

The chronicles of Margaret RR O'Neill

Profile

Name: Known as Margaret. Real name not disclosed for legal reasons.

Age: Anywhere from 70-85 years old. No one has been brave enough to ask yet!

Location: Lancashire, The North.

Likes: Driving fast and scaring people. Bingo, disco dancing, martial arts, and reading books.

Dislikes: People who are idiots. Many things from America.

What can I tell you about Margaret? Where do I even start? How do I tell you? Why should I tell you? Who is Margaret? When shall I tell you? If your head is now spinning with all of this information, imagine how much mine is dealing with her on a regular basis. However being around Margaret is often very exciting.

I'll answer the last question first. When shall I tell you? Right here right now!

The answers to all of the other questions will become apparent as the story of Margaret unfolds, but know this, if you are a child, a parent or grandparent, these chronicles have come about because I was foolish enough to tell a small story about Margaret, this led to people wanting to know more about her, and after a while I thought it best to write it all down, so welcome to part 1 of the 'Chronicles of Margaret.'

* Public warning.

Bear in mind that it wasn't my idea to tell these tales, children and adults just like you kept asking me for them, so read them at your own risk! I bear no responsibility for the behaviour of Margaret. If you are old or know someone who is, do not try or encourage other older people to do the things that Margaret does – you have been warned!!!!

It's usually best to start at the beginning - so I will.

Margaret and I didn't get off to the best start, which wasn't entirely my fault, although my wife Mrs O'Neill and Margaret would probably disagree. Let me tell you what happened and you can decide for yourself. Although I use the name Margaret, it's not her real name, I thought it was wise not to use her real name for security and safety reasons-my safety and security! You'll understand why, when you learn more about **Margaret** (not her real name).

A few years ago I moved to a new house, not an actual new one, it was old, but new to us, it wasn't a bigger or more expensive one either, just one that had a small drive at the side, making it easier to carry all the things I made for schools, the toys for small children and the recycled wooden furniture, from the car to the shed and back again. At the old house I had to keep asking permission from my next door neighbour to pass things over his fence, or carry it through my house to the front door, neither of those was ideal. So another house was needed, still a small house, just one with a drive.

So now you know the reason for moving, probably my fault for making so much stuff I suppose, but I like making stuff. Anyway like a lot of things in life what you think is bad (and often is) can turn out good in the end. It took my wife and I a while to find the right house, and we were both surprised when we found the one we have now, our biggest surprise was how cheap it was compared to others on the same estate, we asked the estate agent if there were any other people interested, she said that a lot of people came to view it, but no one wanted to move in. She assured

us there were no major problems with it, we had it checked by a builder friend of ours, he was as puzzled as we were, but as nothing was wrong we moved in.

Moving day was fairly uneventful until the incident ... oh the incident!

Dave who helped us move, ran over a neighbour's gnome (by accident he said, but we all know he doesn't like gnomes), Mrs O'Neill dispatched me to Wilkinson's to get the neighbours a new one, which I put in the same place as the old broken one, and that was that sorted out-or so I thought. Until another neighbour, a friend of the broken gnome neighbour, jumped in front of our truck shouting 'Gnome killers!' which I thought was way over the top. Friend of broken gnome neighbour then ran off threatening vengeance for the gnome. What a welcome to the neighbourhood!

While Mrs O'Neill glued the old gnome back together, and put a couple of plasters on it, and a small bandage for good measure. Dave and I managed to get all of the furniture, washing machine, beds and all that stuff out of the truck and into the house without any problems (or further Gnome killing), Dave and I loved the electric tail gate on the truck which you could lower up and down at the press of a button, we worked out just how quick it could go up and down in time to our favourite songs which was great fun until Mrs O'Neill told us both off. The house we had just moved into was called a semi-detached, which meant it was attached to another house on one side, but on the other side there was a space the width of two driveways, ours and Margaret's. We had a front door at the front (not surprisingly), but instead of a back door opening out onto the garden we had a side door which opened onto the driveway, which meant if you came out of your house side door at the same time as your neighbour you'd be facing each other.

We had met the neighbours we were attached to, Ben and Kate, very nice they seemed too. They asked us if we had got our stuff in alright, and whether our electric was on, and did we need them to boil us a kettle, or make us a cup of tea. We thanked them for their offer, but didn't take them up on it, because our electric was on and we'd had a cup of tea already. Ben asked if we'd met Margaret yet. I asked them what Margaret was like, they looked at each other then smiled weakly at us, and moved hurriedly towards their house saying they had something very important to attend too. Mrs O'Neill and I went back to our jobs, she was unpacking upstairs, and I put all of my woodworking tools in the shed.

I had to get to bed early that night as I was working in school the following day and didn't want to be tired at school, you never want to be tired at school, you will get told off for snoring in class, and I don't want that to happen to me again.

I had a good day as usual in school, and because it was summer after I'd had my tea, I decided to have a nice sit in the garden next to the wounded gnome, who was now looking much better after having his plasters and bandage removed and being treated to new paint. I got myself a glass of water, went out of the side door and that's when I saw Margaret! She was coming out of her side door when I was coming out of mine. I put my drink down on the window ledge and walked towards the fence intending to shake hands with her, 'hello..I'm Richard' I said smiling whilst trying not to show my surprise at seeing this small very old lady with short grey curly hair, a very wrinkled face. The surprise wasn't the fact she was an old lady with grey hair, I'm used to seeing them, they don't surprise me, it was what she was wearing, a pair of jogging pants and a sports-crop top! What was what even more surprising was the fact that below the crop top was a six pack stomach. Once I got over the shock of the sight before me, I waited for her to say something in response to my introduction. From past experience of moving into a new place, or if people have moved next to me, they've said to me or I've said to them things like, 'how are you settling in?' 'do you need any help with anything', 'is your electric on—do you need me to boil a kettle for you?' So I was expecting something similar from this old lady-instead she fixed me with a steely gaze and half smiling said 'do you wanna arm wrestle mate?'

