

One week with JOHN GULLIVER

Political steer from Keir?

IS there such a thing as a model victim of a sex attack?

There was years ago among lawyers and police.

To pass the "credibility" test the victim has to show that she or he reported the attack straight away, gave a full account first time, and had not been affected by drinks or drug.

Sounds pretty loaded to me – loaded against the victim, that is.

I hadn't thought about it in such a cold, forensic way until I heard Keir Starmer, former director of public prosecutions, set out why he wants to turn the world of law upside down with a new "Victim's Law" that will tilt justice more towards the victim instead of the perpetrator.

He was giving a talk to – I sensed – a converted audience that packed the Working Men's College, in Camden Town on Tuesday, part of the very good free talks the college chief Satnam Gill has put on our calendar.

Even when a victim gets to court, it seems the system works against her or him – unexpected exposure to public gaze and often withering questioning from the defence that can go on for days.

Starmer will find he is pushing at an open door when it comes to pre-trial assessment, I believe, but tampering with the rights of the defence, ah, that will probably be more difficult.

It was a brave talk by the nation's ex-prosecution chief who



Keir Starmer and Satnam Gill at the Working Men's College in Camden Town

deftly dealt with two questioners who accused the police of corruption.

"There were cases where there was corruption when I was Director of Prosecutions," he said, "but the vast majority are not corrupt."

By the time Starmer arrived, a few minutes before the talk was due to start, it was a question of will he or won't he? –

throw his hat into the ring for selection as a replacement, that is, for Frank Dobson who is rumoured to be thinking of standing down as MP.

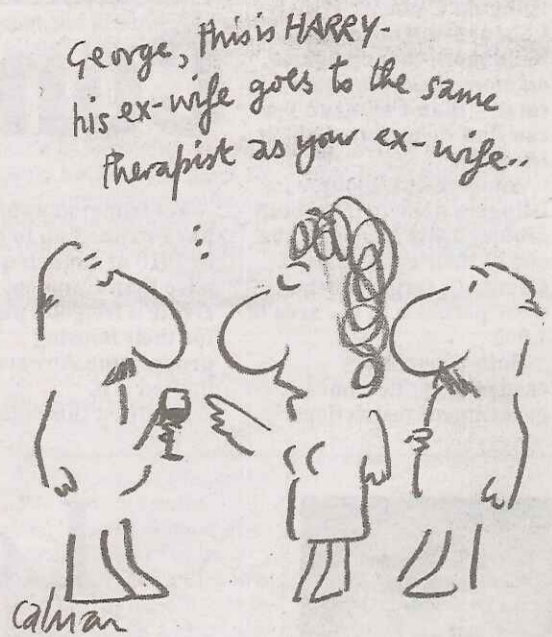
Starmer avoided answering my question directly but said he was "inclined" to consider entering politics.

It sounded like lawyer-speak for yes, but that is only a guess on my part.

One or two well-known Labour members I chatted to thought the much-publicised talk was Starmer's way of saying "Yes – here I am".

My memory goes back to the last battle for the St Pancras seat in the early 1980s when Frank fought it out with the sitting MP Jock Stallard who had held the seat for more than a decade. The selection meeting lasted more than two hours on a Sunday – and it was a bloody affair.

Years later, I would meet from time to time the then-ennobled Jock – a former engineer and an Old Labour type – a sad figure who once told me, and I felt the pain in his voice, he had been to a local Labour Party branch meeting and nobody knew who he was.



One of the late cartoonist Mel Calman's pieces

One to pencil into your diary

COULD it have been conceived in any other way?

When novelist Claire Calman, daughter of that great angsty cartoonist Mel Calman, described to me last night (Wednesday) how the idea of an exhibition of her father's works came up, I knew someone in the celestial was behind the scenes.

"I'm a bit of a hermit," she began, "but somehow when I was at a swish occasion at the Savoy last autumn I got talking to Lisa Appignanesi about my father, and suddenly she said 'Let's do an exhibition'."

Well, the exhibition, with the blessing of writer Lisa Appignanesi, is due to open this evening (Thursday) at the Freud Museum in Hampstead, and I cannot wait to go there.

Mel, a worrying, brooding artist of the Jewish variety, was one of our great cartoonists who, of all things, died of a heart attack in 1994 at 62, at the Odeon Leicester Square during a showing of *Carlito's Way*.

How he would have loved to have been analysed by Freud!

Why Benny has rightly been lionised

A THOUGHT intruded as I glanced at the startled face of a child on his father's shoulders as the colourful Chinese lion's dance swirled in front him on the Camden High Street pavement on Saturday afternoon.

Did the lion look frightening in the choreographed dance? Were the clashing cymbals and beating drum all too much for him?

Mobile cameras to hand, passers-by snapped the dance as the crowd gathered.

I thought of how many thousands of years old the dance



Traditional Chinese celebrations on Camden High Street in honour of Benny Mei, left

was – and how it was still lovingly performed today in modern China signifying courage.

Today still linked with yesterday.

Yet our feudal street dances have all but vanished, buried by the glacial sweep of industrialisation, a fate no other nation experienced.

All we could offer today would be our bucolic Morris Dance – and would there be quiet sniggers from passers-by?

This great spectacle was held to celebrate the life of a man, Benny Mei, who opened a little Chinese traditional clinic 32 years ago, and saw it grow into a small empire known as Acu Medic.

To him Chinese herbal medicine was a passion that needed to be promoted and shared, not only among the public but

also the more sceptical practitioners of conventional Western medicine.

They all fell for his charm – Royal Free consultants as well as high-ups in the department of health.

While he beavered away at building bridges he found time to invent the first disposable traditional acupuncture needle, and link up with world leading academies in China.

Yet I was surprised by the enormous crowd that packed the High Street clinic for what was a beautiful celebration of Benny's life – friends, patients, and no doubt a few passers-by who had been vaguely aware of the clinic over the years.

One more surprise: Benny was a man with a public conscience as revealed by his son, Don Mei, in his eulogy, when he described how his grandfather cut him off after he refused to leave Hong Kong for the family restaurant business in the US because he could not stand its war against Vietnam. He had a real sense of "honour".

John Gulliver

VALENTINE'S DAY
at Andy's
Camden's favourite
Greek restaurant
Reservations now
being taken

Andy's Taverna,
81a Bayham Street, Camden Town
020 7485 9718
email reservation@andystaverna.com
www.andystaverna.com

Join us for a **FREE**
event celebrating
**Castlehaven's
Community
Time Bank!**
**Monday 10th Feb.
3.30pm-5pm**

- Come and meet the new Time Bank staff
- Find out about new opportunities for giving and spending your time
- Connect with other members of your community
- Learn more about the Time Bank

21 Castlehaven Road
NW1 8PX
020 7485 3386

*light snacks and refreshments will be provided

Beyoglu
Grill & Meze

"A reliable Turkish outfit where quality is predictable" Harden Guide 2013

20% off Mon-Wed Evenings
(when you quote this advert when booking)

72 Belsize Lane, Belsize Village, NW3 5BJ
020 7435 7733

www.beyoglu.co.uk