



Illustration: Sam Kalda/Folioart

## MY WEEK

# Alvin Hall



## The good and bad dreams that help me hit those deadlines

Every night this past week, I have woken up at 3.16am, no matter what time I went to bed. My eyes would open to see 3.16 in soft white light on the digital video recorder in my study. I often sleep in the study when I'm writing. I have my laptop nearby, seemingly waiting for me to get up, open it, and begin typing my thoughts for this column. My mind was a swirl of potential ideas.

I wondered why 3.16am. I remembered that years ago a friend talked about how winning lottery numbers came to him in his dreams. He believed Lady Luck was speaking to him. However, he only won what he sneeringly called 'chump change'. So, I doubted there were winnings to be had in 3.16's appearance. Each night, a new idea surfaced in my mind and seemed perfect, that is until dawn when I started to type into my laptop. The first idea was to write about Black History Month. I was so inspired I got to work at 5.30am. I wrote that the ironic joke among my fellow undergraduates when I was in college was that, of course, February would be the month chosen in the US. It is, after all, the shortest month of the year.

At least the recognition had expanded by 1976 from the mere seven days when it was created in February 1926 as Negro History Week (the month that coincides with the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass). Then I remembered Black History Month in the UK takes place in

October. So, my timing was, shall we say, not exactly timely.

On another 3.16am night, I woke up thinking I would write about the transitions occurring in my life – transitions that my more seasoned friends might have warned me about but did not. Several key healthcare professionals I've gone to for decades have decided to stop practicing. My GP announced his retirement and handed me my files. My dentist developed health problems that caused him to sell his practice. My beloved ophthalmologist is winding down, assigning procedures he used to perform to his assistants. He once said to me that we always assume the professionals who look after our health will outlive us.

We think this of our close friends, too. As I recalled this, my barber of more than 30 years decided to close shop. Realising that a prolonged rumination on these transitions and the mortality of close friends would probably be too much of a downer, I scrapped this idea as well. With more than 600 words hammered out and discarded in two drafts, I was feeling a tad anxious – but I knew I had a few days and nights to work.

My next 3.16am idea was to focus on situations during my week which threw up humour or quirkiness. I ruminated during my morning coffee break, during lunch, during my mid-afternoon walks. Nothing! That day, I decided to take an afternoon nap to lower my anxiety. I didn't set my usual 30-minute alarm. I would sleep as much as I needed. I was startled awake by a dream that I had somehow missed the deadline for this column. I felt the anxiety throughout my body, until I realised the situation wasn't real – only a mini-nightmare. Amazingly, it was the right nightmare. It gave me the impetus and focus to sit down and wordsmith these sentences in one sitting that very evening.

I woke up shaking my head and laughing quietly at my slightly obsessive, sometimes neurotic self.