

**Keep right on
to the end
of
the road,,,**

,,,keep right on round the bend.

Sir Harry Lauder was one of my mother's favourite performers and we had most of his records at home, although, when he sang about 'keeping on round the bend', we didn't then see a potential meaning that now is so obvious. The thrust of the words of the song, the going forward in spite of everything, the taking charge of your life in spite of everything, were an instinctive part of the philosophy of the home. Our parents, my brother and I agree, could not, with the resources at their disposal, have done more for us as children. When we hear or read of the awful things that can happen to kids, even in their own homes, by members of their own families, we look back with gratitude at a childhood where everything was positive, free from abuse (apart, that is, from having a piece of soap pushed up your bum if you were seriously constipated - whatever would Mr. Jung have made of that?)

We were encouraged to achieve our best in everything we did - "Hitch your wagon to a star my son" would say our father. On the wall, hanging below the clock, was a pokerwork motto:

*Life's battles don't always go
To the strongest or fastest man,
But soon or late the man who wins
Is the man who thinks he can.*

While on another wall the 'Maxims of the late King George V' daily exhorted us to a life of high standards and caring for others; sentiments reinforced by regular attendance at Sunday School. And thus, by encouragement, example and osmosis, we adopted our parents' standards. So there was no question but that, by whatever means I had, I would go forward. 'Excelsior' my father had sung - the moving tale of the young alpine traveller - onward and upward! Although I must admit that I wasn't consciously thinking along these lines; my main need at that time, an unexpressed need, for I was living alone, was to have my 'wounds' bound up after treatment with a soothing salve, and compassion and understanding - yes, those especially.

How many Western movies have you seen where the hero finds himself well and truly put through the mincer? He gets pistol-whipped from behind; he has someone's fist elbow deep in his middle; several boots are planted in his anatomy; he is dragged by a rope through rocks and cactus and has umpteen bar-room chairs disintegrated over his head; he finally ends up abandoned in a corner, a dribble of blood at the corner of his mouth. But it's only halfway through the film - surely? Of course, the lovely heroine is suddenly there, or the bar-room girl with a heart of gold, full of compassion, who turning modestly away, lifts a skirt and tears strips from a snowy-white underskirt, and with great tenderness cleans and binds up his wounds. Then before you can say, "Swear in a

posse", he's on his feet and buckling up his gun belt; the rest you know. Mind you, he never marries the bar-room girl - and the men in black hats always get their come-uppance! But there's always that moment of tenderness, compassion, which softens the plot and tugs at the heartstrings.

Off the silver screen the damage and the hurt are real and intense - yes, I've actually done the one where you are unconscious, trapped by flames in a small cabin in the interior of a blazing ship that is in some danger of sinking or drifting onto a hostile shore. I have no idea what brought me round, but consciousness presented its own problems. Whereas, I recollect, there had been *four* of us in that cabin, now I was alone, and, strange, the door was a mass of flames lighting up the eerie orange brown smoke which comes from exploding cordite. But this wasn't part of the plot; what had happened to 'before'? *Before*, we four had been at our Action Stations in the radar cabin; three to operate the radar and me to repair anything which became faulty. *We*, i.e. the British Navy, had been about to exert the right of free passage through an international channel - the Corfu Channel - that was being threatened by the Albanians. The *who*? Earlier in the summer, they had had the temerity to open fire with light weapons on a British cruiser as it passed along this Channel, and such things definitely do *not* go down well in Whitehall.

But this was 1946 - *peacetime* for God's sake! Ah, but the Cold War had begun and the Albanians were working off a different script. *They* said that the ships sailed too close to their territory. But Whitehall doesn't negotiate with a barefoot republic, a bunch of Commies. No: if the buggers dared to open fire - well, we were at Action Stations! 'Nuff said. But the politicians had underestimated the cunning of these Balkan peasants. With the aid of their neighbours, the Yugoslavs, they had laid some mines in a channel that our minesweepers had not long before cleared of wartime mines, and they had got us! One of the magazines and one of the boilers exploded, and many were killed, while many others were burned or scalded.

I must have been made unconscious by the initial explosion that had been just beneath the radar cabin, but on coming round, I was in no state even to guess what had happened. When later I was able to talk to my colleagues, I found that, being nearer the open cabin door, they had caught the power of the successive explosions and been burned and scalded and concussed. In their confused state, they had thought that I was following. All of which was purely academic as I rapidly came to understand my predicament. You don't think, you just *go*. While visual scenes are flash-bulbed on my memory, the physical getting out is/was a blur. I was out on deck, but there was yet another fire blocking the way. The *sea* was on fire as well. I thought I was totally alone, until I looked up and saw the Jimmy and the Bo'sun on an upper walkway - a sight that brought me to my senses. And so I painfully skirted the fire, and made my way aft towards the Sick Bay, not realising how many had been hurt - many much worse than me - and how many had been killed.