I thought it was a joke and was waiting for the punchline-but none came.

‘Do you wanna arm wrestle mate.....or are you bawk..bawk..bawk chicken’ she said now flapping her arms for extra effect.

Knowing that she was serious and thinking I could probably take her I said ‘OK, where and when?’

‘Right here right now’ she replied placing her right elbow on the top of the fence. I could see the muscles in the tops of her arms, her biceps looked like two tennis balls under the skin, I thought that was a lot of muscle for an old lady, but still reckoned I could easily beat her, so placed my right elbow on the fence too. We clasped hands, and I was reminded of arm wrestles I’d done with my little brother when we were children, I don’t know if you’ve ever done the same, I would play around pretending that they were really strong, and then when they were least expecting it just slam their arm down quickly-great fun!

That’s what I decided I’d do with this old woman (don’t judge me she’d been very rude to me first), I just put a bit of pressure on her arm playing with her, and then when I decided it was the right time, put all the strength I had into to pushing her arm down, but shockingly it didn’t move, I tried harder, it still didn’t move, it was like trying to push against a concrete wall, the old lady saw my panic, smiled showing the few teeth she had, nodded her head and slammed my arm down so quickly and forcefully I wasn’t sure it had happened until I felt searing pain in my wrist. She clapped her hands together and walked back into her house cackling ‘loser..loser’ as she went.

I was shocked, amazed, and in great pain, so went straight round to the doctors who saw me as an emergency, told me I had a bad sprain and gave me a sling. I didn’t tell them how the injury had happened of course as I didn’t want to be laughed at by the doctors, or worse be reported for having an arm wrestle with a very old lady (was it illegal-I didn’t know-still don’t) so I simply said I did it whilst moving into my new home,’ which was true-sort of. I had to tell Mrs O’Neill of course and she said ‘I hope you haven’t annoyed or upset our new neighbour.’ And when I mentioned the pain in my wrist she said ‘serves you right for not growing up!’ I thought, ‘charming!’

Now all I wanted to do was to have a sit down, some pain killers and a cup of tea, but Mrs O’Neill had other ideas, she’d decided that I should go round to Margaret’s and apologise.

‘Apologise!’ I exclaimed. ‘It should be her apologising to me, she was the one who suggested the arm wrestle, knowing full well how strong she is, she’s the one who has damaged my arm.’

‘You are the one who was stupid enough (rude) to go along with it, no one forced you, and you are the new neighbour and she is old and should be respected, go and apologise now! she instructed. I did what I had to do, gently knocked on Margaret’s door, I was rather hoping that wouldn’t hear my knocking or that she’d be out, and I wouldn’t have to deal with her. I realised that luck was not on my side when the door slowly opened to reveal Margaret with a very scruffy cat sat on the floor next to her leg, like some kind of evil side kick. ‘Erm...I’ve come round to apologise for (I’d forgotten what I was actually apologising for until Mrs O’Neill’s words came back to me)I may have been a little rude before we may have got off on the wrong foot, so I hope you’ll accept my apology,’ I grovelled.

‘More like you got off on the wrong arm’ she shrieked whilst laughing wildly and stroking the cat, who also seemed to be laughing at me. ‘Apology accepted.’

‘Right, I’ll be getting back then’ I said happy that it was all sorted.

'Not so fast neighbour' she said 'let me take you for a spin in my car to show you there's no hard feelings.'

'Ok' I said as she pulled her front door shut, and ushered me towards a bright red small hatchback.

'Hop in' she said opening the front door. She hopped into the drivers seat, looked across and me and said 'buckle up baby!'

So I did, then she started the engine and revved it, which did not sound like the usual small hatchback, it sounded more like a sports or racing car. Margaret seeing the puzzled look on my face said in response 'I changed the engine, made it a bit faster.' She revved the engine again until it screamed and then the car lurched forward it's wheels spinning and burning rubber. We went through the streets and avenues on the estate at ridiculous speeds, and finally ended up in a cul-de-sac where Margaret started going around in a circle, that's when I notice the sticker on the window which stated she was a member of the 'Northern Drifting Club, tyres squealed and smoked, Margaret laughed, I hung onto my seat belt as hard as I could trying hard not to cry, We finished with a few figure of 8's (donuts) using a technique called hand brake turns. Then she drove me home, as she parked the car (using the handbrake turn method once again) outside of her house, she gave me her gap-toothed smile, and patting the dashboard of the car said 'what d'you think?' I realised that even through my shock and desire to be sick I was supposed to comment her on her car and driving display, 'Great' I said rushing out of the car and back to the safety of my home.

When I recounted the tale to Mrs O'Neill she thought it was hilarious! So from that day on Margaret and I became...well I'm not sure what the word is...not friends.. we weren't friends. Mrs O'Neill called us partners in crime, which wasn't accurate either I certainly wasn't her partner, and she was the only one committing crimes including driving way too fast! The best I could come up with apart from neighbours was associates, that didn't sound perfect either, but it was the best I could do. If you have any suggestions then I would be pleased to hear them. That was the start of a number of adventures with my associate Margaret (not her real name), there are many more to chronicle.