to realise just how seriously Joe was taking things!

## **Friday Night - Banyan!**

Manchester is a wonderful, cosmopolitan city, brimming with a stunning variety of restaurants to suit any taste, culture, wallet or S61 reunion. That is, until the modern equivalent of the Black Death appeared, since when strict rules and limitations on all aspects of the hospitality sector have reduced the options considerably. Knowing, as we all do, that Joe is simply NOT the sort of person who is prone to exaggeration, I was filled with sympathy and amazement when he told me that he'd had to phone at least FORTY establishments in order to find one that could take us all on the Friday night! It was well worth the effort though, as the Banyan turned out to be a superb, trendy (by S61 standards anyway!) and very welcoming venue, with young, very friendly, and, most importantly, patient, staff. As can be imagined, the name of the venue created a little confusion; Al had some difficulty in persuading Eddy to leave the oil drum and crates of beer at the Travelodge, where they were both staying.



Eleven; it's the new Six!



Joe's organisational skills were stress tested early in the proceedings. Due to Covid 'restrictions', we had all been asked by Joe to let him know our choice of food from the online menu, which he would then satisfy by liaison with the restaurant. Due to the ageing process, on the other hand, we had all forgotten what we'd ordered. Joe pounced on this chance to demonstrate his meticulous planning, and, in a flourish worthy of an EU Brexit negotiator, produced a six foolscap page breakdown of exactly what each person had ordered, down to the last grain of couscous.

All too soon, Joe discovered that, with advancing senility, comes fickleness, and he was forced to become a spectator as the waiting staff were besieged by a finger jabbing, fork wielding mob demanding changes to their menu choices. Sic transit gloria mundi, eh, Joe!

After recovering our decorum, we were well behaved enough to be allowed to stay up late, by which I mean that the staff gave us an extension well beyond their advertised opening hours! We all went 'home' having had an enormously enjoyable night of catching up, good earthy banter, the swapping of dits, and the general strengthening of the bonds of comradeship, as well as having enjoyed some superb food and drink. And, in a sure sign that even the most extreme social animals amongst us are beginning to experience gradual limitations to their stamina, even Eddy went straight back to his hotel and got his head down!

### **Saturday Night - Reunion Dinner at the Comptoir Libanais**

After a daytime spent taking advantage of the massive variety of attractions that the Metropolis at the heart of the northern Powerhouse had to offer, we regrouped, to attend the reunion dinner proper, at the Comptoir Libanais, which is part of an upmarket chain of restaurants that, as the name suggests, specialises in Middle Eastern and North African cuisine. Joe assured me that it had taken about FIFTY phone calls this time, and much negotiation, to secure this venue, what with it being a Saturday night and all! Just as the Banyan had done on the previous night, however, it soon proved itself to be well worth all of Joe's efforts. Excellent surroundings, food, and drink were complemented by the warmth and friendliness of the staff, who provided us with outstanding service.



I beg your pardon; you never promised us a Rose Garden!

We were accommodated in a specially prepared room that had never been opened for public use before. At one point, in fact, photographs were taken by a member of staff, for inclusion in the restaurant's marketing literature! I think the staff agreed that we had been right to insist that they remove the mockup of the Brazilian rain forest, with which they had initially adorned the table, and which left little room for food! They left the surrounding Rose Garden in place though (see photos!).



Looks like Sandra has heard that one before!



Jeff was always easily amused!

As the evening unfolded, a familiar pattern ensued. Dinner was conducted in a wonderful atmosphere of good humoured merriment and friendship, interspersed with spontaneous outbreaks of ribald singing. Leading the singing were Al and Jeff, who has the looks, and build, of a Tenor, though with slightly shorter legs. Ace raconteur Pete showcased his fabled ability to entertain, on the spot, by regaling us with a brace of dits, mainly at the expense of the gathered chippies, naturally! Our clankies do seem to have a certain ability to project their voices; developed, no doubt, as a result of having spent half their lives shouting at each other in noisy machinery spaces in the bowels of Her Majesty's ships.



One Tenor, and Two Fivers

Highlight of the night was the now traditional handing over of the ceremonial decanter by the incumbent to next year's host. After a passionate, and, at times, emotional, description of an action packed year in the hot spot from Joe, the legend that is Calvert was helped to his feet in order to make his acceptance speech. Eddy proceeded to serve up a lengthy, rambling, and largely incoherent speech, oblivious of the constant interruptions by staff members, who seemed unaware that the drunken, swaying figure, seemingly talking to himself, and getting in their way, was actually



in the process of delivering a keynote address. Pete and Joe may be the masters of dits; Eddy usually IS the dit.



