

Joss Shove writings – a selection to share

Contents

Autobiography	2
Parents	14
Letter to a younger self.....	15
Desert Island desires.....	16
There is something about camping.....	16
Swimming.....	17
The House	18
Painting the kitchen	19
Something new	20
Journey.....	20
Hair	22
Easy going	23
The Blanket	24
Nice	25
A happy day in summer	26
“Every Little Helps”	27
Toe Socks.....	28
Fairy Story	28
50 words	29
Joy and Despair	29
Freedom.....	30
T.V. Presenters.....	30
Obituary: Colonel Arthur John Bullimore, D.S.O.....	31
Rain	32
Joyce.....	33
The Surprise Package	34
Living on the edge.....	34
The sun never rose that morning.....	35
Memory.....	36
Coming Home	37
Recover	38
A mere trifle	38
St Valentine’s Day	38

Detective Story.....	39
Thanks to our nose.....	39
Just to be safe, I take it all back	40
Last night I dreamt	41
The Blue Book	42
Conversation between Henry 8th and a marriage guidance councillor	42
Sorry, I forgot	43
Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, as told by the serpent	44
Miss Muffet.....	45
Not coming back	45
A day in the life of our cat.....	45
Love story.....	46
Shoelaces	47
New Cooker.....	48
Utensils.....	48
A household object	49
A small black handled kitchen knife.....	50

Autobiography

I am 68 years old now, I was born on 17 November in 1930.

This section will be rather short for as a record of the first decade of life, I cannot remember anything much before the age of 5. Memories before this time are a jumble of versions of what happened on certain occasions handed down from my parents and relatives. I was the eldest child, my brother was born 2 years later and I have no remembrance of his arrival or the impact that he may have had on my life then. My sister Lyn is 7 years younger than I and Chrissie was born 17 years after me. One visual source of information for the 0 - 5 period is the photograph album which we have, an uneven record for there are photos taken at special times and very few at other ordinary times. There are photos taken at my christening party which show aunts, uncles, and cousins clutching a small creature in their arms and looking down upon its head. It is almost completely covered in wool, buried beneath a large hat and enveloping shawl. There are fewer photos of the christenings of my brother and sisters.

From my parent's account it seems that I was born in my paternal, grandmother's house where my mother had temporarily gone to stay. My father's sister was a qualified midwife and was willing to officiate. Her training however did not include sufficient information about the after care of mother and baby, for the baby (me) lost weight and there was some concern. But the cause of the feeding problem was diagnosed, my mother recovered and I grew. From then there must have been many ups and downs of family life, sickness, holidays, quarrells, my brother being born, the love and care from our parents, but nothing to impinge on my memory until the time of going to school. Although certain scents and sounds evoke fragmentary and fleeting memories, they do not add up to the coherent consciousness of the first day of school.

That event was perhaps the first jolt to the safety, security and stability of home and was the first time that there was a direct independent encounter with the outside world. Maybe these factors plus the fact of now being 5 secured the memory or perhaps I remember more vividly because I was very frightened. My father walked with me to school that day towards the Caterham Valley primary school. Part of this journey was along the main road and it seems that I kicked and punched him as we went along. My father's account of the walk was always presented as a joke, because the dustmen employed by Caterham District Council witnessed this and laughed and teased him afterwards since they knew him as the Building Surveyor employed by the same Council. "You can't even control your own children" was the implication. For me there were other effects, I had insisted on taking Growly my dear bear to school with me and because I was late for school after forgetting to pick him up and then having to go back to retrieve him it was decided that he could no longer accompany me. This was a severe decision and a very unfair one in my opinion.

At the age of 9 there was a family visit to Croydon airport. Not only were we excited to see the aeroplanes landing and taking off but the scent of the flat asphalt roof of the public viewing space melting under the hot sun made an impression. A few days later, or maybe a month later, we heard the sound of air raid sirens for the first time, a weird and sinister sound. Somehow this sound and the recent sight of aeroplanes produced an uneasy sense of foreboding as I sat on the stairs listening. This was the beginning of World War 2.

My father joined the army and my mother and brother Mick, then aged 7, and sister Linda aged 2 went to live in Warwickshire with my father's elderly parents. It was thought that Caterham being close to aerodromes and not so far from London would be a target for enemy [German] attack and that we would be safer in the country. I have no idea what my mother thought of this arrangement but for Mick and I it meant going to the local village school and being very apprehensive about this. We could not fully understand for a while what the other children said to us, the Warwickshire dialect seemed very foreign. We must have appeared extraordinary to the other pupils and we had a few alarming encounters with the larger boys at the school who used to gather round and intimidate us at the cross roads on the walk home. From the easy going curriculum of the village school which on some afternoons meant taking "nature" walks, bringing back dog roses from the hedges and drawing them and on others singing together whilst the teacher played the piano, we had to leave for more structured studies at the grammar schools in Leamington Spa.

The grammar school, although not so alarming as the primary school had been still provided cause for anxieties. There were compensations however, new differently coloured exercise books for all the new subjects, and biology lessons with amazing films of the growth of plants, giant wobbly stems emerging from splitting seeds. There was a certain pleasure in running from the school cloakrooms to the open space of the hockey pitch, although no great skill at the game was ever acquired. I suppose that I managed to get by, since the end of term reports showed an average standard acceptable to parents and teachers.

The war was for us a matter of bomb craters in the fields around and the sound and sight of many aircraft in the skies, and the distant glow of Coventry being afire. All the regulations regarding rationing of food, petrol and clothes applied and we picked rose hips from the hedges for rose hip syrup and knitted sea boot stockings with thick oiled wool and the black out was a feature of everyday life. In our case this involved our aunt or mother lifting with a forked stick the curtain pole which held the curtains and moving the pole away from the window in order to pull the window shutters across the windows. This was a delicate operation performed nightly. We listened to news of the war and tried to make sense of reports of ground fighting, battles in the air and the sinking of many ships. My

brother was given a book of photographs in which scenes of destruction were shown, shot airplanes in downward twisting dives and plumes of water rising from the sea above a torpedo strike.

My father had leave from the army and when this happened there was great excitement. It meant for us that unusual events were likely to happen, a ride in a punt on the river Leam, a picnic, or a visit to a concert in the Jephson Garden Pavilion or going fishing from the banks of the canal.

When my father came out of the army in 1945 it was decided that we leave our grandmother's house and our life in the country and return to the more suburban environment of Caterham in Surrey. This move was a shocking one for me, the disruption to what was now an established way of life. This life had been involved with keeping rabbits, growing vegetables, watching the pattern of the surrounding fields as the seasons changed, hearing the sound of hens in the yard and being part of haymaking time in the fields and harvest festivals in the Chapel.

The abrupt entry into school life at Purley County Grammar School for Girls, when aged 15 was not easy socially. Everyone had already formed their own friendships and I felt quite isolated until I was adopted by a group of 3 who may have been asked to do this by the staff. Later, the time came for a decision to be made about the future and this was resolved not in any clear and resolute way but in a rather hazy muddled one. The result was that I became a student at Kingston School of Art in the architectural department although I had no overpowering interest in the subject or any intense wish to become an architect. My youngest sister Chrissie was born on the day that I started the 5 year training process and a short while after, the family moved from one part of Surrey to another, from Caterham to Cobham. There was a large flat garden here and my father set about making a lawn tennis court which seemed to fill most of the space. He was a keen tennis player and hoped that his children would enjoy it also.

The experience of being at Kingston Art School was mixed, much of the time being anxious and nervous, on other occasions excited by the projects we worked on, and then terrified by the crits where we all had to hang our work along the corridor walls for public scrutiny and comments from the tutors. There was a memorable trip to Paris, for me, my first time abroad and with 3 other girls we explored architectural sites and even met our architect hero Le Corbusier. After 3 years of study there was the Intermediate examination and then a 1 year period working in an architect's office to gain practical experience. I left Kingston Art School in the following year since the grant for study was withdrawn after failure in getting the necessary testimonies of study approved by the R.I.B.A. Although I failed to qualify there was a lasting practical consequence of being at Kingston Art School. Whilst there I met John a fellow student and we eventually married in 1958 after dithering for a long time about that decision.

There was some preparation for our life together as John's father had bought a pair of cottages near Hindhead in Surrey for £600. John's father was already using one for himself as a weekend cottage and gave the other to us on the assumption that we would "do it up" and then live in it. Thus for a long while our weekends were spent working there with John putting in a bath and W.C., connecting drains, installing electricity. lining and decorating walls and laying a beautiful maple strip floor. In one area there had been bricks laid on earth as a floor. Some walls were demolished to form a living/dining room and a new staircase was constructed. This house was near the top of a steep hill a 1 in 3 slope for a short section, and when we first lived there the views over the surrounding woods towards the Hog's Back were extensive and the roof of the nearest house could just be seen. The narrow approach road ended just beyond the house and then there were tracks through Forestry Commission and National Trust lands which led through delightful and varied wooded scenery.

We were married at the Registry Office in Guildford and after a meal and small family gathering at a hotel in the town we set off in our Land Rover for the honeymoon in Winchester. One night there and the next night in Andover and then we had to return to High Button because the Electricity Company were due to inspect and connect the next day. With their help we could start living there with light and a radio and hot water for a bath and power to the grill and oven. I do remember that the plan at first floor level was a bit unusual for there was one bedroom, a W.C. and a kitchen cum bathroom. The long side of the bath was against a wall with the end of it tucked under the kitchen worktop. The heating system was, apart from plugging in fan heaters, independent of the electricity supply and this meant that we had to light the fire with sticks and paper before much warmth was coaxed into the living room. We wore our overcoats most winter evenings. In those pre- washing machine days we took the sheets and towels in a hold-all to a launderette in London for washing during the lunchtime break and carried the loads of laundry back on the train. However, that situation changed when I stopped working because of sickness due to pregnancy and was permanently at home.

The name of our first daughter was Elizabeth and she was born by Caesarean section in November, a month after my being admitted to hospital and a month before our first wedding anniversary. We set off very uncertainly to look after her, making notes at the hospital during the demonstration of her being bathed by a nurse. That was perhaps a sign of anxiousness and inexperience and the notes got splashed and unreadable after the first few baths.

The fourth decade was to do with babies, feeding times and washing nappies and the pleasure of watching the growing process, noting down weights, enjoying smiles and responses, and cuddling and playing. Our neighbour, Mrs Edwards, came to help with housework, ironing etc whilst I gathered strength after the operation. John was then working in London and would arrive home from Witley Station at 7-30 or if I had used the Land Rover for shopping during the day we would load Elizabeth into it and meet him at the station. It was an uneventful period in terms of meeting people, the house was isolated and we knew nobody in that area, except John's father who came some weekends to the adjoining house, but it seemed to be a busy and fulfilling time.

Our second daughter, Caroline was born on 5 April, 17 months after Elizabeth. The diaries that I had started to keep are very small and the entries although brief do give some indication of the pattern of our lives then.

Interspersed with "lovely day" and "paid breadman" and "walk to pigs" are clues as to the quick growth of Caroline. There is an entry "weighed C 9lbs 8 ozs" which was recorded one month after she was born and her birth weight was 7lbs 4 ozs. The summer holiday, walks and picnics are mentioned and visits to my parents at Cobham and to John's mother and brother. The purchase of a tent and a new van were important but the spin-drier's arrival is underlined.

The effect on our daily lives when John left the architect's office in London and started to work for an architect just 3 miles away was considerable. He then came home for lunch and at 5.30 p.m. was back home again. The new office was set up in what had been the billiard room of a very large house overlooking a valley with a stream running through. The garden was laid out at different levels and there was a wonderful brick terrace close to the house. Even better from our point of view there was a swimming pool and tennis court and we were invited to use them at any time. Our memories of swims at "Milhanger" are still vivid and concern ice cold water and shivering bodies, but this never prevented us from using this unheated outdoor pool.

Elizabeth and Caroline went to school at the local village school which was just over 3 miles away. This was a distance that gave them the privilege of being taken there by taxi, by courtesy of the Surrey

County Council. The headmaster there liked his pupils to have some real understanding of the world around and so before an outing they would have to work out the costs of fares and the timings of bus and train journeys. They walked into Haslemere for the swimming lesson, there was no minibus. All this training ended when John was asked to supervise the construction of a new university in Guyana for a two year period and decided to do it. We all set sail from Southampton on a Dutch boat "Oranje Nassau" having packed many belongings and arranged to let the house.

The Guyanese house that was allotted us was spacious, it was built with all the main rooms at first floor level and had an open concreted area below, to allow the breezes to circulate. Here we became used to the very different surroundings, climate and people and to the displays of fruit and vegetables laid out on sacks in the markets. We became accustomed to the phrase "just now" which at first we thought meant "within the next ten minutes", but later realised it could mean "in six month's time". For the Contractors at the University site the idea of "just now" from their Guyanese sub-contractors had financial implications but the building was completed.

The diary reports many visits to the swimming pool where we, Caroline, Elizabeth and I learnt to swim better in the warm water of the outdoor pool. There were visitors to be collected from the airport about 20 miles away from Georgetown where we lived and often the journey was made at night time. The large plant leaves at the sides of the ragged road edge would all be closed up and dewy when we passed. Mosquito nets around each bed were necessary and since there was no air conditioning in the house the windows were open at night letting in the noise of barking dogs and in the morning the sound of cocks crowing. Sometimes we heard the roar of the lion from the nearby zoo, and there was the special shout from the man who sold vegetables from his donkey cart to potential customers in the street. Daily life involved many short journeys in the car, backwards and forwards to the building site and 4 journeys to the Ursuline school. On shopping trips when the car had to be parked and locked and all windows shut for security the heat inside was fierce, the steering wheel was burning hot.

We did once make a journey away from Georgetown and the coastal strip where all the sugar plantations were located and joined a tour to visit Kaiteur Falls. The waterfall was spectacular and we had climbed up a steep track from the guest house to see it and were on one side of the curving rim of rock from which the water fell. From Georgetown we had flown in a small aircraft, ridden in a lorry through the forest tracks and been taken by boat along the brown river to the guest house. There were portrages along the river and during one of these our camera fell into the water. The record of our adventurous trip was ruined.

After our 2 year stay in Georgetown where the sea is brown, muddied by the Amazon river we visited Tobago and Barbados where the sea is blue and the beaches are of white sand and Guadeloupe where the sand is black. We flew from Guadeloupe to Lisbon to Paris to Heathrow and noticed the chill in the air on our arrival home.

The next decade from the years 1970 until 1980 was a time initially of settling back into life in Surrey, enjoying the house and garden and the surrounding woods. Elizabeth and Caroline returned to the primary school from which they had been uprooted and as far as we, the parents, could tell this was not too difficult for them. In this decade they transferred to secondary education with the more competitive pressures of 11 plus, "O" levels and "A" levels

My mother died in January 1972 suddenly, whilst returning home from a coach outing to the theatre. She was taking medication for heart problems and although she never talked much about the seriousness of her condition it was apparent that everyday household tasks were becoming a slow

and wearisome business. My father was bereft, and sometime afterwards the routine of my weekly visit was established. It was on Wednesdays and Dad would prepare lunch and we would talk until it was time for me to go and be home for daughters and husband. My father remarried in May 1973 and went to live with Madge whom he had known in his twenties, in a village just a mile from the house in which he spent his childhood. This was in Warwickshire and here it was that my father died in November 1974, he had helped a motorist start his car by pushing it and had a heart attack. His new wife must have been devastated but I never heard her account. She lived on for many years until she died in a retirement home in Southam.

For me there was the chance of part-time work in the architect's office where John worked 3 miles from home. After 10 years of being "at home" this was an interesting prospect. The working hours were flexible and of mutual benefit to Frank Rutter, the employer, and myself. They were arranged on an hourly basis and for instance when Elizabeth and Caroline had mumps or when the school was closed because of a heavy snowfall it was understood that I could take time off. If there was a lull in the work in the office and I was not needed, then it was understood that I was unpaid and at home.

The most dramatic event within this decade (the ten years between 1970 to 1980) was the fire on September 20 in 1976. This fire destroyed the roof and the first floor and all except the external brick walls of the house which were left standing to a height of about 7 feet. We could see the sky from the huge pile of debris on the floor of the living/dining room. The fire had started in a clothes cupboard off the main bedroom at first floor level. Our daughters Elizabeth (17) and Caroline (15) were in the house and when they smelt burning had used a fire extinguisher on the area surrounding the small electric heater which warmed the cupboard. Some clothing had fallen over the mesh guard of the fire and this was thought to be the reason for the build up of heat. The fire crept behind the lining of the cupboard however and it reached the ceiling. Caroline and Elizabeth remember watching flaming polystyrene ceiling tiles dropping on to the bed. They phoned the Fire Brigade and the house in Haslemere where I was attending a meeting. As I drove home there was a red glow in the distance it was in the direction of our house, and it was our house burning. The fire engines were parked on the steep road with their blue lights flashing and Elizabeth and Caroline were watching the burning at the bottom of the garden with our nearest neighbours. We were bemused by seeing the flames on the roof and the tiles of the tile hanging from the upper walls falling off. It was not until a friend arrived and suggested that we rescue documents, papers and passports that we thought to do this, and it was still possible then since the first floor was intact. At that time we also rescued the circular dining table, we rolled it on its rim across the lawn and the Scrabble game was saved though the letter tablets were later found strewn amongst the yew bushes in the garden. The fire at roof level had spread to the adjoining house which was rented to a friend. She also experienced the sight of a blaze while returning "home" and her anxiety was great, for she had a collection of her batik paintings ready to be exhibited in the house. They were safe and the Exhibition was held in Guildford.

