

A photograph of a boat at low tide on a beach, with a sunset sky in the background. The boat is in the foreground, and the water is calm, reflecting the sky. The sky is a mix of blue and orange, with some clouds. The boat has blue buoys and a rope around it. The background shows a beach and a lighthouse in the distance.

I received a proposal of marriage on the **Norfolk Coast Path**

Writer Chrissie Gittins is an exiled Northerner who calls London home, but her heart's in East Anglia – including a department store's nightwear department...

Low tide at Burnham
Overy Staithe
Photo: CONTRIBUTED

I've been visiting East Anglia for over three decades, ever since I moved to London from the North. I would escape on my Honda 90 before I moved on to a car. I'm drawn to its wateriness and wildlife, its colours and vistas, its history and stories. I come to walk, to see the 360-degree horizons, to feel my shoulders drop and breathe keen air.

I like the back-to-back water at Benacre Broad and Covehithe Broad, where the sea whooshes and the inland water is still. I like the stately River Stour as it progresses along its wide valley. I like the changing patterns left in the sand by the lowering tide on the salt marshes at Burnham Overy Staithe. I've spent a whole day watching the tide rise and fall in the Alde estuary from Iken Cliff.

I don't always intend to work, but as a poet there can be an idea which presents itself and won't go away. On a recent visit to Southwold I went into St Edmund's Church. I learnt that a wooden corbel angel from the 15th Century had been found in a green bag on top of a cupboard during restoration work.

The discovery of this precious object, which had been stored so casually, was intriguing to me. It was carved from a single piece of local English oak, and the traces of lime wash indicate that it was originally positioned against a wall.

It now sits in a glass case in Southwold Museum. It's possible to see her flat face pocked with holes made by death watch beetle, her cracked skirt, and her craggy back. I wondered what it must have been like to be present through over five centuries of history, and how she felt about her journey. This became a poem, a dramatic monologue from her point of view.

I received a proposal of marriage on the Norfolk Coast Path at Burnham Overy Staithe. A man in his 80s used to walk the path twice a day. He'd lost his wife and was looking for another. When he saw me sitting on a bench he came to sit beside me. He told me his story and put his arm round me. "You look alright," he said. I hope he found another bride.

From that same path, by the River Burn, I saw my first

Glorious Burnham
Overy Staithe

Picture:
BRIAN SHREEVE



kingfisher. This memorable moment hatched another poem. It tells the myth of Alcyone and Ceyx, who were very much in love. Ceyx was drowned in a storm; Alcyone (or Halcyon, another word for kingfisher) threw herself into the sea in her grief. Touched by her devotion, the gods transformed them both into kingfishers so they could go on living and being together. They are reunited along "a familiar creek", which I imagine to be in Overy Staithe.

A boat trip from Orford inspired another poem - this time a poem for children. As we wound around the curves of land, the skipper told us about the Wildman, or Merman, of Orford, who appeared in 1167. He was caught by fishermen, strung up by his feet and tortured. Allowed to swim in the sea, he escaped the net barriers put up by the jailers and dived till he was free. In the poem he returns, has his say, and tells us what he's been up to for the last 800 years.

Of other exclusive East Anglian



Chrissie Gittins on East Anglia: 'I'm drawn to its wateriness and wildlife, its colours and vistas, its history and stories. I come to walk, to see the 360-degree horizons, to feel my shoulders drop and breathe keen air'

BELOW: Chrissie Gittins reckons it's sometimes very difficult to cross on foot at Darsham station

delights I would pick out these: Bakers & Larners in Holt, particularly the nightwear department; the flower festival at Potter Heigham with the imaginative interpretations of themes; skeins of pink-footed geese flying over Norfolk skies; tea and cake with a blanket at the Boating Lake Tearoom in Southwold; the morning sun breaking through September mist at Walberswick, the light picking out the river and the sea.

Chrissie writes poetry, short stories, radio drama and poetry for children. Her second short story collection, published by Unthank Books in Norwich, is *Between Here and Knitwear*. Her latest poetry collection for children is *Adder, Bluebell, Lobster*, and her most recent adult poetry collection is *I'll Dress One Night as You*. Details and reviews here: www.chrissiegittins.co.uk

'I recall the nauseating smell of this 'radioactive' cold war food'



James MARSTON

I've lost on the horses and I've lost my bank account!

I remember when I was at school being taught to use a fountain pen. Actual pen and ink. Indeed, I still use a fountain pen and even write the occasional letter. But who else uses a fountain pen and writes letters these days? It's a lost art, isn't it?

And yet receiving a proper letter, though rare, is so much better than a bill for something dull like Council Tax.

Later this month it's National Stationery Week, something which one witty-ish colleague suggested must be a staple of the calendar, so I'm expecting, instead of the usual flurry of emails from you, dear readers, a few hand-written letters telling me how much you enjoy hearing about my small flat with sea views (distant) in the Edwardian spa town of Felixstowe.

This week I've had to open a new bank account after the Norwich and Peterborough Building Society decided my current account wasn't for them. Perhaps they didn't like the amount I was spending on cheese scones. And I've also started on the garden - well, cut the grass for

my ma and pa, what with Easter and people coming over - and started the annual attempt to grow things in pots without killing them. As regular readers will know, I like a flutter, occasionally, on the horses and the Grand National is always a good excuse. I popped into my turf accountant last Saturday but didn't pick the winner. In fact, I'm not sure what happened to my horse as, after an initial and brief mention by the commentator, he seemed to disappear.

In other news, thanks to Barbara Boyd of Hadleigh and Ann Fenn, of Norfolk (she didn't say exactly where) for emailing with their recollections of pink custard. Ann recalled a number of strange and colourful foodstuffs, including a green milkshake which tasted like window cleaner.

She wrote: "Being a child of the 1970s, I can recall many psychedelic dishes, probably later withdrawn due to the vast quantities of food colouring and additives.

"School curry was daffodil yellow, and I can still recall the nauseating and extremely pungent smell of this 'radioactive' cold war food. It was a good twenty years before my taste buds were calmed enough to partake in a restaurant curry."

Write to me at East Anglian Daily Times, 11 Woolhall Street, Bury St Edmunds, or email james.marston@archant.co.uk - and remember, I like any form of flattery.



MY EA HELL

What I don't like about East Anglia is leaving it, and not spending enough time there. It takes me a while to adjust when I get back to London. There's always the gripe of the A12 with its drivers too close and too fast. It's also very difficult to cross on foot if one is trying to get onto the platform at Darsham Station.

A disappointment is that the woman who used to make England's best carrot cake for Café 46 in Wickham Market has gone into teaching. I can't tell you how delicious and incomparable that cake was. But then there are always sausages from Revett's butchers across the road. I never go home with less than 24 of those!