More vivid in my memory now than much of what went before, is the recollection of other people's acts of sympathy, of immediate care, which came in spite of the main concern of putting out the fires and stopping the ship from drifting ashore or sinking. The socks that were found and eased over my flayed hands and forearms; the immediate brandy, and later, rum; the hug of a young matelot when the pain was unbearable. Finally the morphine, and a space on the deck, head cushioned on a dead Maltese steward. Then it started to rain.

Evening brought transfer in ships' boats (*please* mind my hands!) to an aircraft carrier in which a friend, David, was serving. More compassion and practical care from him - better attempt at dressings, attention to my face and a bucket held to receive the rum and brandy on their return. Then, next day, taken on board a hospital ship, saying goodbye to my friend whom I didn't meet again for another thirty-seven years, and then in the oddest circumstances.

The hospital ship provides many, many memories. One, thankfully now just a rueful recollection, is of the three-hourly penicillin injections - for two hours you were getting over the discomfort of the last one, then there was an hour to anticipate the *next* - for all of six days (and at night, when you were wakened, desperately trying to remember which cheek of your bum had received the previous one)! The most potent and recalled memory is of the temporary dressings being removed and new ones applied. Sedated I lay, arms immersed in warm saline solution, while the old dressings were being gently teased away. What fills the picture are the faces of the surgeon and nursing sister, one on each side, bright in their working lights, faces that radiated concern, gentleness, tenderness and a *humour* which bound them all together - a total compassion so real that I could have reached out and touched it. Even now, more than fifty years on, if I am feeling bruised by life I can recall their faces and delicate touch, and derive comfort from the memory.

But, in the sequence of my narrative, I have reached 1976, thirty years on almost to the day from when the ship was mined. My life and work have been 'wrecked', devastated, albeit in different ways from when I was at sea, but nevertheless, there is equally the crying need for help and compassion and the gentle touch. Looking back at that time from the vantage point of today, I can see how my need was met; not dramatically, immediately as in the Navy, but imperceptibly like a reservoir being refilled after a drought. The people who met my need were many and varied, and I doubt whether at the time they knew what they were accomplishing - it might even come as a complete surprise to them if ever they should chance to read this. Most helped me by simply being themselves, absorbing me into parts of their lives - or continuing to share what it was that they had that was special, for some had been friends for many years.

Probably the most obvious and direct help came from my then G.P. - if we are still numbering and counting he was about six or seven. I came into his patch when I moved this house, and, as happens in our

slower moving rural lives, friendship developed. Sandy had a more open approach to medicine than many, and we explored widely the possible causes and factors contributing to a depression, and mine in particular, for that is what we still believed ailed me. The first achievement was getting rid of Valium, which we managed surprisingly smoothly, particularly so when one considers the length of time for which I had been taking it. Slowly, almost by stealth, we arrived at a day when I could truly say that I was a drug free zone! Had I known then what I know now, namely that, totally and completely, prescribed drugs and other clinical interventions had been the cause of my trauma and personal tragedy, I would have decked the house with flags and called for a national holiday to celebrate a famous victory. But we took it in our stride, and continued working at the strategy that previously we had only discussed in theory.

We had both come under the influence of Dr. Richard Mackarness and his book *Not All In The Mind*. Mackarness, a psychiatrist, had achieved quite dramatic and well-documented cures in patients with seemingly intractable conditions, and had done so entirely through diet. Specifically, he had identified foods or food additives which, when removed from the diet, had resulted in the immediate improvement and ultimate cure of the individual. (I have deliberately avoided use of *allergy* because I believe that it has developed a blanket and unspecific meaning). Mackarness required a five-day spring water fast. I didn't do this, but adopted a very limited diet of foods which consensus said were those least likely to have any adverse effects. It is my belief that the eliminating and cleansing effect of the limited diet, together with my own natural water supply, and the support of Sandy himself, were the prime reasons why coming off the drugs was so comparatively painless.

Apart from a very short period when events were occurring that I shall relate in sequence, and during a very brief emotional crisis, I have never again taken any drug of any sort.

As is the case with most people, I had grown up eating what was the normal, conventional, accepted diet of our time and situation. It was more a matter of eating what one enjoyed, rather than eating with an analytical mind that sought to ensure that all the natural substances that were needed by the body and brain, were ingested in the quantities and proportions which evolution said were necessary. The germ of thought implanted by Dr. Mackarness' book, and the realisation that diet could so affect behaviour and mood, have both influenced my thinking and dietary practice ever since. I have, or have had, several GPs as friends, and have discussed diet and its influences with them on numerous occasions; they have all agreed that far too little time in their training was allocated to the subject - sixteen hours in a five year course, said one. It was as if diet and nutrition were hived off into someone else's speciality, and that was that. The myth of the 'Balanced British Diet' and its ability to provide all necessary nutrients in correct proportions seems to have held sway. Unfortunately, and for example, the level of vitamin C expected from the BBD was just that which would prevent scurvy; levels far too low, as many authorities now agree. While the intake recommended by Linus

Pauling would overwhelm many people, my own inclination has been to aim more for *his* levels rather than those derived from the mythical BBD. However, I must move on, though I am sure that diet and its influence will appear again.