When the firemen left that night the pile of debris was sodden and we left to spend the night with a neighbour. In the morning we had to tell John that his house apart from the single storey bathroom and kitchen extension was destroyed. This news was postponed until the morning to save him from a night drive home from Milton Keynes in a worried and frightened state. Our employer invited us to stay in his large house "Milhanger" whilst we could rebuild the house. We stayed with Frank and Avice for 2 months, before returning to North Cottage, the less damaged house of the pair which had had its roof repaired. We were then living next to the burnt out shell and began to organise its rebuilding. Caroline's pet rabbits who were living in their hutches in the lower part of the garden were not affected by the fire and our cat Stripey came back to the ruin after 2 days.

There were some remarkable finds amongst the debris. On the morning after the fire we found Owlly, a stuffed cushion which was intact, though grubby, sitting on top of the debris pile. At lower levels there were smaller items, one little pottery jug belonging to Caroline was there, much the same colour but crazed by the heat. The glass in the diamond panes of Caroline's bedroom window was deformed and the timber framing of the walls below was charred and blackened in a strange pattern. The smell of all this was quite distinctive and even when carted to the bottom of the garden the smell lingered for a long time.

After 3 weeks or so John started to rebuild although the Insurance claim was not then settled but it was a positive action leaving us no time to feel sorry for ourselves. The help offered by family friends and neighbours at the time of the fire was most supportive and John was most grateful for the generous attitude of the firm for which he worked. He wept when the offers of money and paid leave were made. All this kindness was heartening and most reassuring and made us feel less burdened by the event. My sister Chrissie sent a book token for a large amount for us to replace lost books or buy new, Frank prepared a survival hamper at Christmas full of delightful surprises. My brother and his son came to help with the rebuilding.

We returned to live in South Cottage on 31 May 1977. Although the maple strip flooring in the living room floor was not completed, there was an unfinished strip around its edge and other refinements were missing. Throughout 1977 there is mention in the diaries of buying new carpets, chests of drawers and the making of curtains.

In 1979 John was given the job of supervising architect on the site of a new hospital in London. This was on the Cromwell road in West London and we went to live in some first floor rooms above the temporary site office in a row of houses in Pennant Mews. We stayed there during weekdays and returned to the house in Surrey at weekends. This arrangement gave us the opportunity of experiencing city life as well as having the accustomed country life. It seems that we went to the theatre, visited art galleries and explored some of the neighbouring parts of London. Another delightful feature of our weekday location was that it was generally easy for our daughters, family and friends to visit us, so that sometimes we would stay there on Saturdays and Sundays. There was plenty of choice of restaurants for eating out in the evenings and on the streets so many various people to be seen, all this was quite a contrast to the Surrey life. As a base for setting out on holiday trips it was most convenient, for example in 1980 our daughter Elizabeth and I took a ride on the Magic Bus which left Victoria for Amsterdam. There was no long train journey to make at the beginning or end of this journey, we simply went on the Underground for a few stops along the line.

In 1981 on January 20th, I bought a new bicycle a light weight tourer with drop handlebars. This was a significant purchase for it gave me the opportunity to join my daughter on many subsequent cycling/camping holidays. It was also a pleasure to ride and even when panniers were bought for it to carry loads it still responded beautifully. Claudette was her name, she was not merely an "it". That year it was tested for we took our bikes to Spain, for the first part of the journey it was easy, we all travelled on the train to Madrid and then to Granada. En route home we cycled from Biarritz to the east and met my aunt at Revel. We enjoyed a wonderful lunchtime meal at the home of her son Jean, were taken to see a waterfall in a mountain cave, and made very welcome. My aunt was not well and we guessed that it would be unlikely that we would see her again, she died the next year. The road we took away from Revel was along the valley of the Garonne towards Bordeaux. I think that it was on that holiday that we discovered a strategy for finding a place to camp that was useful. When we had enquired of farmers for permission to stay it was often the case that they did not own the land and could not help us. Thus we decided to go to the largest landowners in the area, those living at a

chateaux and ask if they knew of a suitable camping spot and sometimes they offered a place in their garden or fields. On several occasions we were given a bottle of estate wine as well.

The second week in February 1982 was a very significant time for me although I was rather apprehensive. This was the week when the Open University Course that I had applied to study began. John and I were then living in one end of the upper part of a large site hut at Ealing. The rest of the hut at first floor level was used by B.D.P. as offices and we shared the kitchen. The project was the redevelopment of an area of Ealing as a shopping centre, new library and leisure centre and carparking with B.D.P. as architects and Laing as the main building Contractor. When we first went there the site was no more than a huge hole surrounded by hoardings and a fringe of existing buildings. It was interesting as an observer to watch the changes on site and hard work if you were involved in the construction or supervision. Our bed sitting room was spacious and whilst lying in bed we could see the constant stream of aircraft heading towards Heathrow airport flying past just above window sill level.

For John this was a busy period and for me the start of an association with the Open University that was to continue for 10 years. There was no initial plan for such extended study but there were many varied and interesting subjects to choose, and my B.A. degree was made up of courses in art criticism, literature, sociology, women's studies, popular culture and film. The essay marks and tutors comments were usually encouraging but examinations in October were always an ordeal and I never did very well at these. The final course had no exam, as an alternative to answering exam questions in a large room filled with many small desks and many nervous people, there was a project to be completed on a subject of our own choosing, and this was more enjoyable. The beginning of February was the time for the first mailing of Course material, and timetables of radio and T.V. programmes and news of the tutor and dates for the tutorials. Between this time and October there would be much reading and writing, and meeting of fellow students some of whom have remained as friends. The attendance at Summer School was obligatory on some courses and after these it became customary for my daughter and I to have a short cycling holiday. In 1983 after a week at Keele University we spent some time camping in Wales. My studies were undertaken at a leisurely pace since I had no job then I had been made redundant, but for many other students it was different, they had fitted in essay writing and reading with the care of young families and many also had jobs. The Summer School week must have been very precious to them, a chance to concentrate without interruption.

In 1984 John went to work in the Falklands Islands in August. He was employed to supervise the construction of accommodation for air force personnel which was ancillary to the new airport which was being constructed on the island. His tour of duty was to last 14 months working for the P.S.A., no wives were allowed. For John who was mostly working in a centrally heated office the clothing allowance for rugged outdoor conditions was rather superfluous. He took many photographs of a bleak moorland terrain which resembled that of the Shetland Isles and it seems the climate was similar. There were few resources on the Island, food for the construction workers was brought from the U.K. as were the pre-fabricated buildings and at first there was no surfaced road between the air base and Stanley, the only town some 30 miles away. There was some excitement when the first aeroplane landed on the new air strip with Michael Heseltine and others on board. Prince Andrew who was in the Falkland Islands on duty in the boat HMS Brazen came to take part in the opening ceremonies.

For two and a half months shortly after John left, I went to live with Elizabeth who had a small terrace house in York, this was a delightful time and in February 1985 I returned to Surrey for another O. U. Course was beginning. John came back from the Falklands on a month's leave in May and he renewed

acquaintance with his relatives and daughters as well as having a camping holiday in Portugal. His tour ended in November of that year and he was going to be "at home" then. On the 15 of that month we took a holiday on the Costa del Sol. Whilst there we visited the Alhambra at Granada and walked in the gardens wearing our gloves, and on the camp site in Granada there were cats and pomegranites. The source of some of these details comes from the diary notes and if it wasn't for them I doubt that I could remember when we made that trip, and many other events would simply merge in the memory.

Games of tennis, going to concerts are recorded events interspersed with mention of O.U. tutorials and in 1987 Elizabeth bought a larger house in York which had a garden. This had an effect on our life because John became the Contractor and Consultant to the modifications that were required. He had been in this role on previous occasions when both Elizabeth and Caroline had first moved into their own houses. The pattern had been that we stay in the house and work in it, getting familiar with the local builders merchants and the tip and becoming even more familiar with the walls. Stripping, filling, papering or painting were our tasks whilst John attended to the hot water systems, drains and electrics and we all helped with demolition.

The 16 October 1987 has a special mention for the gales arrived in the night blowing over many trees in our area, in fact there were dozens blocking the road. John and neighbours used their chain saws to cut them up whilst in the Forestry Commission land around there were areas of devastation. Large mature trees had been tipped over their roots exposed to the air. In some places there were pockets of destruction surrounded by standing timber which was hard to explain. Our electricity supply was cut off for nearly two weeks and our camping experience and equipment was useful then.

At the end of the decade 1980 -1990 in 1988 Elizabeth and I joined friends on a visit to other friends who were then living and working in Malaysia. We flew from Heathrow to Moscow, the airline was Aeroflot, and we waited in the gloomy airport there for 5 hours. From there we flew to Karachi and over dry and hilly land and on to Kuala Lumpur our destination. Uma met us at the airport and took us to the hotel and we all swam in the pool, this was most delightful after being in an airplane seat for so long. Elizabeth and I later travelled on our own, to Singapore and then by bus northwards along the eastern coast and into Thailand. We stayed one night in a beach hut where at certain times of the year turtles come out of the sea to lay their eggs. The beach was deserted when we were there but we often bathed in the sea, the South China Sea. In Thailand we visited the Wats in Nakkon si Thammarat, great bell shaped domed structures where Buddhist monks are based. In Thailand we could buy beer and everyone seemed more cheerful than in Malaysia where the Muslim religion is dominant and drink is forbidden. Later that year I travelled to Majorca, Chester and Liverpool and in December spent 8 days in Florence. Journeys to St Malo and Paris are recorded in 1989.

At the beginning of the 6th decade 1990 -2000 John and I are in Telford busy with building works in the house of John's father known to us as Grandpa and his Japanese wife Chieko. Grandpa had bought a 3 bedroomed house in Telford and we thought of some improvements. The plan was to remove a phoney brick fireplace and some wobbly block walling in the garden do some decorating and build some shelves most of which was done at a future visit in April. Elizabeth was with us and returned to York whilst we went back to Surrey.. John was then working on site in Kingston on the Bentalls site where a new shopping mall was being constructed. He lived in part of the site hut during the week returning to High Button at weekends. I was then employed by B.D.P. at their Guildford office on a part-time basis, Monday - Wednesday. This allowed me to attend a midday literature class, continue with O.U. studies doing a half credit course and to help with an adult literary scheme at Milford school.

After Summer School in July 1990 I went to New York. Elizabeth was already there, she had been working in Washington and after our meeting at J.F.K. airport we went to the Vanderbilt Y.M.C.A., our base for the next 2 weeks. We walked a lot in the city and found the swimming pool in the basement a delight to use after a hard days tourism. We also visited Philadelphia, and Coney Island and stayed with Alison on Long Island. She took us rowing on Noyak creek and we enjoyed the Whale Museum at Sag harbour, before journeying to Boston. Here we found a great mix of cultural treasures at the Isabel Gardner Museum which were displayed around an internal courtyard and also a wonderful aquarium and many other delights. The train took six hours to reach New York and we had an evening view of the city which was stunning, it was sad to leave 2 days later. However we had another holiday that year, flying to Barcelona and exploring parts of that city for 5 days, watching the building of a stable for models of the Holy family, visiting the Picasso museum and Parc Guell.

The diary notes do not generally record events in the wider world but on January 16 1991 there is an entry "War with Iraq". This was a worrying time for the fear of the hostilities escalating seemed real. Saddam Hussein was presented as aggressive and ruthless whilst the Americans were thought of as impetuous and equally as aggressive, oblivious to international constraints

Whenever there is a holiday to report the text for the holiday period fills to overflowing the allotted spaces for each day. It is easy to see when holidays occur the density of the writing makes a blacker patch. There were 5 black patches this year (1991). The first was in April when I accompanied Elizabeth on a tour of firms selling and installing cavity fill material for the building industry. She had arranged various interviews in the West country to compare with other studies of firms in the North. Thus we went to Exeter, Plymouth and Luxalyan but also managed to take time off for a wonderful walk along the cliffs near Fowey, some sunbathing on the beach and a look at castle Drogo.

The second adventure was in May when Elizabeth and I took our bicycles, Orbit and Claudette to Sweden. Although May in Sweden is always sunny and warm, so they say, this particular year was an exception. We cycled for days in rain and lit our camp fire for warmth in the evenings. The policy in Sweden of allowing everyone the free use of the countryside made it easy to find a place for the tent, and there were many cycle paths to use. After meeting friends in Stockholm we cycled first to the north and then to the south of this attractive watery city full of islands and bridges.

The third expedition was later known as the Great North Western tour and was undertaken in the company of my sister Chrissie and her two friends Ursula and Mary. We travelled by car eventually reaching Liverpool and the Beatles museum and from there to Blackpool where we joined many excited ladies cheering and applauding Adonis a male stripper group. We noticed that the men did not strip completely.

The fourth journey was made with the help of Air Miles who were offering flights to America for half the usual number. So John and I flew to Houston and hired a car for a camping trip that took us through much varied scenery, we were driving for many miles along empty roads. We swam in the Gulf of Mexico, we saw mesas in New Mexico, and later marvelled at the sight of the Sangre Cristo mountains, we saw river gorges and sand dunes, caves and gold mines, we climbed Pikes Peak at 14,110 feet high via the cog railway and visited the Shove chapel in Colorado !

The fifth journey was to Brussels with Elizabeth who had a series of meetings there as part of her current project. I had time to visit the Atomie and we both went to Maastricht. There we were both given badges with the European logo of a circle of stars on a dark blue background and were also offered E.U. balloons. The international meetings had recently been held in the town.

Elizabeth had bought a house near Durham for she had a new job at Sunderland University. On 23 December she was given the keys. This inaugurated an intensive period of building works there as John and I and Elizabeth moved in to demolish a fireplace, remove floor boards, strip wallpaper. There were also more constructive jobs, John installed a ring main, insulated the roof, built a new bathroom and put in the hot water system and drainage etc etc. In April 92 we made a return visit for phase 2 which involved some engineering skills this time. There were some gigantic stones which had been used as lintels to the range in the kitchen area and these supported the chimney above. They had to be loosened and lifted with block and tackle and trolleyed out of the front door where they became steps in the garden path. The garden was transformed at this time with help from Caroline and Brian.

There was a family holiday to Paris in July '92 and John, Caroline, Elizabeth and I stayed in accommodation aptly called "Hotel des Familles". The Garden Festival in South Wales was the site of another family rendezvous though this time without Elizabeth. En route home John and I camped at Malvern and Ludlow where we visited estate agents. This is the first mention of the search for the most desirable retirement area. The search went on for several years and in different parts of the country, even though according to our research the most favourable climate was in an area of Staffordshire. That is where it would have been sensible to settle, but we didn't. It is ironic that we managed to make our house really warm in '92 by installing a log burning stove called Vision at the same time as we were looking for somewhere else to live.

A tour, this time entitled The Great North East was made with my sister Chrissie and Mary. We travelled to Edinburgh via Hull Whiteley Bay, and Berwick on Tweed. In Edinburgh it was festival time and it was easy to book into many fringe events and those we saw were very entertaining. I left the North East Tour to stay with Elizabeth at her house near Durham. Whilst there I experienced an aching chest during the night and the next morning went to Sunderland hospital for a check. To my surprise I was not allowed home and stayed there for a week but on returning to No 27 the chest aches and restlessness in the night caused Elizabeth to phone the local doctor. He quickly arranged an ambulance and I was taken to the intensive care unit at the Durham hospital. The problem was a mild heart attack and ever since then I have been taking preventative medication. It was a reminder of one's mortality and it took a little while to gather confidence and resume usual activities. We returned to Surrey and I took the special, because it was postponed, O.U. examination in November.

On one of the house hunting expeditions we had been interested in a house at Heacham in Norfolk and we had made an offer for this in '93. There turned out to be a few problems with a right of way and vehicle access to the site. John wrote many letters and had many meetings with the local authority at Kings Lynn. The near neighbours whom we were to pay for the right of way across the drive were suggesting restrictions on our possible occupancy of the house, no floodlighting, no noise after 6 p.m. etc. Eventually we withdrew our offer and abandoned the idea of living there.

In 1994 we are still walking into estate Agents's offices, this time in Buxton, Oakham and Market Overton. In April we are exploring part of Wiltshire at Hungerford and Pewsey, Chippenham and Ramsbury. Nothing was ever tempting enough to follow up but in May a visit to Stowmarket, Mendlesham, Diss and Saxmundham are recorded. We, John, Elizabeth and I are camping at Saxmundham in June for it was now a custom that we took our tent whilst looking for a more permanent residence. The O.U. graduation ceremony interrupted the search and the chosen venue for this was Ely Cathedral. We camped near Ely and drove to the marquee next to the Cathedral for the gown to be put on. It was a cold wet day, not the best of weather for standing around and for photographs to be taken. It was however good to see the congregation of O.U. students and something of a revelation since during all the years of study it was never possible to see so many students gathered together.