“I can’t die now”, I said, “I’ve got a reunion to organize”



“If I have to cancel, I’ll give a week’s notice – Fair enough?”

Just as we had done the previous evening, we managed to enjoy ourselves enormously, whilst conducting ourselves with sufficient decorum to be given a lengthy extension by an appreciative staff. Or maybe we are just good tippers!

Talking of tips. We all agreed to split the bill evenly between us, with Al kindly offering to pay a little extra to make it a nice round figure to divide. What none of us realised was that Al somehow got lumbered with everyone’s service charges, which meant he ended up paying more than twice as much as anyone else! Nice one, Al



How much!!?

### **Sunday Morning - Brunch at Bill’s**

All good things must pass, but Joe made sure that the weekend ended on a high note, as he brought us all together for a farewell brunch at yet another impressive, upmarket, and decidedly trendy eatery. I daren’t even mention the number of phone calls and hours of negotiation that it took Joe to organise! It made a fitting conclusion to a hugely enjoyable and highly successful event, which will be forever remembered in the annals of S61 history as the Covid reunion!

And so we all finally went our separate ways. Almost. Al Trusler drove Eddy and Lorraine back down to the South Coast, while Pete and Sandra, who stayed for a whole week in Manchester, were escorted to a very famous Garden Centre in Warrington by Joe and Annie. 'A Garden Centre in Warrington' may not have quite the frisson of danger and adventure associated with a run ashore down the Gut, Bugis Street, or Wanchai, but you can bet that, with it being Pete and Joe, there'll be a dit!

### The Ladies

Yes; I know!! I've hardly mentioned the ladies! Our better halves have always been prominent in all of our S61 reunions, and play an indispensable part in our mini reunions; and Manchester was no different. Annie, Carolyn, Linda, Lorraine and Sandra definitely made their presence felt, and contributed every bit as much as the chaps towards making it a memorable and enjoyable weekend.



Cheers Ladies

Annie looks just about to pour a drink over Lorraine!

However, the thing is, these Reports of Proceedings of mini reunions are basically a vehicle for the slander, misrepresentation, and character assassination of the chaps. It must really hurt to read this stuff; it's painful. Trev Payne proof reads it for me, and he tells me it's excruciating!

So what I'm trying to say, ladies, is - it's not (always) about you!

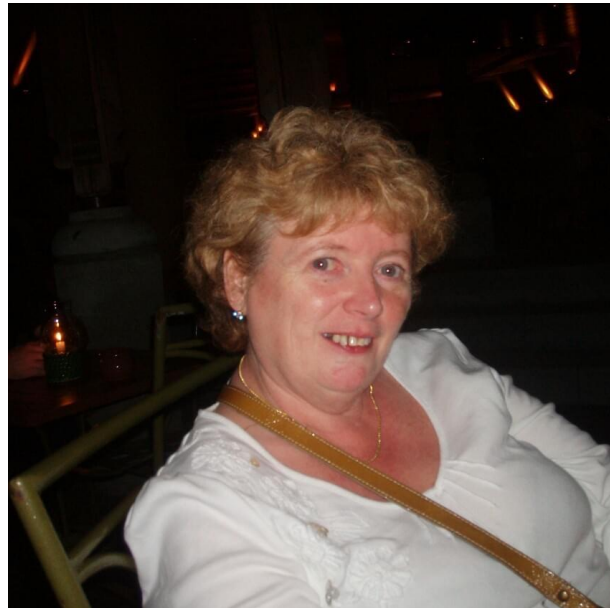


Eddy says it for all of us!  
Cheers Joe!

### Absent Friends

On Saturday evening, we observed the traditional raising of a glass to absent friends. Foremost in all of our minds, and given special mention, were Wally and Wilma Clelland, who have graced most of our mini reunions with their considerable presence. Sadly, Wilma passed away a mere fortnight before this year's reunion, leaving a hole that can never be filled. Whilst we will all miss Wilma's smiling face and sunny disposition, she will always have a place in our hearts, and so she will always be with us.

For Wally, the loss of his wife and loving companion for 50 years will have been a devastating blow. He will be heartbroken. Our thoughts are with him.



R.I.P. Wilma