

Foreword

Hello, my name's Rory. I'm quite old now. Not really ancient, but, put it this way, I usually grunt for no reason when I get up from an armchair. That sort of old. However, I can still remember quite a lot of my childhood adventures with Guy and Adrian. Then there were my parents, and let's not forget my annoying sister, Clare (actually, let's). Anyway, I thought I'd jot down some of my recollections and share them with you.

I like stories. And the fact that you're either reading this – or listening to it being read aloud – makes me think you like stories too.

I don't know *that* much about anything, but I do know my own story, just like you know yours. Your story is Unique. Like you. Have you noticed that often we get lumped together as all being the Same? Either because we're the same age, or go to the same school, or live in the same town. But you look completely different to that girl you passed on a bicycle yesterday, or the boy you said hello to on the train this morning, even though you're the same age and live in the same neck of the woods.

And the main reason you might recognise them again tomorrow, on that bike, or on that train, is because they are *different* from you. Similar maybe – but definitely different.

That's what this story of me and my friends is

about. How we're all Similar but Different.
Individual.

And while this is my story, with lots of it actually having happened to me all those years ago when I was growing up in Brenwell Heath, well, some of it *didn't* happen to me. But that's often what stories are: things that *really* happened that sound SO much better if you add a dollop of this, a spoonful of that and a sprinkling of 'What if ...?'.
For instance, what happened one summer at primary school when the circus came to town. In my next book I'll reveal the extraordinary spy story that unfolded on my own doorstep. And one day, if you're interested, I could tell you about a half-term trip to Italy involving a mysterious disappearance that no one in the Sparkes family would ever forget.

Right. Let's go ...

London

October 2025

THE SPARKES



J.P. Sparkes

Patricia Sparkes

FAMILY



Clare

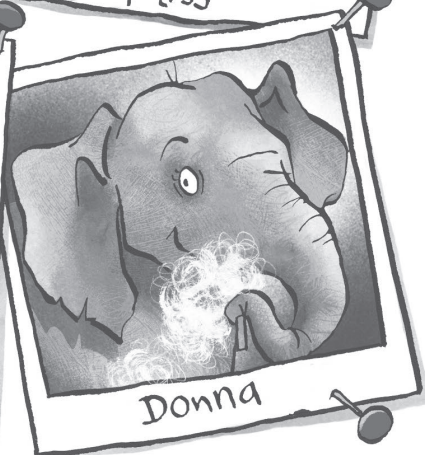
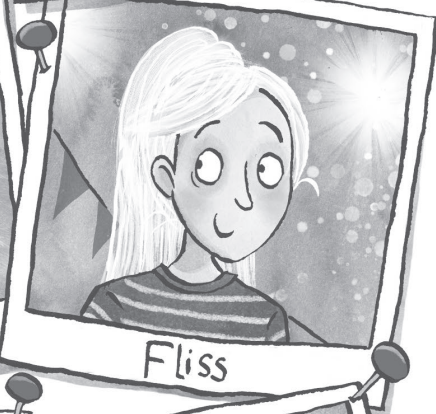
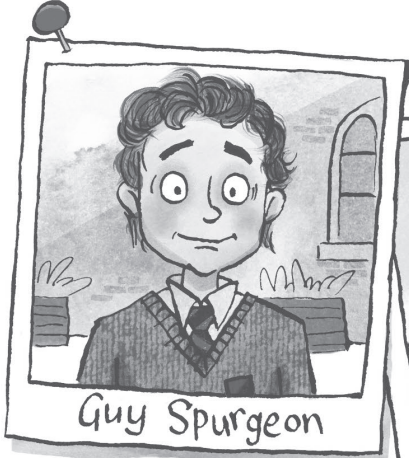


Rory

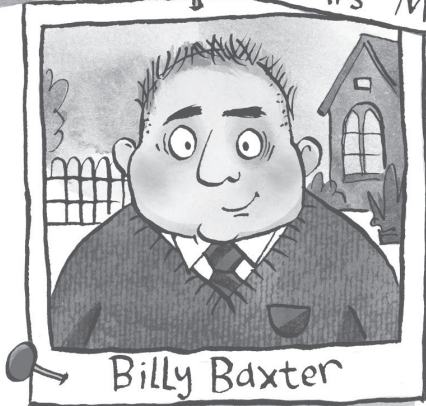
Archie



ALSO



STARRING





Chapter 1

Dressed in his pyjamas, Rory looked out of his parents' bedroom window as he brushed his teeth. By standing on tiptoe he was *just* able to see – away in the distance through the trees, in the middle of the grassy common known as Brenwell Heath – the roof of the circus tent.

Two cones of blue-and-red striped canvas had been hauled into place, with strong ropes securing the tent to the ground. As a finishing touch, gold pennant flags rose into view on the twin

peaks, fluttering in the warm breeze of the early summer sunset, announcing to the world that Teddy Trent's Circus had finally arrived.

For the next couple of months its trapeze artists and tumblers, contortionists and stunt performers would make audiences *oooh* and *aaah* at their jaw-dropping acts.

Except, thought Rory, for the clowns. They're not talented and they're not funny. End of. And their bright red wigs are just stupid.

Yet, in spite of the clowns' failed attempts to amuse him, Rory was smitten with the circus. The atmosphere, the daring displays, the sense of magic, the impossible made real and, of course, the candyfloss. One year he'd been so impressed by the strongman, who had raised two colossal old ladies on a bench above his head, that he'd spent the next week going round the house trying to lift chairs with one hand and getting puffed

out and putting them down again before keeling over from exhaustion.

Best leave it to the professionals, he thought.

Over the weeks, months and years, Rory's first impressions had developed into a big idea and finally into a field of dreams. One day, he told himself, he really would run off and join the circus.

'And that's a *promise!*' he said aloud and emphatically, which was an unfortunate thing to do with a mouth full of toothpaste. He spent the next couple of minutes wiping the splatter from the windowpane with the sleeve of his pyjamas, before returning to the bathroom to rinse his mouth, lob the toothbrush in the general direction of the holder and sort of put the lid back on the toothpaste.

He would have picked the towel up but it looked quite comfy on the floor.