In July we made a definite offer to buy Tollgate Cottage in Saxmundham and there were prospective buyers arriving to look at South Cottage High Button which was advertised for sale. An exchange of Contracts was made on 2nd September between us and the new owner and on the 26 there was completion, we had bought a different house. We had lived at South Cottage for 36 years apart from the 2 year absence in Guyana and other people thought that it would be unbearable for us to leave such pleasant surroundings. However John was busy emptying the sheds of all his acquired site scavengings, a huge quantity of timber, joists and boarding, in fact so much that it required a flat bed lorry fully loaded to transport it. There was no time during the packing and moving process for regrets and there were plans for alterations and modifications to Tollgate cottage. These building projects eventually consumed the load of timber and assorted materials so that it all became satisfactorily recycled.

There were several journeys back to Surrey and on one of these we caught the fish from the pond. They travelled in plastic bags to their new home, a huge black plastic container in which they lived for a year or so. We settled also and for the next few years were absorbed with the construction of first a garage and then an extension to the house comprising living room, bathroom and bedroom. The bedroom was most spacious and we still enjoy this and the view from the patio doors out over the garden. The original building alongside the road was then modified, this involved many different building operations, raising the floor level in one area, adding insulation, re-slatting the roof and it was John who did all these things. We have a photographic record of some of these operations. Before the new extension was linked to the original building we cooked in the old bit and carried our meals outside along the path and into the new bit to eat them. When the link was roofed it was easy, we simply walked within the house from kitchen to dining room. There was always a constant moving around, what had been a bedroom became a cloakroom, a study became part of the new kitchen. The building process was fascinating to observe with so many changes and improvements being made and it went on for some time. The building was in progress from 1994 for about 3 years and after that there were some garden works. A paved terrace area was laid outside the glass doors and adjoining this a pool was established, some raised flower beds were constructed and since then with Caroline's help we have been well supplied with a variety of plants.

We did have some time away from all this building for in 1995 we visited Caroline who was in America. She was enjoying her "year out" from Writtle College where she was studying for a degree in Horticulture. When we went to see her she was living at Woodside some 30 miles from San Francisco. Her work was in a grand Italianate garden surrounding the mansion of Filoli and her home was with a very generous family who allowed us to stay at their "pool room" adjacent to the swimming pool. We had taken our camping gear and with Caroline and her loaned car set off on a tour along the 101 the Pacific coast road through Oregon, and Washington, to Seattle and on via Butchard Gardens on Vancouver Island to Vancouver. We saw redwood trees, the rain forest of the Olympic National Park, Mount Rainier and Crater Lake on our way, it was all most interesting. The camp sites were usually delightful and well landscaped to provide pleasant places for the pitching of the tents

I also visited New York in 97 for 6 days with an arts group connected to the O.U. to look at Modern Art. We spent much time in various art galleries but also had some time to explore the city. A friend and I visited Grand Central Station but it was undergoing redecoration and its splendid structure was hidden behind protective wrappings. A ferry trip to the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island was fascinating and at the end of that day our group evening meal was arranged at the restaurant of the Museum of Modern Art. We viewed Manhattan Island from the top of the Empire State building and attended a free concert on Memorial Day at St John the Divine an enormously tall church at 122 St.

On the way home we had a very clear view of part of the Irish coast and the valleys of South Wales, it was intriguing to be sitting comfortably whilst looking down on a map view of these areas.

Later that year I spent a few days in Paris travelling there via the convenient Eurostar. Bruges, The Loire valley, Paris again and Dublin have been other destinations since then, and each experience in its different way has been a pleasure.

Since living in Saxmundham I have started to play bowls. This was initiated by my brother's enthusiasm for the game and knowing that we lived close to a bowling green suggested that I play. Helped by an introduction of a friend to a group that she played with, I was lent some woods and bought some shoes and joined the group. It is a good game, a mix of skill and luck and the chance to enjoy the company of the other players. The sound of the woods as they touch is a gentle sound and the sight of a wood travelling across the rink towards the jack is fascinating whether it belongs to one of your team or not. The state of the rink, dry or damp and the varying distance of the jack as a target cause great variations in the play and are challenging for the players. One of the greatest difficulties however is getting the measure of the bias and learning how to control the weight and speed of the delivery. At our standard of play it is all very hit and miss, sometimes you can draw close to the jack, but at the next shot the wood rushes past into the ditch.

Parents

This is about my parents. My father was the youngest son of a family of 7 children, he had 3 brothers and 3 sisters. When we knew him there were only 2 sisters alive, 2 of his brothers had been killed in the first World War and his other brother and 1 sister had died of natural causes. We came to know his mother and father and the house where he was brought up and the surrounding fields and woods when we went to live with my grandmother during the war. The area was a rural one 7 miles from Leamington Spa and the place, not big enough to be called a village was a scattering of houses, with a pub, a letter box and a small wooden church. From the photographs we have of him as a young man he was quite handsome, he rode a motorcycle and had worked to make part of an adjacent field into a tennis court. There were tennis parties and in later life he was to be re-united with one of his tennis partners, in fact he married her after my mother had died.

When my mother spoke of her early life she described some incidents when her stepmother used to threaten them with a knife. She had 2 sisters, one of whom married a frenchman and was living in France throughout the occupation. It was intriguing that when we met her much later she looked so like our mother but spoke French and drank wine. My mother was trained as a teacher at Goldsmith's College and always enjoyed looking things up in the dictionary which may be some indication of her pleasure in learning and helping others to learn. She was teaching when she met my father.

They met in Staffordshire near Cannock, they shared the same lodgings or "digs" as they called it and although my mother was engaged to be married to someone else it seems that my father was persuasive. There are wedding photos taken in the garden of my grandmother's house and outside the small wooden church known as the chapel. When I, the eldest, was born my parents were living in Acton, West London and they did not have much money. Many details of their life together have not been remembered, I wish that I had asked them many more questions. They moved to Caterham in Surrey and bought a house with a garden that rose steeply up behind it and later moved to Cobham, also in Surrey. Here my father again constructed a grass tennis court which this time almost filled the garden space and he played on it until he was 60.

As parents, there are variable accounts depending on which of their four children you might ask, but mother was fierce and cross at times whilst father was more equable and playful. It was he who told

us stories at bed-time and invented Lady Tolpuddle and her stupid maid Matilda who always misunderstood her orders and was the cause of immense confusion and commotion. He also instituted games of cricket played in the narrow concreted space between the house on one side and a wall, the dustbin and the coal shed on the other. If the dustbin was hit the score was increased by 6. Fielders were required to stand close by the dustbin, a vulnerable position since there was no space sideways for the ball to go.

The eldest children my brother and I were punished for disobedience and I vividly remember the time when my precious paint box was confiscated because I was caught reading in bed when it was thought I should have been asleep. My youngest sister, 17 years younger, seemed to have an easier time with not so much strictness but often a lot of disapproval.

Whereas music, painting, sport, music and politics interested my father, my mother enjoyed gardening and was in later life keen to travel. It was disappointing for her at this time that my father was not, although they did have several journeys together. My mother died suddenly but had been unwell for some time previously and my father died 2 years later after remarrying and moving house, both were in their early seventies. They were most supportive of all their children, for a while a succession of future son-in laws lived with them, they gave all their daughters the chance of good education and they had provided a secure and friendly place in which we could all grow.

Letter to a younger self

This letter is to wish you a Happy Birthday on your 51st Birthday. I am writing this some 30 years later so I'm in a good position to know your future. You are fit and active now and have had a relatively easy and comfortable time of it so far.

You were having a good time around these years the early eighties, enjoying the movement between 2 different home locations. One was our permanent home in the countryside near Haslemere in Surrey and the other was a site hut on a building project at Ealing Broadway. John was working as a site architect there and lived during the weekdays in the hut, a large bedroom, shared kitchen and one small room. You were able to join him and also use it at weekends as a base for exploring London and meeting our family.

There were holidays as part of your life then, a camping holiday with John in Wales and 3 weeks spent in Corfu visiting John's father and his wife. From Corfu you had a memorable boat journey to Crete in the evening light and slept on a flat roof under the branches of a vine. In August you and Elizabeth each packed your cycle panniers for a tour to Spain and took them on the train via Paris to Madrid and on to Granada. You dithered over a decision as to whether to make a long cycle diversion to visit your aunt Bessie and uncle Hippolyte in France and then catch the return train to Bordeaux for Paris and home. It was so good that you both met them for we had seen very little of them and they were elderly then.

The cycling/camping holidays with Elizabeth became a regular feature during many summers and there were many enjoyable adventures along the way. The discipline of carrying clothes, bedding, tent, cooking equipment and food all on two bicycles has always been useful for future packing in small spaces. I remember accounts of orchard camp sites where you were offered wine from the chateau vineyard. A cobbled yard which you shared with chickens was also talked of.

Some of your actions and decisions have had a great influence on me although when you made them you could never know how much they would affect me. When Elizabeth suggested the idea of you studying with the Open University you were very apprehensive, thinking that you would be incapable.

But being made redundant from part-time work gave you time and the choice of courses seemed to be interesting. An acceptance form was sent off in 1981 and the following year you were a student and continued over 10 years with a 2 year break in between. The studying was provided by distance learning which involved being sent text-books through the post, information to connect to special radio and television broadcasts and the requirement to write a monthly essay and attend summer school and occasional tutorials. It is all differently organised now with new technology available. The studying, I have come to realise, made you more aware of what was going on in the world and more able to appreciate and acknowledge other people's views and see both sides of an argument. I am so grateful to you for starting me off and listening to Elizabeth's suggestion.

There are a variety of other interests that have lasted and which have become pleasurable activities. This is not so surprising when you think that you, as younger and me, as older now, are the same person. I suppose it's possible that we could have changed a lot, but for us there would always be a lack of confidence.

Enjoy your Birthday and many Happy Returns

An aside: they may not always be as comfortable as the ones you've had so far.

Desert Island desires

As a luxury item to take on this island of no practical value I would wish for a paint box full of watercolour paints with of course an unlimited supply of paper. It would be possible to use sea water to dilute the paints but then I would also need an empty jam jar in which to carry the water from the beach and a white plate for mixing them on and some brushes. All this may be more than the allowance but I would have unlimited time to experiment and practice and even be able to use the paints effectively. The subjects of the painting could be the landscape, some rocks, a palm tree or two and some wonderful cloud effects and sunsets. I could also paint imagined scenes, woodland and rolling hills and rivers and this could be comforting on this wretched island. I might amuse myself for days conjuring images of friends and family, gardens and sitting rooms and recording them via the paint box. This box would become so important, but then it has been in the past, for I remember, as a child, the worst punishment that my mother ever devised was for her to confiscate my paint box. It sat in sight on the top of a high cupboard until the required period of penance was over.

As to the 8 records that I would choose they would be of music as diverse as possible a harp and flute concerto by Mozart, some jazz music, dance music, some songs and a symphony or two would be in the collection with the hope that all of these would cheer the spirit.

The book that I would have on this deserted island must be a long and complicated story. It should have many characters whose lives intertwine and where those characters are made credible for they will be the only company available. "Middlemarch" by George Eliot might be the one.

There is something about camping

Here are some thoughts after a recent camping holiday that John and I had in the Dorset area. Why do people go camping – is it a pleasure or punishment or simply that a tent provides cheap accommodation? Our daughter, for instance has just returned from France where she loaded her lightweight bicycle with many pounds of luggage. This comprised tent, pegs, sleeping bag, clothes, cooking stove and saucepan, cutlery and water bottles etc. Then she cycled, loaded with these objects, up and down steep volcanic hills in central France for many kilometres getting hot and thirsty and tired. She has returned fit and well and delighted with the whole experience!

Perhaps it is the challenge of facing uncertainty and not being safe and secure at home that makes journeys and the temporary life in a tent alluring. Certainly, there are hazards, and the first test is to find a campsite. We spent approximately 2 hours recently in trying to find a site that was listed in our up to date book. Eventually we discovered that it had been closed last year. Later that evening we got to a site which was full of caravans with small roadways between and vicious cross humps to slow the cars but we found a spot and put up the tent. The romantic description in the guide was of a place with views of Chichester harbour but the very muddy creek encroaching into the site was the nearest view of water and was not attractive.

Vulnerability to the vagaries of the weather and the geology of the land, the bumpy ground and the nature of tussocky grass all contribute to the camping pleasures. Lying comfortably is not guaranteed and the awareness of being close to the earth is vivid. Less than 2 inches below your head there could be burrowing creatures, worms, moles maybe rabbits? As for the night time excursions, conveniences are not called that for nothing but first there are the 3 layers of the tents entrance to unzip before you fall out onto the wet grass and feel the cold night air. The return to the warmth of the sleeping bag after the trek across a field is comforting though.

Preparing meals and cooking is part of the camping experience which often produces unreliable results. If the wind is strong the camping gas flame blows out constantly, the cylinder has to be well sheltered then or supper will take hours to cook, or will have to be abandoned. Onions are the most slippery things to manage when there are several to be sliced and there is only one plate to cut them on. Boiling water from the rice pan is difficult when you're trying to drain off the surplus. Whilst holding the full hot pan at an angle to allow for the excess water to spill over the edge, the lid has to be manoeuvred to regulate the flow and be held in a position to prevent the rice from sliding in a heap on your ankles. No colanders here.

To return home is like reaching heaven in some respects. All those taken for granted facilities, like water, hot and cold, coming from a tap within easy reach, not halfway across a field, seems miraculous. How sublimely easy life has become. Not only easy but luxurious, just consider the fact that having a bath is now possible. But who would not have enjoyed the chance to travel and explore?

Swimming

This was a highlight of my life and not only was the occasion a momentous one but the repercussions of it have given me great pleasure.

The occasion happened many years ago and as a schoolgirl at Leamington College for Girls we walked across the Pump room gardens to the swimming pool adjacent to the Pump Rooms. Leamington is a Spa town in Warwickshire and the Pump Room with its lavish tearoom and adjoining treatment rooms is located at one end of the Parade. All this must have been a fashionable centre for visitors at one time but given the foul tasting spa water that was available to the public whilst we lived in the area I don't know whether visitors or locals still valued its healing properties. Anyhow the swimming pool was used by the school once a week for swimming lessons, and the pool was filled with chlorinated water, not spa water.

I cannot now remember the number of lessons that were attended before the miraculous thing happened, I was swimming, my feet were no longer on the tiles at the bottom of the pool, they had been lifted off, I was like a fish and could swim. My arms and legs were flailing in a disorganised fashion but I was freed of the fear of sinking under water. With all these arm movements and kicking legs the body was supported and could even move through the water, it was a wonderful feeling. After more lessons came a growing confidence in being in this alien element of water, probably due

to the swimming instructors. We were encouraged to take up a star position that is to spread wide our arms and legs and lie on our backs and simply float. This is a joy and can be practised in Leiston pool only if there are not too many people around but off Greek islands or Mallorca it is exceptionally magnificent.

Even if you can't swim well, I have never learnt to dive or swim comfortably with my head under water or adopt the correct breathing techniques but the feel of water around the body is seductive. The weightlessness is part of the joy and you can via Leamington school swimming lessons perform the push and glide routine. This is simple and delightful and allows you the chance to push off from the side of the pool facing forward but with your arms reaching back to hold the edge of the pool and your legs bent with feet against the side in order to push off. Thus, you glide forward with your head under water and then with arms outstretched in front of you and your legs trailing in a straight line behind you and you can go gliding for a surprisingly long way before you have to resurface. I love it.

There have been many occasions since the initial learning to swim when I have been so grateful for all the delight that it has brought me. A swim with my brother in the black pond on Esher Common, swimming in the clear sea off Barbados and swimming in New York at the YMCA pool after a long day sightseeing.. And after a very long flight to Kuala Lumpur being taken to the hotel pool late at night, this is a good recipe for relaxation.

I'm so glad I can swim even if I perform badly and inelegantly but the pleasure of being relatively confident in water has been a highlight in my life.

The House

When we first saw the house from the outside we didn't like the look of it. It was a single storey building very close to the road and in need of some repair but it did have nearly half an acre of garden. Thus we bought it, for John could see the potential for modifying it and building an extension and there was space to do this, although two large holly trees had to be cut down to make way for the first building.

The huge flatbed lorry piled high with John's collection of scavenged building materials, only just squeezed through the gate to one side of the house and he put a tarpaulin over this load dumped in the garden, to keep it dry. The plan was to first use the existing roof space for storage and then build a garage for more storage. He made a hole in the external wall at high level to reach the loft and fitted a door. After we had taken levels and measured the area we dug out the trenches for the garage foundations. The ready mix concrete lorry arrived and together with other family members the poured stream of concrete was spread and levelled.

The skeleton timber frame of the garage was fabricated mostly from John's recycled timber and the garage doors fitted in place. The doors were made by John during his stay on the Falkland Islands for as supervisor of the building of accommodation blocks there, he had access to a workshop and waste timber. He had them transported back to England by sea for he discovered that as a seconded employee of the P.S.A. it was officially allowed. The doors were part of the box he made which held many other offcuts and useful items due to be scrapped, even though all the building materials had been carried 3000 miles to the Falklands. There was a grand ceremony therefore when these special garage doors were fixed. Some party hats were worn and a stick with a large tail of tinsel at one end was used, for at the appointed time when the champagne glasses were filled the wand was pointed and a speech was made. There were many similar ceremonies later to mark the completion of significant stages of the building works.