Sandy and I also conversed widely on topics such as organic gardening and alternative energy sources, and we each in our own way was heading along the path of healthy unadulterated living. Part of my future eating was in one of my fields in the shape of my beef-on-the-bone bullock, Bert - or Berk, as young Toby would have it. Now Toby would gladden anybody's heart. He and Ben were sons of Carole and Des, who had entered my life in my response to an advert for a piano (somehow I seemed to have a surplus). Before I knew it, I was fully absorbed into the family - and, totally unplanned or by conscious intent, received more of the balm that I so desperately needed. But, in that curious way which life has, we became mutually supportive, for my new friends were experiencing a personal disaster following a vicious redundancy.

A wooden pole, by itself, has limited strength and usefulness; however, take *three* poles and make them into a tripod or sheer-legs and you have a combined strength and potential use *greater* than that of the three as individuals. And so it was, as is testified by the inscription on the flyleaf of a bird recognition book that I possess - 'To one prop from two props, with love'.

Two others who were always 'there for me' were Tricci and Peter. Farmers, I had originally met them through my riding activities. To extol them in the manner that they deserve would, I am sure, embarrass them, so what can I say? Two more naturally caring and generous people would be difficult to find, and their home has been a haven on so many occasions. Tricci's profession of physiotherapist in a way completes a circle, for almost daily she gave postural drainage to another of my 'carers'. Val, also my Girl Friday at work, was herself a victim of unjust life. Pneumonia in childhood had left her with one (incomplete) lung and she needed help with its clearance, but yet, with her limited capacity, or *in spite of* her limited capacity, she put more into, and got more out of life than most people with all of their physical resources. Hers was yet another home where, with her parents, I was always trebly welcome. How tragic was her early death.

Take any road from beside my house and in a very short distance, you go down a hill. At the bottom of the hill to the north, the road brings you to the home and workshop of Klaus and Brenda. Klaus is an 'émigré' from the Black Forest area of Germany, and is a wizard with metal - whatever you want he will make it. Brenda comes from a village very near by here and derives great satisfaction from their smallholding, and her Jersey cows, fowls and garden. They both come into their own later as I shall relate, but also at this time there was always a gentle welcome and wide ranging discussion. And then there was Number-One Son, Patrick, who came one Saturday to 'Bob-a-Job'. He worked with such gusto that would put many adults to shame, that immediately I asked his parents if he could become a regular. And so began an

enduring friendship, based initially on our intention to garden, but often devolving into peripatetic philosophy of which Aristotle would have been proud. Patrick normally works all hours now, but when he can spare the time and call, the resulting breadth of discourse is to be marvelled at, and mulled over for several days.

Go down the hill to the west, and you arrive at the cottage where lived someone who gave me so much in unassuming friendship. Bob had, with his smile, given me the freedom of the Parish when I first arrived. A complete book would not do justice to his life, and one of my great regrets is that I never recorded him talking, telling the most wonderful anecdotes of life in this parish where he had always lived. Another home into which I was always welcome and where the 'crack' was always good and fascinating, and where Maggie his wife was always glad to be part of it, in spite of her speech limitations following a stroke (even if she *did* think that I talked posh! - what me, with a Welsh accent?). Bob was probably one of the best friends I have ever had, and from him, by 'infusion', I achieved so much in confidence as to be able to set to work on my house and make it the place that I desired it to be. I had little or no DIY skills, but simply by seeing him at work, and realising that he, in turn, had learned by 'doing', was largely self taught, made me realise that, within reason, I was capable of doing, achieving anything that I chose. From the window beside me, I can see the churchyard where Bob and Maggie lie, though 'Rest in Peace' would be totally inappropriate for Bob, for he just could not stand being idle - knowing him, he has probably re-roofed Heaven and fettled all the down-spouts since he arrived. And wouldn't it be wonderful to think of long-suffering Maggie, released from the crippling effects of her stroke and wandering freely, picking her favourite snowdrops that are so prolific at this moment?

Having said all this, it is quite probable that not much of what was happening inside me was visible to the outside observer, and, from what my friends have implied since, some were beginning to despair a little of my ever regaining full control. Next time you see a chrysalis, why don't you spend a little longer in looking at it, and try to imagine what is happening inside? I doubt whether anyone, not even myself, was aware of my restructuring, and what was about to burst forth. All will be revealed if you are patient, but first please bear with me as I explore some concepts that the process of telling my tale has forced me to consider