The wall was constructed of plywood sheets to which the horizontal weatherboarding was fixed and the inside was lined with building paper. The roof was tiled with black pantiles and for John this was an early exercise in the technique of setting out the spacing for the tiles and fixing them. Inside the garage there was room not only for the car but for storage of yet more timber and saw benches and tool cupboards.

Not all the work was constructive there were some enjoyable periods of demolition when a short row of external sheds were knocked down. The best bit for us though was the flattening of the offensive flat roofed extension that projected from the existing house and was the bathroom. There were some black tiles around the bath and pink wallpaper on the other walls, a green toilet pan and it had frosted glass in the ill-proportioned window. The removal of this horrid bathroom took 2 days and was done when our grand new one was in use.

Phase 2 was the new wing. This consisted of a bedroom, bathroom and lobby outside with space for built in cupboards and one quite large living room. It was constructed in a similar fashion to the garage with a timber frame but the walls were more sophisticated. The space between inner and outer wall linings was filled with insulation, there was insulation also above the ceiling and below the floor. John devised a contraption for lifting the heavy unwieldy plasterboard sheets into position and keeping them there at ceiling level whilst he could fix them, and fortunately it worked well. Building the chimney and hauling the chimney pot up between the roof rafters was another adventure and then more roof tiling.

Visits to Builders merchants and D.I.Y. stores were part of the process and the smell of spilt cement on the floor at Wickes provokes a memory of that time. Deliveries of sand in the huge sacks and packs of roof tiles being mechanically lifted from the lorry and later pallets of paving stones arriving for the hard landscape around the house were all important events.

Painting the kitchen

The kitchen was in my parents' house in Cobham, Surrey and they were temporarily away on holiday. So, left at home, my brother and I decided to re-decorate the kitchen. We planned to do this without our parents' consent but we were both in our late teens and thought we could take the responsibility for doing this. The idea was, that it was meant to be a pleasant surprise for our parents when they returned.

The kitchen was decorated with cream coloured paint on all the walls and had a white ceiling. Our colour scheme was to be very different with one red end wall and some grey and white walls, all the cream paint was to be covered. The details of setting off on this project, where we bought the paint and considered if there were enough clean brushes and rollers already in the garage, are not clearly remembered. We did prepare all the surfaces however and began to paint

It's easy to see why TV programmes that show the re-decoration of people's houses are so appealing. Even if the resulting décor may not be to everyone's taste the transformation process is beguiling. And in our kitchen the act of painting red over a cream wall was dramatic. We were in awe of the change, the effect had the optical effect of changing the proportion of the room. It was a long narrow kitchen but now miraculously it suddenly seemed wider and shorter. The grey and white walls adjacent to the red emphasised the colour and we were getting quite excited, it was beginning to look good. We had not done anything like this on our own before and in this sense it was a highlight. We were enjoying the pleasure of the process, for although painting walls is hard work, there often have to be several coats to apply, there was, for us, much satisfaction in gradually covering the walls.

Our parents returned and seemed pleased with the newly painted kitchen, they were not demonstrative people and so did not gasp in surprise or mock astonishment as those who have suffered a re-decoration on the TV programmes do. The painted kitchen however soon lost its bold impact, the change was absorbed and taken for granted, the boiler in it continued to heat the water and the washing machine and gas cooker were used, and the colour of the walls were simply a background. My brother and I however still remember, as a highlight of our lives, the painting of the kitchen.

As a sequel to this highlight, he, my brother and I have continued to re-decorate. We have separate lives now, so I don't know whether the wonder of this initial introduction has given him pleasure. For me, I have continued to enjoy the painting and the associated rubbing down and the second coats and have had great opportunities to indulge in all of this for John and I have been involved in many projects with our daughters houses where my pleasure in re-decorating may have been useful.

Something new

I have chosen 10 rolls of glass fibre insulation material as an example of something new. They were bought at Homebase in Lowestoft as a result of John finding an offer of cheap rolls that was irresistible to him. The offer coincided with a visit from Elizabeth, who was willing to help with the installation of these rolls. She has just had the experience of buying many herself, but then not having time to lay them, so that they were parked in her hall and sitting room for some weeks, she became quite fond of them.

Having something new, often involves effort, for instance, reorganising the whole kitchen to make space for a new saucepan or having to dig a mighty hole in the garden for the new shrub. So it was with our rolls, they were put into the car after the back seats had been removed and once transported had then to be lifted to the loft and unrolled.

Our loft spaces, there are 2 separate ones, are approached through small doors high up in the exterior walls, thus a ladder is necessary. The rolls were of a manageable weight but were an ungainly size and hauling them up was not always so easy. In one loft there was a collection of cardboard boxes, knitting machines and some chairs but there was headroom. In the other there was the chance to unroll a whole roll, all 7 metres, but we had to crouch and bend. Being in a crumpled position for a morning does make you envy the chance to stand upright but we became more expert as the day wore on. We cut the thick layer of glass fibre with a saw when we had to fit it around electrical wiring and once laid it looked like the pelt of a great grey animal spread over the timbers. This was an additional layer for there was already insulation material between the floor joists but there are new standards for the suitable thickness of insulation to conserve heat in houses.

Our "something new" is unseen in this room but I hope that you may benefit from its being above you.

Journey

There were huge rats scuttling across the floor of the empty warehouse building and it was hot. It was a disconcerting sight for we had just arrived in this country for a 2 year stay and it had not been a quick or easy decision to come here. Now there were huge rats, why ever had we come? When the custom officials queried our right to stay and work our doubts were getting stronger. But after some phone calls we were allowed to stay. This was fortunate I suppose since we had invested much time and energy in getting here. There were months of packing our possessions, cooking pots, bedding, toys, clothes and arranging for our home in Surrey to be let. This home was close to Forestry Commission land where we were surrounded by chestnut coppice, larch and beech trees and we had

been so excited by the sight of the palm trees as we had come close to the shore of this new country where we would live.

We, that is, John and I and our 2 daughters then aged 8 and 6 had not had an uneventful journey to reach this country. The sea had been rough after we left Southampton and the huge bouquet of flowers that we found in our cabin sent from the office staff fell over, the water spilt and the flowers died. Later, off the Azores we saw a school of flying fish and became aware of the increasing difference between the air conditioned interior of the ship to the outside temperature when we opened the door to go on deck. The heat on deck was overpowering. There was more rough sea which caused 2 of us, Caroline and myself to be sea sick so we lay on our bunks listening to the engine noise and feeling miserable. The rocking sea had been caused by hurricane Chloe passing some distance off and it is known that September is the month for hurricanes in that part of the world. Our voyage was for 11 days from September 2 until September 13 and we were sailing on a Dutch boat named Oranje Nassau.

Although the reason for our journey was clear, for John to become the resident architect for the building of the new University of Guyana, in Georgetown. We were unsure as to our expectations of life on this piece of South America. It was a different climate and culture to that in Surrey and the people living there were of mixed race. Among them Chinese, Indian and African people as well as the minority group of Europeans. On the inhabited coastal strip some 20 miles wide the sugar plantations had been formed and British influence still lingered. The department store was Bookers and at Christmas the window displays there had cotton wool blobs representing snow scattered over the goods. No real snow was ever likely to fall in this coastal area just 10 degrees south of the Equator. At the end of our 2 year tour the visible effects of British influence was being erased and no longer were British products on sale, no more Huntley and Palmer biscuits.

Before we landed there were entertainments on board, fancy dress costumes to be made, games on deck and the use of the swimming pool. For our daughters however life on board was not all fun since they had to be confined to the nursery for many hours of the day. This was situated to the rear of the boat and it was very noisy, a continuous rumbling sound was always present and it seemed overcrowded with younger children.

This voyage was a strange interlude between the past known phase of our lives and the future, the unknown. The beginning of the journey marked the end of one phase and the end of the journey was the beginning of the new life. The journey was an intermediate space, a time of irresponsibility where we were looked after, fed and entertained. This would end as we prepared to renew the routines of daily life.

So here we were about to take up residence at A60 Barima Avenue. This house was so different to the one we had left behind. In Surrey we lived in an old country cottage, tiles on the roof and walls, diamond panes to some windows and situated up a steep narrow lane with woodland all around. A60 was constructed of concrete with the main rooms at first floor level to take advantage of the sea breezes. Under the house was a concreted area with two staircases leading up to those rooms. The house almost filled the site except for some drainage channels and strips of coarse grass and a star-apple tree. Other houses of similar design were closely packed around. On our first night we were attacked by mosquitoes for we were unprotected by nets and were full of rich red blood.

Our future experiences in Guyana were less dramatic and we eventually returned to Surrey after our 2 year tour.

My journey of a lifetime

This journey is about a change from one phase of my life to another and it involved a sea voyage

from Southampton to Georgetown, Guyana in South America. There were three other journeys that were made at the same time for John, my husband and Elizabeth and Caroline our daughters all went with me. Their accounts of our 2 year stay in Guyana would differ, but for all of us it was memorable.

The important decision about whether to accept the invitation to go abroad was not taken lightly, there were times when it seemed a preposterous idea, the upheaval too great, and the interruption to our daughter's education was considered at length. Fortunately, we overcame our doubts and so the journey started.

As a prelude, there was packing to be done and arrangements to be made for our house to be let and then the good-byes. We have a photograph taken from high level on the deck of the Dutch ship the Oranje Nassau looking down on my parents and John's mother and brother standing below. They did not meet very often and I wondered what they may be saying to one another.

We watched the coast of England disappear and some days later there were rough seas, the vase of flowers delivered to our cabin, organised by office friends to wish us well, fell over. This may have been symbolic as an omen of future disasters but we arrived safely. The sight of a palm fringed shore line made me realise, with some excitement, that here was the beginning of a new life and this was to be in a tropical climate.

Many things were new, the sight of huge rats in the customs shed, the overwhelming heat when we stepped out from the shade, and the first sight of our home for the next 2 years. This was a structure with the living accommodation at first floor level and a staircase to reach this at ground floor level. We believed it was designed in this way to allow the air to circulate freely around the building, for Georgetown is situated near the coast and the tropical climate is thus moderated by sea breezes. The house was in an affluent area removed from the rundown shacks and overcrowding of other areas of the city. However, our privileged position made us a target for break ins and burglary and locking car doors and shutting all windows when we left the house became a necessary habit. Stealing from the more prosperous was part of the social scene, for there was a gap between rich and poor.

Our grasp of different attitudes and social expectations was imperfect. At first, we thought that when the expression "just now" was used, it meant that, for instance, the speaker would be able to cut the grass very soon, but we learnt that it was used in a free way and could mean that the grass cutting was in a month's time.

My journey of change spawned other journeys, the chance to visit the islands of the West Indies. here there were clear blue seas, not the brown muddy sea that we knew in Georgetown. A chance also to visit the mighty Kaieteur water fall after a flight and a boat ride to a rest house in the jungly interior of Guyana. It was a time that I will always remember, these journeys of a lifetime.

Hair

Human hair is an unpredictable commodity and I'm referring to the hair that grows on your head. No wonder there are hairdressing establishments in every small town, sometimes several. There is the hope that the hairdressers working in them can somehow tame and order hair. Perhaps they can for a short while but then the hair grows long and the perming and setting have to be done all over again. Part of the routine of cleanliness means that hair has to be washed thus there are many advertisements for shampoos, conditioners etc to deal with this. The hair business is big money for most people have hair and will pay for its upkeep, even those who don't, spend money to try and overcome the lack of it.

The constant attention required to control the hair is not simply a question of preventing it looking wild and unkempt. It is also a matter of style and fashion and of the choice about how you want to present yourself to the world. There are many aspects to the subject of hairdressing.

To illustrate this I will describe the varying attitudes of my family to their hair.

John, for instance has had a beard for 30 years and usually gets one of us to trim it for him. He is intrigued with the different texture of the hair of his beard which is coarse and prickly to that of the hair on the top of his head which is soft and fine.

Elizabeth our eldest daughter has never bothered with fashion she is content to leave her hair in the same style as it was in her teenage years. She has the fringe trimmed and the uneven ends of her long hair cut and that has been so for years, she is now 45.

For Caroline our younger daughter it is very different. She is interested in clothes and in having her hair cut, so she has enjoyed many different styles, perms and colours. Now she has orange-coloured hair with some paler streaks to the side and top.

As for me I can remember having my hair plaited from the age of 7 until 14. There was a central parting and two even plaits. But then a drastic change occurred when the hair was cut short and I suffered a "perm". My hair now was thick and resembled a windswept bush on the top of my head. I suppose I did wash it, but the perming process, then not very sophisticated, made it seem an impenetrable thicket.

Easy going

I am a very tolerant easy going person without many prejudices or grievances, so I think. But as you may tell from the rest of this piece that may not be true.

I hate crumbs in the margarine tub and loathe the sight of clothes to be washed spread over the bedroom floor. It is always someone else who is responsible for these enormously irritating situations, of course. My own untidiness is completely acceptable and can be seen without any offence to the sense or order which is so particular to me.

Shoppers who dither with their trolleys in the aisles of Somerfields store need to be swept away in my opinion. Whereas, I have a well written list of requirements these people haven't a clue. They come to a halt just in front of you and gaze for many minutes at the shelves, they turn to consult and deliberate with their companion, they reach for an item, hesitate and return it. There is more pondering and wondering, their trolley is definitely blocking the aisle and then a slow move forward. The indecision ends when a friend is seen and a focus is acquired for the urgent need to tell them long and complicated stories is apparent. There is a complete halt now for this conversation takes a long time and still the trolley is parked in the way of all other shoppers. I hope that you are not one of these people.

Dithering in other circumstances also annoys me but I can dither to my heart's content and never notice. Someone, for instance, who says I am going out now and does not immediately go is infuriating. The front door closes and is re-opened several times, as they come back for the forgotten garage door key or something and each time the front door is shut it is shut with a bang and so it goes on.

When some people, friends as well as acquaintances, refer to me as "dear" I feel instant antagonism and resentment. This is inexplicable but true and the method of dealing with this situation is for me

to stay quiet for how can one properly object to this endearment. There may be a polite and sensitive way of objecting but I haven't found it yet.

Thus the easy going person first mentioned turns out to be one compounded of vicious prejudices and extreme intolerance. No wonder life is difficult, no wonder that there are disagreements and disputes when despite the self image of tolerance there are disturbing aggravations.

The Blanket

This blanket is made of wool and is a patchwork of knitted squares, oblongs, wide strips and infill pieces sewn together. It is a random assembly of all these pieces in different coloured wools and each piece is often multi-coloured in itself. It has been crudely assembled with all the bits being sewn together with white wool and it is not a regular blanket size. The outside edges are very irregular they do not form into a neat rectangle, they weave in and out depending on the kind of wool that happened to be used for each piece.

This is no ordinary blanket and could easily be used as an example of how not to knit. Although the needle size, a no.6, has been constant, the different wools have been various, some thick, some thin and often 2 strands of coloured wools have been knitted together. Thus the texture of the blanket is irregular, but also the knitters themselves have been various.

It has been worked on by 3 generations in our family over an 8 year period. We haven't all been working on it constantly for that time, there was the initial incentive, a pamphlet from Oxfam describing the need for blankets. John's mother used to visit then and she contributed many carefully knitted proper squares, some with different coloured stripes for variation and to use up the odd balls of wool from our collection.

Whilst she was here I joined her in the knitting and then Caroline, our daughter came and knitted, - the 3 generations were all at work – simultaneously.

After that flurry of activity, the wool, the needles and Oxfam pamphlet were put away in a cupboard. But, recently the half-finished blanket was re-discovered and the Sunami appeal gave impetus to the idea of its completion. We still had a good stock of plain red wool and I knitted a large red swathe. Whilst doing this a friend visited and offered to help, her knitting technique was so different from mine and there in the blanket it shows, several rows of much looser knitting. But, all the participant knitters of this blanket have produced quite unique and distinctive pieces for it.

To boost the production of pieces we no longer bothered about strictly dimensioned squares and Caroline made many contributions from her home near St Albans, - distance knitting. She had a large quantity of wool oddments, for in the past she had time to knit many wonderful garments and was interested to do so. One was a mohair jumper for which she designed a complicated pattern inspired by a Picasso painting. Her pieces for the blanket are the ones using 2 coloured strands and the resulting rich colours are splendid. 2 of them are specimen pieces, an elaborate basket pattern on one and the other a design based on a square. Both these will be appliquéd on to the plain red swathe as decoration.

Elizabeth joined in during one of her visits and her contribution was original. She has little past knitting experience and sometimes the stitch making was inconsistent. Some purl stitches appeared in the rows of knit only rows and there were variations in the number of stitches on the needle. At one point

there were twice the number that had been cast on. Some quick casting off gave the piece a very quirky and interesting look. It became quite lumpy and a small flap developed in one corner.

Everyone's work has been absorbed into the whole, each contributing to its bizarre look. The blanket is nearly finished, just 2 more pieces to stitch on and some loose threads to weave in, it looks wonderful and we have doubts about giving it away now, perhaps we'll keep it. It's become part of our history, all those leftover wools from past knitting projects which we remember, and the fact that we have all been involved in creating this thing together.

Nice

Effects of a strike in relation to bus, train and plane services in France on 2 stranded visitors to Nice, last week. [Tuesday 10th June.]

We didn't know any of the implications of the strike action, was it justifiable, how many people were involved, was it nationwide, or how long the Tuesday strikes had been operating. However, no buses no trains and not many planes,

As visitors and short of information, no one at the Tourist Information office could tell us what was happening, all we found out was that it was "black Tuesday but we decided to get to the airport by taxi, taxis now difficult to find since no buses or trains running. At Nice Airport the Easy Jet desk was manned by staff but there were no queues of passengers. There was no flight offered until the evening of the next day. Thus, I sat under a palm tree guarding our luggage whilst Elizabeth walked from the airport to find a hotel. She walked on the hot unshaded route by a busy road and booked our room at Premier Classe. She returned to the airport and the palm tree and the luggage and me and my companion woodpigs which were living at the base of the tree. We decided not to take the hot route to the hotel but to walk in the shade of the palms on the opposite side of the road. So, carrying our luggage we walked along this shaded route to a point opposite to the hotel. We watched 3 lanes of fast continuous traffic pass and decided to retrace our route back to the airport for we could not safely cross the road.

There we found a delightful baggage trolley on the grass and for one euro claimed her – we could sense the pleasure we might have. Pushing her loaded with our luggage was truly delightful. Negotiating the complicated set of roundabouts and pathways outside the airport was fun. Past hedges of exotic plants, walking now in full sun but free of our load we got to the hotel "Premier Classe" which was situated over a Ford Motor showroom. Reception was on the 3rd floor and we took our now beloved baggage trolley up in the lift to our room. We think of her as one of our group now, she is part of our holiday experience and we imagine that it is a great treat for her also. Just think what it must be like for a baggage trolley to be wheeled away from the airport where she is mostly chained to a long row of other trolleys and is now exploring the wider world. What exhilaration, and to be spending a night out with strangers, foreign speaking ones at that! We left her in the room to walk to the beach, watch some games of boules and have a swim and eat some supper. We all spent a peaceful night,

The next morning we carefully loaded our luggage on to her and tenderly wheeled her back to the airport. Her freedom was short-lived but we hope that she enjoyed it. We fastened her back to her appointed place in the Terminal 1 Foyer but we do have several photos of her to remind us of our delightful acquaintance.

After that we caught the bus, strike now over, to Grasse and enjoyed many hours there eating bread, cheese and tomatoes and drinking water from the lion fountain in the square. The Museum of Perfume in the town was brilliant and we made the bus journey down the hill and through the trees

back to the airport. We got the plane home knowing that our delayed departure from France was, in our case, the most delightful happening.

A happy day in summer

One ingredient of a happy day for us is to take a picnic to the seaside and spend time on the beach. We need a warm sunny day for this and on such a day we drove along the A12 and turned towards the coast at Wrentham in the direction of Covehithe. The cliffs there are being eroded and each time we go the footpath has been closer to the cliff top than before. There is a very dramatic view of the road which passes the church, for it suddenly ends and there is a 40 foot drop to the beach. There is a warning notice so that drivers do stop before plunging down.

We, on this occasion, John and I and Caroline our daughter and Steve park the car and unload it. John has constructed a special 2 wheel truck which fits into the car, he fixes the handle to it and we're ready to pull our goods along the road to the beach about a mile away. The goods comprise our picnic box full of food and drink, towels, swimming things, John's windbreak shelter, Caroline's kites and a few extra warm clothes. The road to Beach Farm that we use rises gently between some immense fields and at the top of the rise, you can see the sea. That first view of the sea is just as exciting as it was when I remember seeing it as a child. The expanse of the sea there in front of you, an unfamiliar sight for those of us who live inland.

We then have to negotiate a stile which involves unloading our goods and reloading them the other side and then the track gets narrow through brambles and bushes and eventually we're on the beach. The tugging of this loaded truck is not easy, we could be steering it amongst the pebbles or moving it over hard wet sand, but at any cost, we're heading to our favourite destination, the place where the birch trees from the adjacent wood have fallen from their habitat onto the beach and have been swallowed by sand. It's weird, the branches rise from the sand for the trees are lying on their sides half buried.

So we set up camp, John erects the windbreak with its flexible rods as a framework and he buries the plastic discs which fit at the end of the guy lines. To anchor the windbreak in sand is not always easy. The rest of us open up the food box and Caroline and Steve who have invested in a special rucksack with shaped compartments containing a set of plates, cutlery and even glasses, lay out the feast. We uncork the wine and eat and drink. We can be as slow as we like over this, the whole afternoon is before us to laze about and enjoy the sun and the sea. There's no appointments to keep or meetings to attend.

In spite of some rough waves and cold water Caroline and Steve decide to swim. There are yelps of surprise as the cold waves first slop over them but once immersed they are happy in the water. The drying process is vigorous and the feel of warm clothes again is good. I saw a seal who was also swimming in the sea when I had walked further along the beach from our camp. I was at the point where Benacre Broad a freshwater lake is adjacent to the sea. The strip of beach that separates the two is the nesting site of terns and is often fenced off to protect the nests. One winter however, when we visited the beach the shoreline was completely changed, there was a deep channel of water connecting the lake to the sea. It wasn't possible then to walk along the beach from Covehithe to Kessingland.

Now Caroline is ready to fly her kites. She has a large collection of the most wonderful kites, most of them of a beautiful shape and brightly coloured. They are all 2 string kites so that she can make them

whirl and twist in the sky and some of them she has designed herself. The strength of the wind is all important for this activity and it's too variable today for a reliable flight but she is experienced enough to be able to land a faltering kite safely on the beach without damaging it. Steve is helping with the take-offs and then the winding back of the lines, ready for the next flight.

John and I have been less active but I have very satisfactorily constructed a sand fort, complete with surrounding wall enriched with pebbles and a moat. The incoming tide swept up the channel towards it smoothing out the groove in a second and then swamping the sand wall so that it sunk back to level sand. It is so reassuring to know that the effect of water on sandcastles is predictably the same as 60 years ago.

Towards evening we pack up our truck and set off along the upper path through the bracken for the tide has come in and our initial route along the beach is now more difficult. The evening light is mellow and the sun still warm as we walk to the car. A happy summer's day.

“Every Little Helps”

Although this slogan is used to promote sales in Tesco stores it may not help to save you money, but it seems as though it will. The slogan refers to savings for the customers to tempt them into buying from their store only. The offers involved usually mean that you may buy 3 of any item although you only require one. The voucher offers only operate for a limited time and usually apply only to specific products during that time. There is great competition to obtain and keep customers and stores have to provide an incentive to shop at their stores rather than at one of their competitors.

I am not thinking of saving money inferred by this title, but use the title, to show how very little things can be of huge importance to the world.

This small insect, the bee, sometimes only 21 mm long [approx one eighth] of an inch] is responsible for helping, via pollination, to produce a third of the human food supply. This little creature the most complex and sophisticated in the history of evolution, there are 20,000 known species, is found on every continent except Antarctica.

The best known is the European honey bee which collects nectar as an energy source and pollen for protein and other nutrients. Most of the pollen is used for feeding larvae. The focus on collecting pollen means that they are specialised pollination agents and better at it than beetles, flies or butterflies. The pollen sticks to the bee's furriness and some of it is then stored in various parts of the body, honey baskets are on their legs.

Bees are highly regarded although they have a nasty sting because they pollinate and produce honey. Their social system and diligence are admired in relation to human society, and so is their honey production, for honey may be used in the cure all kinds of human diseases. It is claimed that, in combination with cinnamon, heart disease, arthritis, bladder infections, upset stomachs, honey can help. Immune systems can be strengthened and by taking a spoonful of honey a day the ravages of old age may be arrested,

These bees are recognised by governments as being important for there was in 1980 a U.K. Bees Act and in 2013 the European Union plan to restrict the use of certain pesticides. Although bees are so valuable there are threats to their well being and there are various factors involved. A combination of a virus and a fungus were found to be in many collapsed colonies and the parasite varroa is also partly responsible. Urbanisation, and the use of pesticides in agriculture mean that the preferred conditions, more pasture with wild flowers rather than arable farming are diminishing. Bee keepers are very keen

to support any legislation that may improve the environment for their bees and protested in London recently against the U.K's refusal to ban potentially harmful pesticides.

Toe Socks

I have to write a poem and don't know how to start
I need to find some words to rhyme, that is, if I'm smart
Poetic subjects, death or love or moonlight on the sea
But how these can be caught in words – beats me

I've bought some special socks with individual toes
But how to get them on – heaven only knows
They're red and yellow, orange and blue
With purple and crimson and black stripes too

But every toe must find its home and can't without much aid
Toes don't know about toe holes they're unaccustomed I'm afraid
So backs must bend and fingers push to try and make them fit
But will the struggle that ensues ever be worth it

For feet and toes within these socks won't fit in the shoe
That is sad, and it's not known what anyone could do

Fairy Story

Once upon a time there was a lovely girl with short blond hair whose name was Annette. She lived in a 2 bedroomed semi-detached house on a large housing estate in Luton. She did not have much money because she worked at a garage and she worked overtime as often as possible because she was saving up to buy a car. This car was important, she wanted it to take her elderly disabled mother to hospital and to the shops and to ride out into the countryside. Annette wanted to lessen the wretchedness of her mother being housebound for months on end with nothing else to look at but the ground floor room where she was confined.

One day a handsome young man with dark curly hair came to the pay counter at the garage where Annette was working. He put his beer cans and crisps on the top and the cheap road map that he had just taken from a pile. She smiled at him as she scanned the goods and put them in a plastic bag for him. "You planning to go far?" she said. "Not far today" he said "but tomorrow I'll be travelling round". "Wish I could, but I haven't got a car" said Annette. "You will one day" said the young man as he paid for his map and beer.

Annette worked hard and eventually had enough money to buy a car. She looked through pages of advertisements and found a second hand car dealer who was offering a small red Honda at a price that she could afford. She went one Saturday morning to where the dealer was waiting and he showed her the car. He was a thin sour looking man with an unpleasant manner and was wearing a dirty jumper. But she was excited and eager to drive the car and it seemed to run so smoothly when she drove for a short distance to test it. So she paid him and soon she was driving away in her newly acquired car.

On Sunday she went to find her mother in the gloomy apartment block. "We're going for a drive" said Annette joyfully, "I've bought a car and we can go out together at last". She drove out through Luton into the country, her mother delighted at the views of trees and hills. Suddenly there was a thumping noise and the engine faltered, Annette could find no power when she pressed the accelerator pedal

and the car stopped. She was horrified, this was her new car, and now both she and her mother were stranded. The car was awkwardly positioned on a bend and she was aware of it as a hazard to other drivers.

And now, as this is a fairy story, the lovely blonde Annette is rescued by the dark curly haired handsome young man whom she has once met before at the garage, when he was buying beer and crisps and a map. He is an AA man famous on TV adverts as “the man who can”. Thus he fixes the car and they return to Luton but not before he has advised her as how to deal with the evil car dealer who has sold her a worthless car and can be fined and put out of business for evermore. The happy ending is obvious Annette marries the AA man, three A’s now and her mother is driven around forever.

50 words

Once upon a time there was a fair princess who lived in a palace surrounded by delightful gardens with trees, fountains and luscious plants. The sun shone, the earth dried, there was drought, the gardens without water became parched and withered. Like most stories this does not have a happy ending.

Joy and Despair

Once upon a time, long ago, there was a beautiful princess called Miranda who lived in a castle with her father, the King, and her two elder sisters. Miranda was lonely and spent most of her time in the wonderful gardens surrounding the castle. Her elder sisters were out most of the day and at night they were partying with their friends.

One day when Miranda was walking past the rhubarb she saw the boy coming up the grassy path to meet her. He was lithe and graceful and had a winning smile. They exchanged greetings and he told her that he had just come to work in the gardens. The next day they met again and on the next day also. Their meetings became regular and they enjoyed a growing fondness of one another. They kissed and embraced and he asked if she would marry him. Miranda said that she would have to ask her father. The King was not at all pleased that she wanted to marry a young gardener. He proposed that before they marry the boy must first complete a set of three tasks. The first task was to travel across the world and bring back a turtle’s egg from the far East. The second task was to kill the menacing dragon when it woke from its hibernation in the deep caves of the Western mountains. The third task was to bring back barrels of oil from the desert lands to ensure the prosperity of his country.

Thus, Jason, for that was the boy’s name, set off on his long journey to complete the first task. He and Miranda were separated for a whole year, such were the delays at airports and the infrequent bus services. He returned with the egg and Miranda and he had an ecstatic reunion, she wept with joy at seeing him again. For a few months they spent an idyllic time together but then he had to leave for the Western Mountains and his appointment with the dragon. He collected his gear to face this challenge, a motorbike helmet, a baseball bat and some football boots. He had read articles on the internet about dragon habits and behaviour and felt thoroughly prepared for the encounter. Miranda clung to Jason, she couldn’t bear to let him go, and he sorrowfully took his leave.

Some months later Miranda was wandering in the walled vegetable garden when a messenger brought her a note. She cried out in dismay for it was not the good news that Jason had killed the dragon but, that the dragon had killed Jason. Miranda screamed and ran from the garden, she was in despair. She lost her appetite and grew thin, no one could help her or comfort her, she was so miserable. Gradually, however, she came to accept the loss of her beloved Jason. She began to work in the gardens herself and planted a row of runner beans that she watered with her own tears.

There is no happy ending, for joy was quickly followed by despair in this story, and the moral is don't try to kill dragons with poor equipment.

Freedom

Peter Benenson who was a founder of Amnesty International wrote of his hopes for the organisation that he set up "Only when the last prisoner of conscience has been freed, when the last torture chamber has been closed. when the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights is a reality for the world's people will our work be done"

It is a hopeful statement and its aims may never be achieved for in the information that is contained in the Amnesty International magazine there is a depressing catalogue of the continuing violence by some regimes against those who criticise their behaviour.

Amnesty International identifies cases of mistreatment and offers some support for the victims by making the situation known to many others and complaining to the states or governments responsible. There are reports of many violations of human rights. Unlawful arrests and detention, unfair trials, harassment, torture assault and death threats are amongst those violations.

Journalists in Gambia are routinely subject to some of these and the former Minister of Information and Communication in Gambia was given a life sentence with hard labour for possessing T shirts. There was a slogan on the shirts which read "End to dictatorship now" and he was charged with intent to cause disaffection and contempt towards the President or Government of the Gambia. In many countries to criticise the ruling parties will get you into trouble and imprisonment means that your voice can no longer be heard.

When an open challenge to the authorities was dangerous the African American slaves in America sang as they worked. They sang spiritual songs which were partly to keep up their spirits but also to express defiance of their oppressors for though the songs had a religious theme they often carried an underlying meaning which the slave owners would miss. In this way they could vent their frustration at the gross injustice of the slave system.

There are groups who use music and singing to bring global awareness to the abuse of human rights. The members of a group of women from Zimbabwe sing to protest against impoverished living conditions in their country in the face of police truncheons and brutality.

Human rights defenders are themselves treated badly when they speak out against oppressive forms of government. The Burmese Aung San Suu has been under house arrest for many years for she refused to stop speech making tours throughout the country where she was critical of the repressive practices of the government. She was awarded the Nobel peace prize in 1991 but in Burma she was prohibited from standing for election.

It would seem from this brief account that human rights to legal justice are not easy to maintain across the world.

T.V. Presenters

I have an aversion to T.V. presenters who believe they have to get themselves on the screen. There doesn't seem to be any very good reason for them to be shown so often but whenever there is a comment that leads the story to a new location there is our presenter. Sometimes he or she is striding across the landscape or loitering outside a building or dramatically pushing open a door to enter a

building. Why do presenters themselves have to appear so frequently during a programme. For instance in Simon Schama's history of England, Schama himself pops up everywhere, he's on farmland, once a battlefield, in Northumberland, then he's in Canterbury and then in Ireland. Why do we have to look at him in his black leather coat when we could have simply listened to his voice while the cameraman would show us all those locations uninterrupted.

Perhaps presenters think that their presence on the screen helps us, the audience, to better believe their stories. Perhaps it adds some aura of credibility and authenticity to have the presenter seen at the very place where something once happened.

In a recent programme concerning the artist John Constable the presenter, Andrew Graham Dixon, offered a view of his subject's life that was so opinionated and limited in scope that it seemed a pure indulgence of the presenter's ego. There were often scenes where Dixon ended a particular sequence by making some profound remark whilst looking seriously at us, the viewers, and then he would look down and away, implying that his last statement was irrefutable, the only pronouncement possible. It is this conceited, arrogant presentation that annoys me. It is all very well for the presenter to have opinions and a point of view, but to flaunt himself in front of us so constantly is sheer arrogance and for him not to mention many other aspects of the artists life does not produce a balanced or well rounded view of the subject. For viewers who may encounter this subject for the first time it is not a good introduction, the presentation is biased beyond belief.

No matter what the subject of the programme, either history, nature or art, the personality of the presenter, perhaps this is what sells such programmes, is exhibited via the continual shots of them. The location is usually very relevant to the programme, when it is shown as the scene of the work of the artist or as the site of industrial archaeology, that is what I want to see NOT the presenter parading himself in front of it. Sorry to Simon Schama, Andrew Graham Dixon, Dan Cruikshank, David Attenborough and Fred Dibner etc etc.

What an egocentric lot you are.

P.S. Maybe David Attenborough is an exception here for he appears to be genuinely enthusiastic about his subject and although he appears in person wearing various outfits to suit the climate he offers impersonal views about the animals or birds he is describing.

Obituary: Colonel Arthur John Bullimore, D.S.O

Colonel Arthur John Bullimore D.S.O.

Died aged 85

Born on 17 January 1914

Although too young to have served in the 1914 -18 War he was a pugnacious leader. Born in Cheshire, fortunately, the only son of Bertha and Leonard Bullimore he quickly showed himself to be a real bully, living up to the family name. Educated at the London Road primary school he was later sent to a secure establishment for corrective training. This proved to be an ideal environment for him since his aggressive and violent behaviour was noted and as a result he was then sent to Sandhurst. After his time there he was attached to the Royal Cheshire regiment and he served with the first Battalion in Cyprus, Egypt, Malaya and India and was twice wounded in Germany. While having 50 stitches put in his leg without anaesthetic the needles broke constantly, he was so thick skinned and on another occasion he lost an arm without even noticing. Bullimore won the D.S.O. when the squadron came under fire while crossing open ground. With his staff car in flames and its tyres punctured he ordered

the rest of the squadron to put out the fire and carry the vehicle, with him inside, to a safer place. The citation praised his calm and courageous leadership.

After the disbandment of the Royal Cheshire Regiment he first used all his aggressive qualities in the service of the Cheshire County Council where he became famous for taking instant decisions whether they were sensible or not. He never listened to differing opinions and consistently interrupted others when they were trying to put their point of view. His summing up speeches were notoriously long without having much relevance to the subjects under discussion.

He later went on to join the boards of many companies, including two banks and the North West Regional Economic Planning Council. He had numerous other public positions and although quite unsuited to reasonable discussion and considered decision making he sat on dozens of committees. This caused him to suffer ailments related to these sitting positions and he eventually retired from public life.

Bullimore will be best remembered not only as a big bullying man domineering, objectionable, intemperate and inconsiderate but also as a man who never washed under his armpits.

Bullimore is survived by his very battered wife and the two legitimate sons.

Rain

Their large detached house was situated within a large garden but with neighbouring houses to each side. All of them bordered a tree lined suburban road. It was a pleasant area in which to live and Ronald and Marjorie had been in their house for many years. It was where their children had grown up and they now wished to build an extension to it, to accommodate the growing family at holiday times for they now had many grandchildren.

Ronald was the one who organised the building firm to do the work of adding another bedroom and a ground floor "family room" for toddlers and the older children to enjoy, that is to spill paint on the floor, scratch the furniture and scribble on the walls. With time, a computer would be installed for, as these children grew up, those early diversions would become out of date, more sophisticated entertainment was then required.

There was much to be done, getting plans drawn up and estimates of cost from various firms. Ronald had contacted 3 firms and had chosen the one that offered the cheapest price for the job. He was unused to dealing with such matters, it was not easy for him, he needed a break from phone calls and e-mails. Thus when the work was scheduled to begin he and Marjorie decided to take a holiday. They booked a flight to Turkey to enjoy a relaxing time in the sunshine, being cosseted in comfortable accommodation and with much delicious food served to them. However, this idyllic dream did not materialise, stormy weather prevented them from exploring and they felt trapped inside the hotel, they wanted to go home.

Ronald and Marjorie returned home earlier than expected and found the builder reading the papers and drinking tea at one end of their extension. There was a pool of water at the other end. "What's going on here" they asked, why haven't you made the roof weatherproof yet " ?

"I can't" he replies "It's raining and it's too wet"

"Then why didn't you do it when it was dry " was the next question.

"I couldn't" he says, "it wasn't leaking then"

Joyce

They don't know what they are doing in this place, but then it's not a hospital. They don't care, you can ring the bell and nobody comes. That Joel is horrible, when I ask him to give me something from the table, he refuses, he says I must get it myself. Last night he just left me on the bed and wouldn't take me to the bathroom to clean my teeth. He's a Filipino you know, lots of them that work here are. I always ask who is on duty each night because I hate it when he has to put me to bed.

I'm going mad you know, I can't remember anything, everything is a blur. The television doesn't work but everyone who comes to see me says it does. They use the remote control and tell me it's alright, but it isn't, there's always the same programme on, I've seen it all before. And things keep disappearing, some of my skirts have gone missing and now I can't find my watch.

It's horrible in here, they tell me that I should practice walking with the frame, now that my foot has healed. But I can't. I fell the other night and lay on the floor and got to the bell but nobody came for ages. My friends are all so cheery and think that I can do anything, but I can't. I lose balance and don't know where I am. My sister, well, we won't speak of her again, thinks I'm going home again, she has no idea.

Where has my watch gone, I need it to tell the time at night.

I don't read any more, I can't see properly and I can't write. I just keep falling asleep. My daughter is coming to see me at the weekend and will bring her small daughter with her. She's a menace, she crawls about on the floor picking up all the electrical cables, the telephone, the ones from the table lamp and when Tracy stops her, she screams.

There's no chance of selling the house, it's been on the market for months and now the recession. I don't know what I'm going to do for money, I can't stay here and they'll put me into some squalid little room.

It might have fallen off the table, they're always telling me that there are too many things on it, and I can't pick them up from my chair.

That photo is of Polly, she was such a sweetie and there is Raffy, the one who used to beg for his ball to be thrown for him and when he ran and fetched it he would beg again. Ritzy used to pull that little cart that Dick made for me and Tracy, we used to drive along the lanes in it. Dick always said when I got back from Kelsale Art group "Well, let me see your masterpiece".

You don't think they will have taken it do you ?

They're doing another Alan Ayckbourn play, but I have never liked him, he is so cruel. That play has some very nasty scenes in it, people being horrible to one another which I hate. And I think horse racing is cruel, just think of all that tugging at the mouth it must be so painful for the horses, and all that whipping. We had such trouble choosing plays and I hardly ever got my way, they would always choose an Ayckbourn but the last play went down well. It's my Birthday soon and I'm dreading it, they will sing Happy Birthday to you and I shall be expected to provide drinks for everyone. Well, I can't, there's no money for that.

They will come up for me soon. They come far too early to take me down to dinner, they come at 6 and we eat at 7. I'm always the first there and the last one to be taken up again. They tell me that it has to be like this for there are many others to get down. But why me, the one who every time is just left sitting. They've put me at a table with 2 old men, the one who talks, I can hardly hear, and the other one doesn't say much. It's all a bit drab.

The Surprise Package

This package was a nuisance. A notice that it could not be delivered arrived through Lily's letterbox, it seemed that she would have to collect it between 10 and 11.30 at the office in the High Street. But Lily was disabled, she could not walk there herself and she would have to ask one of her carers to collect it for her. The carers were not allowed to spend more than 30 minutes at any one of their visits to her and their duties were prescribed, walking to collect a parcel was not on their agenda. If Lily wanted this package she would have to beg one of the carers to get it especially for her. She was genuinely surprised that anyone would have sent anything to her, she was old and had few living relatives. Her niece was the only one who did correspond with her and that was usually by a phone call. There were still friends in the town who called to see her but they would never have sent a package. "I don't want anything more it will just be more clutter, I've enough stuff". Lily thought about not collecting the package but her curiosity grew so she eventually asked one of the carers to get it for her.

It was a cardboard box wrapped in brown paper, a cube about 9 inches by 9 inches by 9 inches. She realised why it had not been delivered, it was too big for the letterbox and she had not been able to get to the door quickly enough when the postman had knocked. But who had sent this? She could hardly hold this package, it was quite heavy and she had arthritis in her arms, hands and fingers, so that to open it was going to be a struggle. She managed to use the scissors to cut at the sellotaped paper envelope and then she could open the flaps of the box itself. Inside was a red plastic flower pot and within it a large bulb resembling a giant onion and a packet of compost material to be used for planting the bulb. "I don't want this thing" she said but then she looked at the picture on the box which showed an amazing flower. It was an amaryllis, a lily, and her name was Lily. The coincidence intrigued her so much that she did not worry that the sender's identity was not disclosed in the box, there was no slip of paper there to wish her well, no message of any kind. The anonymity helped her to accept this gift, she was prepared to plant this preposterous bulb on the basis of the lily connection.

So, a few days later she planted the bulb, although disabled with limited mobility she could walk with her zimmer frame within the house and fetch water from the kitchen to moisten the planting compost. She placed a saucer under the pot and set it all on her windowsill. Some weeks later there were signs of growth, a green slit of a forming bud was showing above the earth. Miraculously this developed quickly, the bud at the tip of the stem grew upwards at a fast rate, Lily was absorbed in watching its daily progress. And then, this was most exciting, the bud expanded, there were four more buds to open and the colour of the emerging blooms began to show, they were red. The petals emerged and were huge, each flower measuring 16 centimetres across its diameter. The lily in full bloom filled her kitchen with a huge splash of colour. The surprise package had been a source of wonder and delight to this housebound and rather lonely old person whose name was Lily.

Living on the edge

Charlie was lying in bed, not his own bed and that was what troubled him. He knew that his leg had suddenly swelled alarmingly and that his wife had called the ambulance and that he was now in hospital. He had been told that his condition was treatable. But he was frightened, nothing like this had happened to him before and he was 72 years old now. His anxiety gave rise to many questions,

how could he be certain that the doctors knew how to treat him, would he be able to walk again, would he even survive and what would happen to his wife if he died? He imagined that his life was in a precarious state, really on the edge.

The bed was harder than his own and the sheets were tucked in around him too tightly, he was used to a downy quilt under which to snuggle. He was not wearing his usual cosy pyjamas but some flimsy hospital patterned ones and he felt cold. A nurse came by and he asked if he could change into his own, that was not allowed she said, but she would bring another blanket. She did not. This was the beginning of his sense of helplessness, his realisation that he was a prisoner even if it was for his own good. He was confined to bed not allowed to get out of it and walk, so had to call for a bedpan, and be washed, he was totally reliant on the nurses and he hated this situation.

He had always been an active man and although he now went more slowly he did not spend much time sitting in a chair or on the sofa. His allotment claimed much of his attention and he was always working on it, his other interest was the bowls club where as groundsman he was fully occupied. No wonder he was suffering acute frustration at the inactivity, the long hours spent lying on the hospital bed.

The whole environment was alien to him, other people, strangers to him, were lying on either side, there was constant coming and going on the ward, there were lights left on all night and the noise of snores and groans from the other patients. He was not alone for one minute, there was no chance of a quiet private time for himself. The inner workings of his body were not private, his blood pressure was constantly monitored, samples of blood were taken and examined, bowel movements were measured and urine collected. He had always enjoyed his early morning walks with the dog a time for being alone and time for thinking things over, this hospitalisation was so different.

He waited all day for the nurses to take him to the X ray department, they had told him that he would go at 9.00 so he had been expecting this to happen. It did not. Why, he thought, did they tell him an exact time perhaps they then forgot him, perhaps all the hospital staff were under so much pressure that nobody could be found to do an Xray? Some doubts about the efficient running of the hospital came into his mind. The uncertainties of his daily life also made him anxious, promises from the nurses, for instance "I'll be back in a moment," were not kept. The time of the arrival of the doctors was also uncertain and this upset him. It was they who made the decisions which affected him, and the nurses themselves never knew when they were coming.

It is true, he thought, that in ordinary life, there is always uncertainty but the not knowing here was different and for Charlie it was hard to bear, When combined with all his experiences, here in the hospital, the unusual feelings of helplessness, alienation and frustration, the total effect had been to undermine his self-confidence. All his doubts and fears became more real and vivid, uncertainty about his future became an obsession. He wept one evening when his wife visited for although he had imagined his life was on the edge before, he was now convinced that he had no future.

As a postscript to this account I have to tell you that Charlie is well, the doctors treated his infection successfully and he is home again and mowing the greens at the Bowls club.

The sun never rose that morning

He, Peter that is, was always fascinated by shapes and colours of everything around him. His mother's blue saucepan and her red and yellow serving spoons were entrancing and the shape of her white teacups gave him pleasure. On his ninth Birthday an aunt gave him a camera, a wonderful chance to capture all these visual delights, he was overjoyed. It was not only the household objects around him but now he wanted to record the natural world, plants and animals and landscapes. Everyday scenes,

the roads, streets and buildings, faces and places became his subjects too. Whilst studying at University he learnt to appreciate other people's view of the world, through their paintings, writing and films and would always be fascinated.

Peter became a teacher of psychology but always had time for his passionate interest in photography. In spite of a busy life at the college where he taught and an even busier one at home with his children he always had his digital camera near him. One evening whilst cycling home from the college he was involved in an accident, an overtaking lorry turned too quickly to the inside lane and he was knocked off his bike and had serious head injuries. The ambulance was called and he was taken to hospital. He was longing for the morning when his family could visit him but the sun never rose that morning for him, he could not see anything around him, he had been blinded in the accident. The full horror of this was overwhelming, he would never see the sun again, or his family, or ever use his camera again and he wept. His world had collapsed he would never be able to see anything ever again.

Memory

Audrey is an elderly lady living on her own since her husband died six years ago. She lives in the house where she had brought up her son Dennis. He is now married and has moved away from what was his childhood home but he visits his mother every 3 weeks. He usually comes on a Sunday and shares the lunch that she has made, they talk and then play Scrabble or in summer they go to the park or by the river for a short walk and a cup of tea. This is all very pleasant but Audrey knows that it will come to an end. She knows that her future depends on what she says and does for if her failing memory worsens Dennis has said that she must go into a Home. Three months ago, she was not at the house when Dennis came for lunch, she had forgotten that it was the day of his visit. Audrey had forgotten but Dennis remembered that occasion very well, he had been concerned for his mother and ever since had become very watchful of her behaviour. Audrey became anxious also, hoping that she would not let herself down, hoping she would not tell the same story twice or forget to turn the oven on whilst Dennis was there. She knew Dennis would take these signs of forgetfulness as evidence that it was time for Audrey to move into a Home and she was afraid. Audrey would resist the move she did not want to go, but she feared it was inevitable. To ward off the dreaded day she tried to improve her memory, she kept a diary of events so that she could refer to this and reread it before Dennis came. She gave herself small tests to check on the accuracy of her memory but in spite of these efforts there were the awkward times when she lost the thread of the conversation or couldn't remember the names of places or people.

The day came when Dennis told his mother that he thought it best if she moved into a Home and that he had found a suitable one not too far away. Audrey said "I'm not going" and complained to her friends about his high handed treatment of her but in the end she moved into "The Limes".

She hated the look and smell of it, she hated the strict regime and the overbearing matron and some of her fellow prisoners, prisoners was her word for the other residents. She hated the frilly curtains and the smallness of her room, the constant T.V. in the lounge and the uncomfortable chairs. She was most unhappy but the one thing that brought her some relief was the visits of her son. She could talk to him more freely now that he was no longer observing her so purposefully and she could repeat herself without any worry about the repercussions of doing so. They could go out together to the park and the river it was wonderful to be away from the Home. She looked forward to him coming and counted the days in anticipation of his visit.

On this particular Sunday Audrey was waiting for her son, he had not yet come and Audrey was at the window looking out for his arrival. After waiting for an hour she began to worry about his safety, had he had an accident? was he unwell? She was getting more anxious and decided to phone his home. Audrey was surprised to hear Dennis answer and she asked him if he was alright and then "Why haven't you come today?" "Oh Mum I forgot" he said. Audrey was upset "How could you, it was you who put me in here because I was not able to remember things and now you forget me." Audrey burst into tears and put the phone down.

Coming Home

The sun was shining when she arrived home. The front door was opened by the cheery hospital car driver and he brought in her bag of clothes and helped her to the chair in her sitting room. At this time of day in the winter months, a patch of sunlight lit up her bookshelf and the vase that stood on top of it. Usually the vase was filled with flowers but now there were only wilted petals on the stems. She had been away for weeks.

Whilst in hospital Edith had longed for this moment of "coming home", she had lain in bed at night thinking of the time when she could leave this place. The central strip light left on at night and the coughings and stirring of her neighbours were part of the strange environment. During the night and through the day there was the constant checking of blood pressure and pulse, interruptions to her overwhelming desire to sleep in those early days. All the day time activity of the ward, nurses coming and going, other patients making their way to showers and toilets, breakfast and lunch trollies with the staff demanding to know her choices it was all so weird and distressing for Edith to have so many other people around her. She was used to living quietly on her own.

She did however, appreciate the attention when she was first admitted. The ambulance crew arrived quickly after she had dialled 999 and she was so pleased to see them and really wanted to be taken to hospital then, if only the acute pain she was suffering could be eased. For the first week she hardly noticed her surroundings and had to accept the situation of having to call the nurses for every trip to the toilet. Gradually she became more independent and aware, and was very unhappy with the hospital routines and the familiar way the nurses spoke to her, "Can you turn over for me love" for instance.

Her wish to be at home increased and she began to ask when that could be. For a while there was no definite answer, it all depended on her progress towards a state which the doctor's would judge to be appropriate for a safe discharge. The lack of a definite date quite annoyed her, she was feeling so much better now. But, when the time came for discharge she realised that compared to her life before hospitalisation she may not be so independent, she became anxious and depressed about her future. She was not so steady on her feet, could she fill and carry the kettle, she was uncertain now about how she would manage. Her neighbours were all elderly themselves and could not be asked to help with more strenuous jobs.

She got dressed hours before she needed to and had to sit and wait for the hospital car to arrive. In spite of the hospital staff reassuring her about help that could be offered, this did nothing to alleviate her anxiety. So, on this sunny day she arrived home, her coming home was not the overwhelming experience of joy that she had expected and longed for. The unease and uncertainty in her mind about the future clouded the pleasure of the home coming.

Recover

He had a difficult time, his leg around the knee joint swelled alarmingly, the knee was hot and then cold. Walking became difficult and even to stand when his weight was on the joint was extremely painful. Later in hospital he was constantly given antibiotics via a canula and the introduction of this often caused some discomfort. He lay for many weeks in the bed in the corner of Needham ward and eventually was discharged. To be home with the opportunity of a good night's peaceful rest and the possibility of eating food that he may enjoy was thought to be necessary for recovery, and he did recover.

Gradually with regaining energy he has been investigating via the internet the wide variety of sofas that are available. We are planning to buy some new ones. Navigating the internet for different sizes and prices and delivery charges etc has proved a lengthy operation with no conclusive results, so that we have not chosen any. Perhaps to continue using the old ones and simply recover them may have to be the best option.

Note I have used the word recover with two different meanings!

A mere trifle

These neighbours had been quarrelling for 10 years about the hedge that divided one garden from another. On one side, the Prims and on the other the Ramshackles and this quarrel centred on the state of the privet hedge. At certain times of year it grew very fast and the Prims were quick to trim their side of it then. The Ramshackles let the privet branches grow thick and tall, which, according to the Prims, then deprived their best flower beds and lawn of essential light.

One sunny morning the Prims decided to have lunch in their garden. They laid out the cold meats and salad and a bowl of strawberry dessert on the table under the umbrella. Whilst they were eating the head of Ernie Ramshackle appeared above the hedge and a few moments later the sound of clipping was heard. Donald Prim could not resist shouting "At last, you're cutting it and not before time". "Who are you to tell me when to cut my hedge" Ernie replied. The exchanges became more angry and abusive. Then there was a pause and the Prims were astounded to see Ernie who had made his way to the front of the house and used the side gate to come into their own garden. He walked towards the table in a threatening manner and seized Mavis Prim by the shoulder. Donald rose to protect his wife and picked up the bowl from the table and flung the contents into Ernie's face. There were furious screams of outrage and neighbours alarmed by the sound called the police. Arrests were made and later bail granted before the Court case was arranged. In Donald's defence he was heard to say "It was only a trifle".

St Valentine's Day

It was St Valentine's Day and Joanne was at the breakfast table with her husband Gary. She was anticipating the postman's arrival for she had a special reason this morning. She had sent a Valentine card to him and had taken great care that it should appear to have come from someone else. Joanne had taken the train to the large town to post it so that the postmark would not be a local one. She had chosen the card carefully, it had the biggest red heart and the most sentimental message of any in the shop and it was sold with a pink envelope.

Joanne and Gary had been married for 30 years, their home was comfortable and they had 2 sons, now adults, with wives and families of their own. Joanne had part time work at the local doctor's surgery and enjoyed the classes and concerts of the music group to which she belonged. For many years Joanne and Gary had lived harmoniously together but Joanne had heard rumours recently that

her husband was seen frequently in the company of another woman and had dismissed the rumours. However, she had sent the Valentine card with the intention of watching his re-action to it and perhaps inquiring as to who might have sent it.

The sound of letters flopping through the letter box caused Joanne to leave the table, walk through the hall and pick them up. There it was, the pink envelope was amongst others containing bank statements and requests from charities. Gary opened the pink envelope first and smiled as he read the message. "Who sent this I wonder, it seems as though I'm loved. Perhaps it was you?". Joanne said "I expect that there are many ladies who fancy you". Gary raised his eyebrows in mock surprise "Why do you think that, I'm an ugly old sod, nobody would ever give a second glance at me". "Well, somebody thinks you're worth a card". Joanne watched him. Gary looked more carefully at the card and then said "I'm going to leave you Joanne, I've fallen in love with someone else and I want to spend the rest of my life with her, this card sent by her on St Valentine's day was the signal that she had decided that she was fully committed to being with me and that from tonight we would be together forever. You and I have had many good years but that has finished now and I'm going."

Joanne was stunned and burst into tears, what had she done? There were no other Valentine cards in the post. Gary's lover had not sent any card that confirmed her enduring love or commitment, it was Joanne who had sent the card and had precipitated his dramatic announcement. Who knows what happened next?

Detective Story

Joan was an attractive middle-aged lady who had begun to be resentful of her husband's absence from home. He spent long hours at work, not coming home until late in the evening and often had to make business trips abroad which involved him in spending several nights in hotels. Joan was beginning to be suspicious of his activities, without much evidence, that he was being unfaithful to her. She suspected that he was meeting another woman and his commitment to long hours at work were to cover an amorous affair.

Ken, Joan's husband was not aware of her possible loneliness, he was keen to work hard in his job for the benefit of them both. They have had amicable conversations about Ken's work where he has told her of his love for her and that the nature of his work is such that it demands a lot of his time. Joan however does not entirely believe him and decides to hire a private detective to find out if he is cheating.

While Ken is at work Joan makes an appointment to meet Mr Spicer from Truthspy.com in his shabby office above the greengrocer in town. They negotiate the terms of his employment and agree to meet again as necessary, for him to report on his findings.

Mr Spicer has not had much to report and Joan is getting anxious for some news and visits Mr Spicer several times. She found him an attractive man to talk with about her marriage, he was sympathetic.

One afternoon Ken had a gap in his series of meetings which gave him the chance to go home early. He was surprised to find another car in the drive and even more surprised to find Joan and Mr Spicer in their bed cuddled up together.

Thanks to our nose

Thanks to our nose
We can smell, I suppose

Animals do it better
Their noses are wetter
But we need our noses
To enjoy the roses
The smell of burnt toast
We maybe hate most
Some smells, called a stench
Can really make you blench
We use perfume for our self
There's perfumed cleaners on the shelf
Lemon and pine to freshen our homes
Sea salt and kelp for bathing foams
Breathing and smelling, a natural act
So whiffs and a pong are a matter of fact

Just to be safe, I take it all back

Oliver Pritchett writing in the Daily Telegraph

As a precaution, it has become necessary to recall last week's column. In a few instances it has been found that it was assembled using faulty punctuation and, in certain circumstances, there is a possibility that one or more semicolons could explode. Although this would not be a large explosion, it could set off a chain reaction if it was close to other combustible materials. There is a danger, for example, that it could detonate a nearby family size packet of Rice Krispies.

We have reason to believe that all the commas in that column were harmless, but we are taking nothing for granted. Tests are also being carried out on the hyphens, but the results are not yet known. For the time being, hyphens are being included in the list of "at risk" punctuation marks.

All other sections of last Wednesday's paper are considered safe. It's just the column that is giving experts some cause for concern. If, by any chance, you find that you can still remember what last week's product was about, you should seek assistance in putting it out of your mind. If you actually have it in the house, you should place it in a bucket of water and hand it over to one of the loudspeaker vans touring your area.

There is a possibility that is also contained part of a contaminated batch of the word "the" imported from Holland and normally used in the packet instructions for micro-waving ready-made meals or in leaflets advertising pizza delivery services. In rare cases it can cause an allergic reaction to the Forthcoming marriages section if looked at within four hours of reading the column – or any part of it. Most experts say you would have to be exposed to at least 30 cases of the Dutch origin "the" before suffering any long term ill-effects, but we have decided to err on the side of caution.

Did any of your furniture or your carpet come into contact with last Wednesday's column? Perhaps when you threw it aside in exasperation it came to rest on a mat or chair cover. We have not been able to rule out the presence of a fabric rotting agent which is sometimes used to give added strength to words printed in italics. The agent was widely used in this column before yesterday's EU report on "Unexpected Fabric-Rotting Substances".

As a precaution, you are advised to place all armchairs, sofas and carpets outside the house to avoid the contamination spreading. Make sure that no birds perch on them at any time, as the italic-strengthening agent could have the effect of making them moult. One fly settling on an affected sofa and then entering the food chain could cause all birds within a five-mile radius to go bald. This is not at all likely, but experts cannot rule it out.

People who have developed particularly close bonds with their loose covers are advised to seek counselling.

Rats which were exposed to a sample of “jokes” from last week’s column were found to become less motivated when performing certain tasks, while other rats, restricted to a diet of the leading article and Letters to the Editor, continued to behave quite normally. Scientists say it is too early to draw any firm conclusion from this, but clearly, if you keep pet rats, it would be unwise to use this particular section of last week’s newspaper to line their cage. Also avoid allowing your favorite rat to scamper across it. In the case of mice, the jury is still out.

Keep an eye on other pets and report any unusual behaviour, or moods of listlessness and depression to your vet. It is always wise to make sure that this column is not kept in the same room as tropical fish.

Readership surveys tell us that many people like to shred this column and to chew up the pieces to make small sharp pellets which they then fire at friends, using the casing of a ballpoint pen as a sort of pea-shooter. If you did this last week, or if you were hit by such a pellet, you should seek urgent medical attention. If possible, take the pellet to your nearest hospital outpatient department where they may be able to perform tests on it to discover if it contains one of the cases of the suspect “the” from the Dutch batch.

In the meantime, the best medical advice is : do not chew this column into little pellets if you think you may be pregnant.

Experts say that the rest of the Daily Telegraph is 100 per cent safe and they are “pretty upbeat” about this bit.

Last night I dreamt

That I was in a dark wood, the trees were close together and there was a tangle of briars beneath them. I had to make my way fast through this because behind me was a wild creature, unspecified, whose intentions I somehow knew were to eat me.

The brambles caught on my clothes and as I pushed them away they flicked back across my face and bare arms. I could feel the prickliness of them and their resistance to my progress and also the warm feeling of my bleeding from the scratches. Also now upon me was the presence of the creature, the sound of it crashing through the undergrowth and the feel of its warm breath behind me. Any moment now and I would feel its fangs on my neck or shoulder and that would be the end of me. But somehow the vision faded and I was now miraculously in Somerfields at Saxmundham. I know it was here because I recognised the layout of the aisles and shelving and the position of the checkouts.

I just had to buy a tub of cream cheese, this was imperative, it formed the basis of a recipe that was essential as part of the menu for a party that I was giving for 8 guests. In the recipe book it had to be Philadelphia and no other. Unfortunately it was not to be found on the usual shelf and when I asked the assistant she said that they were expecting their delivery tomorrow.

Panic. I would have to find a substitute so I bought a lump of cheddar cheese instead and rushed home, because of course I had left all the preparation for the cooking of this meal too late. Before I had prepared the vegetables, nothing cut up or peeled the door bell rang. There was the writer’s

group, so good humoured and expectant and I took their coats and ushered them into the living room. But what next, the meal was not ready and I couldn't even find my saucepans or even know the way about my kitchen, which was now not mine but some different kitchen. The cupboards were unfamiliar, the layout was extraordinary, no sink, no cooker, no worktop. Patsy offered to help me and Anne Walton said there was no hurry, Dorothy was anxious about the delay and everybody then simply disappeared.

Next, I was walking in a field amongst a huge car boot sale. There was a bewildering display of objects laid out, some displayed on plastic sheeting, some simply on the grass. I was with John on this occasion and he tried to buy a set of spanners but the swarthy man selling them would not accept his offer, he moved towards John in an aggressive way and knocked him down. I then punched this man and he fell down and I didn't know what to do with these two persons lying on the ground. Pat Dowding then appeared and suggested giving them each a cup of tea. Somehow they then revived and John and I went on to look at the fabulous collections of cast off pottery items, on the grass, for example a little tea cup, with the inscription "a present from Torquay" and a teapot from Poole. This scene now fades and I'm back in the dark woods offering the savage beast who has been hunting me a cup of tea.

The Blue Book

This book has a blue cover and is used by the writing group to hold a record of their meetings and a list of the members who attend each session. Sometimes this book cannot be found it is missing for several weeks and it may be that it has been stolen. The Coalition government is very wary and suspicious of what they see as subversive groups ready to undermine their authority and spread rumours and disaffection among the population. Thus they are keen to detect any sign of inflammatory propaganda that may destroy or ruin the government and a group of writers are considered possible suspects.

The government's suspicions have been aroused for some of their surveillance team have gained access to the Blue Book. From this they have noted that the group are careful to constantly change the location of their meetings and that the book is not kept in one place. The names of those attending each meeting is written down and this list shows that the composition of the group also changes from one meeting to the next. Each person present has the title of their contribution written next to their names. From a report to the security department their agents had observed that it was easy to identify the authors but that the titles must be in code. They knew that this writing group was linked to a parent organisation known as the U3A. This wider network with a nationwide membership meant that all those members would have access to this code and that possible subversive messages could reach millions of people. The Government's suspicions are perhaps a sign of their insecurity but the writing group innocently enjoy the challenge of writing, their cup of tea and a piece of cake, and each other's company.

Conversation between Henry 8th and a marriage guidance councillor

Mary Budgen was waiting for HENRY 8TH to enter one of the antechambers at Hampton Court. She had been escorted there by a footman who warned her that Henry would be late. And he was.

Mary knew some of the ladies in waiting who had recommended her visit by thinking she may be of some help to Henry .

Henry enters the room and sits in an ornate chair. He invites Mary to sit on a stool some distance away.

Henry: What is your name? Why have you come to see me?

Mary : My name is Mary and I have come to offer some advice which Lady Spencer said you would be pleased to have, your majesty.

Henry: Snorts What about?

Mary : It is about the relationship between men and women as husband and wife.

Henry : Come on then.

Mary : It is so important to have a loving trusting bond between them, from that families grow and children of both sexes may be born.

Henry : Do you think I don't know that?

Mary : I am here to guide you into ways that trust and love can be maintained by thoughtfulness and kindness to one another, for instance. Any action that breaks the trust is very damaging to the marital relationship, it sours and disrupts in many cases. It seems that reports of your behaviour come very close to that description.

Henry : Do you think I am listening to any more of this kind of talk – well the answer is “no” this conversation is ended and you may leave the room.

Mary : Thank you your majesty, your incapacity to appreciate other peoples' point of view, your arrogance and intolerance are beyond belief.

Sorry, I forgot

Here is the Creator of the World, he made it in 7 days only, 6 days for the shape and physical features and then the humans he put on it and the 7th day for these people to remember who made them. It is a glorious world he made, full of variety and the possibilities of change. There were forests and oceans, mountains and plains, lakes and deserts, and ice bound lands and humid tropical ones. He made earthquakes to disturb all this and hurricanes and storms, great weather systems that confounded all the plans of the humans he had created. These humans according to a legend were descended from Adam and Eve, they were keen on sex and reproduced amazingly, they populated many areas of the world. Their shape and colour diversified from their origins and many tribes with their own set of values and interests formed, thus creating different cultural identities. They adapted to all the various environments that the Creator had provided for them and began to make things more comfortable for themselves. They ingeniously invented ways to work the minerals in the earth to their advantage, no longer shaping flints but making bronze. Knowledge of their world expanded, the oceans were navigated and the plants and insects and animals around were studied. All this knowledge equipped them to trade in far-away places, for instance, and grow crops to feed themselves. They tried to organise themselves with bartering systems and later with international banking for regulating monetary exchanges. When they could accumulate wealth, they had more time to enjoy their lives, writing books and music, dancing and reading, studying and learning. But amassing knowledge and inventing ways to communicate very rapidly with one another did not mean that there was harmony amongst the humans in his world. There were huge inequalities between nations and always quarrels, warfare and aborted negotiations. Even within nations there were great differences, riots and protests resulted and the best efforts of their governments could not eradicate injustice and poverty.

The Creator of this great mix of misery and delight was content to let his world and its humans muddle on. However, one afternoon whilst sitting comfortably on his sofa and idly playing with the controls on his computer, he pressed the delete key by mistake. “Sorry I forgot” he said aloud, but he had destroyed his world.

Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, as told by the serpent

I am the serpent in this strange story. I am quite beautiful with patterns of lustrous gold scales mixed with brown and blue ones in a changing design to go round my body. I can coil into many shapes and move rapidly.

I am now in a world made by God for I am part of a creation story. In one of these accounts God made the world in 7 days and this was quite an effort for he put lots of things into it. On the first day, for instance he said "let there be light" and he saw that light was good, he then separated light from darkness and called the light day and the darkness night. And there was morning and evening, the first day.

On the second day he created water and sky and on the third he produced vegetation and growing plants that produced seed and trees. Lights in the sky came next a great one to govern the day and a lesser one for the night so that light was separated from darkness. Sea creatures arrived on the fifth day and birds, all with the instruction to multiply. I came on the sixth day along with all the other creepy crawlies and wild animals and livestock plus some green plants for food. On that day he also fashioned mankind in his own image and told them to multiply and to rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.

Adam was created from dust from one account and Eve was made from his rib, to be company for him and to produce children and here we all are in the Garden of Eden.

This is a very pleasant place, lots of fruit trees and streams and we are all enjoying it. Eve was a jolly girl and easy to talk to and laugh with. She would remind me in her teasing way that she was in control of me, God had ordained that in his specification humans would rule over all living creatures. I would coil around a tree branch near her and flick out my tongue at her. That tree was a bit special for it produced what has become known as "forbidden fruit".

It seems that God allowed Adam to till the ground in the garden and eat fruit from all the trees in the garden except this one. I asked Eve why this was, she said because God had made the fruit if eaten to allow those who did to be able to recognise good and evil and therefore be God like and have knowledge. When Eve heard this and saw the fruit was good and that if she ate it she would receive wisdom she did eat, she was for trying anything. It was natural that she gave some to Adam, so that both of them now had some concept of good and evil. Eve recognised that this was a bit of a responsibility for them. They may have to judge their actions in the future and what does she do then, she blames me for suggesting that she ate this fruit and told me that I had deceived her. I laughed as only snakes can and told her that she was simply being greedy in wanting apples and wisdom.

God was furious that he had been disobeyed and started to curse everything. He stirred up bad feeling between me and Eve, we had been getting on so well, and he cursed the ground which Adam gardened so that the soil became infertile and it was difficult to grow food. Only thistles and thorns would grow and then God banished Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden.

I lived on there for quite some years for us serpents live for a long time. So I've heard other accounts than the one I have just described. It seems that God knew that Adam and Eve had disobeyed him by the way that they wanted to cover up their nakedness, they had acquired the knowledge that they were naked. Their nakedness is now thought to represent innocence, that they were oblivious to evil and that Satan used craftiness to take advantage of their innocence. I am thought to represent Satan! God did not make Satan, he was a rebel.

In many subsequent representations of the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve are both shown with wrappings. I've seen some of these pictures and I am often included in them, but never shown as handsome as I really am.

Miss Muffet

I am black and hairy and have 8 legs and I am the spider mentioned in the Nursery Rhyme. As presented in this rhyme I am a fearsome and undesirable creature, and that is a very unsympathetic view of me. It is not even true that I came along to sit beside this small girl, it was she who had come to sit on *my* tuffet. This small grassy mound or hillock was one of my favourite places from which to enjoy the morning sun. On this occasion a human body settled upon it and I had to investigate. The bowl she was holding in her hand was full of some milky substance which I thought may be good to eat. The stupid girl pulled the bowl away and screamed, she got up quickly and began to run, I had no chance to try any of the contents of the bowl.

I have heard that some humans have an irrational fear of us spiders, it seems quite ridiculous to me. We are generally no threat to human health, we do not bite or sting we do not spread disease. Our webs are the most miraculous constructions and even these are swept away, people seem to think that cobwebs in their houses are a disgrace, and a sign of slovenliness. It is true that we come out of hiding suddenly and in an unexpected way and we can run fast, and this may upset humans, but that is just a spider's way of behaving.

Although you may think that I am just an ordinary spider it is known that I was part of Dr Muffet's collection. He was a well-respected entomologist in the 16th Century so I am proud to have been collected by him. He wrote the first scientific catalogue of British Insects and I am mentioned. None of this fame is ever recorded in the rhyme, it is such a misrepresentation of me, an oversimplified and false account of events that somehow has lasted for too many years. This silly rhyme can now be found on the web [www. thus perpetuating and spreading it all over the world](http://www.thusperpetuatingandspreadingitalltheworld.com).

Not coming back

Mabel was an old lady now and lived on her own. She took great pleasure from her garden which surrounded the house and looked forward each year to the new Spring growth. The patch of yellow aconites under the apple tree were the first to flower and the daffodil bulbs would already be pushing up new stems and leaves. After the gloomy winter days the spring sunshine was a delight and the prospect of sitting out on her paved terrace again was one that she savoured. She felt at ease in her garden and forgot the aches and pains that often afflicted her. Whilst there she became optimistic and hopeful and looked forward to the future. She wondered when she would see the little wren that seemed to run, so quick were its movements, amongst the foliage in one of her raised flower beds. It was usually in the early months of each year that she saw it and expected to see it again. This year however she waited and waited, getting more concerned as time went by that it was not coming back. She would miss this delightful reminder of life returning to the garden.

A day in the life of our cat

I am called Zebo, at least that word is heard whenever I appear to them. They, are huge and the most I see of them are two tall stems which maybe called legs. I have come to rely on these creatures for food and shelter and although I have no understanding of the words they use as they bend low to stroke me, I can recognise the welcoming tone of voice. Even if verbal communication is somewhat limited, I am able, in a basic way, to call attention to myself and make them feed me. All I have to do

is to meaiow loudly in their presence and walk towards the kitchen, eventually they will notice me and follow me and open a pouch of food and put it in the bowl for me.

Not every day is the same for me, I enjoy choosing different locations for my long sleeps. But on this particular day, because I have been out hunting, patrolling my territory and just mooching around all night, it was a brilliant moonlit night last night, I am ready for a sleep. It is hard work being so conscious and alive throughout the night. My eyesight is good but even so there are noises to take note of, my ears are constantly twitching and my nose is alert for the myriad scents that are on the ground or in the grass. It's always possible that I may catch a mouse and that is fun. I can really play with these silly creatures. I let them run away for a while but know that I am able then to catch them again and maybe throw them up in the air and as I'm watching them intently, they don't have much chance of living. Some of them are clever though, they do manage to elude me, they seek cover where I can't go and then escape.

Today, early this morning about 5 a.m. I've come into the house, I enter this through my own front door. I have to step up onto the large stone slab and push my way through the glazed panel, which is what they call my "cat flap". I really enjoy the freedom to come and go as I please, when I was living at the Cat Protection accommodation it was very different. I shared a large cage with my sister and we each had cosy beds, a heated space when cold, and there was room for us to walk around, I was on the upper level, she was at ground floor level. It was comfortable and we were well fed, but we couldn't get out. Although I was very frightened when I was first taken from there and dumped into an alien environment, I hid away for many days. I found a route into the back of a drawer, part of a cupboard system so that for a while no one found me. Fortunately the food they put for me enticed me to show myself and after that they encouraged me into all parts of the house and introduced me into freedom [the cat flap]. Since then, I have explored the garden and beyond, they don't know how far I travel, they don't know what I do when I'm not in their company, I like this feeling of independence. But, I also like the double bed with the quilt that is warm and comfortable where I can sleep stretched out and undisturbed for hours. This bed is in the spare room just away from the kitchen and cloakroom and the noises off are reassuring and companionable whenever I wake to stretch and scratch.

I do sometimes seek more immediate human affection, it seems that occasionally I have an urgent need to be stroked and petted. I don't know how this desire has become part of my life but the humans that I live with now are prepared to indulge me. [One of them anyhow]. The initiation for this intimacy is often precipitated by me, I approach the aforementioned human and meow loudly and walk towards the sofa. Usually the human recognises my need and sits down in the middle of the sofa, whereupon I jump onto the sofa and walk backwards and forwards across her lap, she strokes my head and cheeks and I dribble and purr. This seems to be a wonderful relationship until I get tired of this and suddenly walk away.

As an author of this piece I have to tell you that Zebo is the most wonderful beautiful and elegant young black cat. He has lovely yellow eyes and soft black fur. He is for me a constant source of delight but whether I have interpreted his innermost thoughts correctly is debatable.

Love story

Zebo was the name of our black cat. He was named this after John remembered that his mother used to use a grate polish called Zebo Zebrite to make stoves black and shiny. So a black cat with a shiny fur coat became Zebo.

He came to live with us when he was about 18 months old and stayed with us for about 19 years. He was very nervous when he was delivered by the Cat Protection League and hid in some cupboard drawers. He was to stay in this one room for a short while, and often we couldn't see him when we opened the door, but Caroline coaxed him out and he began eating his food

There was a gradual exploration through the kitchen and then into the garden through the cat flap. Negotiating the flap wasn't too difficult for him but we were anxious about what would happen next. We live close to quite a busy road and he might walk too near that, or he may walk for miles and get lost. Fortunately, he stayed in the large garden away from the noisy rushing cars.

We become accustomed to his daily presence and got to know his habits, the preferred sites for his many sleeping hours. He was on the chair under the dining table in the morning, in the rocking chair by the glass door to the garden in the afternoon and on the settee in the evening. In the summer he would head towards a patch of longer grass under one of the shrubs to sleep in, it became known as Zebo's patch.

Before his morning sleep there were some intimate moments when he would jump onto my side of our bed and lie on my stomach. I would be lying on my back and would caress his head and we would gaze at one another and then he often rubbed his nose against mine. It was so endearing. He was often purring on these occasions and without spoiling the event he would then suddenly go off to find his bed.

It is wonderful that without language we and our cat Zebo can form such a special relationship. Perhaps it is because he could not verbally criticise us or is it that we ascribe to him a good natured character, anyway it was so good to have him around, to talk to with endearments and to cuddle and to watch, for he was beautiful.

As an animal Zebo still maintained his hunting instincts and would at certain times in the year kill rabbits. He would then carry his victims home, get them through the cat flap and through the sitting room into our bedroom in order to devour them. Thus, a rabbit body to be cleared away and a messy carpet to be cleaned. I don't think all cats can act on their instincts but he had previously lived in the country, and near us were many rabbit burrows, so that a young rabbit was available and hard to resist.

This account may describe a love story. The long period of time spent living together, expecting to see him in the house and garden, taking his presence for granted and enjoying him, was delightful. When he died, we buried him in his patch and it seemed absolutely right to do so. Some marigold seeds we had planted in his memory grew up around and flowered for several months.

Dear Zebo

Shoelaces

These humble items have the potential for causing immense problems for the human race. Although they serve the practical function of helping to keep the shoes on your feet, they can be lethal. These shoelaces when laced through ready-made eyelets in the shoes are tied to make the shoes fit snugly. However, as often happens, if the laces once become untied, there is trouble, there is immediate danger of tripping over these laces and falling over unexpectedly. The danger is well known for complete strangers in the street can say "your shoelaces are undone", the menace has been understood by all.

Recently, John, my husband, could not undo the shoelace of one of his shoes, it had become knotted. Rather than bend down and carefully unknit the lace he attempted to remove this shoe off by pushing

its heel with the other foot. As a result, he did eventually remove the knotted laced up shoe by prising it off. BUT, he immediately suffered extreme cramp in one of his legs which lasted for many hours. It is unwise to tamper with the power of shoelaces.

I read in a recent obituary of Lord Lichfield that during his life he had suffered from an accident whereby he had fallen from a wall some eighteen feet from the ground whilst trying to help a friend take off his shoes. I'm sure that shoelaces would have been the cause. Whatever was he doing? Was he so delighted that he had unknotted them and had stepped back to admire his handiwork and forgotten the wall, or had he, like John, resorted to the physical pulling off of the shoes in spite of the shoelaces. Possibly, then, the shoelaces, suddenly broke under the strain and as a result he was thrown off balance and over the wall.

Please beware of shoelaces!

New Cooker

1. Measure old one, the one to be replaced
2. Check dimensions of the chosen new one
3. Discover that the old size cooker is no longer manufactured
4. Think about how to fit the new one, a larger space is required in the worktop.
5. Cut worktop and refix supports
6. Discover that there is a waste pipe at the back of the space in which the new cooker is intended to go.
7. Oh dear !
8. Some plumbing work is now necessary to move the obstructing pipe and some shopping for new length of pipe, a lump hammer and a chisel is required.
9. You may wonder whatever is going on here ?
10. The pipe will have to be repositioned and this involves a hole to be made through the exterior cavity wall.
11. The newly bought chisel isn't long enough.
12. Mistake here
13. Shopping for a longer chisel
14. Hole completed and pipe relocated
15. Safe now to order the new cooker, it should fit in the kitchen

This is not the end of the story, further complications may arise with dates, and times of its delivery. Beware of such simple sounding jobs as installing a new cooker!

Utensils

There are some items in our kitchen drawers that have become friends. There is that particular wooden spatula with the end that is slimmer than the others and the special potato masher, the one with the black handle that is always chosen in favour of the red handled one. These utensils have become favourites, perhaps because we have been using them for a long time. Our set of saucepans are fifty years old now and are in constant use. They are copper bottomed stainless steel ones and some were originally bought as seconds. They have endured many abuses, burning contents have blackened them and water has boiled dry in them, but apart from one dent and one missing handle they are in remarkably good shape. In the cupboard also is an enamel teapot, one that belonged to my grandmother, it is decorated in bright swirls of colour, with a black handle and spout, no wonder we like it.

When two out of four of our red cups were broken, it was a sad day. They had been bought to celebrate some occasion and though not always used their shape and colour together with their associations made them extra special.

Many of our utensils do not have such special status, we use them and take them for granted. Some seem to multiply, as in the case of the 13 egg cups that were listed on an inventory when we rented out the house and we have an accumulation of tin openers nestling in a drawer. Other items seem to disappear, there is the sad case of the missing tablespoons, only one is now with us and I hope it stays, for its use is an easy way to measure out cooking ingredients.

It is possible that we have too many cupboards in our kitchen, for utensils that are bought for particular use in the kitchen are often stowed away and seldom used. The special cheese slicer, garlic crusher, and corn cob prongs have lain dormant in the drawer for years. The amazing baking tin for constructing an elaborately shaped flan case with fluted edges rests undisturbed and if we had less space this item would have to go. There is a mixed collection of a few plates and bowls remaining from each of our earlier dinner sets and some odd shaped, difficult to stack dishes, taking up cupboard space. They are being kept in case we suddenly have 40 guests and would then not have sufficient plates for their food, but this is an unlikely event.

Surplus utensils can be homed elsewhere, they can be taken to their ideal resting places, the shelves of a charity shop or on the grass at a car boot sale. There they will be spotted by a keen shopper and bought as a way of supporting a charity or as desirable objects in their own right. Often if a purchase is made, say, for a gift, it is possible that the item will find its way back to the shop and this round of exchange could be repeated.

Utensils has been an intriguing subject, where some humble objects used in everyday life can assume an importance beyond their practical use.

A household object

The item I have chosen is the small kitchen knife which lives in the top drawer of one of our kitchen units. It is the smallest knife in a row of six that nestle together in a wooden knife rack. The blades fit into the slots of the rack and the knives are arranged in order of size from the smallest to the largest, they were bought years ago in a department store in Lowestoft as a reduced item. All of them are of the same family, they all have black handles with a blue wavy insert let into one side. The wavy bit makes them all very comfortable to hold when cutting. On one side of the blade there is lettering which reads Richardsons and Sheffield and also the signature of Gary Rhodes and a silhouette of his head with spikey hair on top. The image is small to fit on to the blades, so there is no detail in his face but the spikey hair is a feature.

The dear little one has been used most. It must have cut up tons of carrots, apples and potatoes and its point is invaluable for poking into cooked meat or vegetables to test for toughness or tenderness. It was a real shock when we came to realise that it was lost. At first we thought that it had simply been put into an unfamiliar place for there had been visitors using the kitchen who could not know that it lived in the top drawer to the right of the cooker. We searched through all other cupboards and shelves and then the waste bin and the refuse bin outside. Perhaps it had been thrown away with its peelings.

We must somehow have resigned ourselves to its loss, another small knife was bought to replace it. A year went by and then the miracle happened. As we were digging out some compost from the wooden enclosure a blade and handle appeared. It was the little knife, still intact, we were overjoyed. It needed some cleaning and the blue wavy part of the handle had to be removed, it had become discoloured and deformed during its stay in the compost heap. The knife was a victim of its own success, all the cutting and peeling it had done made the pile which buried it.

It is such a pleasure to have it restored to its rightful place at one end of the knife rack in the top drawer.

A small black handled kitchen knife

Though I am an inanimate object I am glad to have the chance to express my thoughts about the way I am used and treated.

I came to this house in a box of knives, we were arranged in a row from the smallest [me] to the largest [6 of us]. We all had an autograph by Gary Rhodes and a picture of his head with distinctive hair cut stamped at the base of our blades. He might have been a celebrity chef at the time. I am now in a top drawer, part of the kitchen units.

Some of my larger brothers do not get used so often especially the one with the serrated blade but I am very busy. Sometimes I get used inappropriately, for instance how can I cut up a butternut squash, I am only 7 and a half inches long? She does make bad mistakes for once, I was included in a pile of vegetable peelings which I had just worked on and was taken to the compost container at the far end of the garden. I was abandoned, no one came to look for me and I lay amongst rotting peelings for a year. But the time came for the compost to be used and I was exposed and there was great delight at the sight of me. She was overjoyed. The fancy blue insert on my handle was in bad repair and removed but I was restored to my place in the drawer.

There is always some cooking going on and I am a specialist in removing the eyes of potatoes which the peeler can't manage and I enjoy slicing leeks. It's especially good when I have been sharpened for I feel very powerful then. The toughest onion skin does not daunt me and the thick base of a cauliflower is easy. She likes sprouts, so there is often the job of trimming their bottoms but she doesn't want me now to make a cross on their tops. Goodness knows why?

She is quite old and has difficulty sometimes in remembering where she has laid me on the worktop and potters about looking for me while I am probably lying just in front of her. This sort of behaviour will carry on I expect but it does extend the time it takes to cook anything.

I've enjoyed telling you all this and best wishes from the little kitchen knife.