

If you have
a
thousand reasons
for
living,,,

If you have a thousand reasons for living,
 if you never feel alone,
 if you wake up wanting to sing,
 if everything speaks to you
 from the stone in the road to the star in the sky,
 from the loitering lizard, to the fish, lord of the sea,
 if you understand the winds, and listen to the silence,
 rejoice, for love walks with you,
 love is your comrade, your brother, your sister!

Dom Helder Camera

Someone who always had my interest at heart once expressed the wish that a magic wand could be waved and somehow everything could be restored to a state of serenity. It was a lovely thought and wish, and at the time I am sure that I fully agreed. Now, having lived for over twenty more years, I am not so sure. Somehow, I think that it would be rather like being lifted to the top of Mount Everest by helicopter - *great* view, but sense of achievement? Not really. For successful climbers, I am sure that the actual climb will figure more in their thoughts than the view from the top. For myself, at the time - the early days of 1980 - I hadn't yet come to terms with my new knowledge and experience, let alone realised that there might be a goal. I had yet to meet anyone who showed in their face that they had seen the 'twin peaks of Mount Meru', and so, basically, I went about the business of regaining my confidence and coping with the reality of living.

Even if I had had my 'visionary's' goal, I doubt whether I would have proclaimed a pilgrimage. Always I have kept my emotions and inner desires and ambitions private except to a limited and close 'few'. Public and ostentatious displays of sentiment, or spiritually inspired emotion, have always embarrassed me, and so I sought not my palm from the Holy Land, nor my *coquille* badge from Santiago. My pilgrimage, if one there has been, has been into myself, exploring myself and my actions with a new vision, and becoming aware of the possibilities and potential that reside in practically everyone. I have always been a Christian - was I not baptised in the chapel-of-ease of the abbey church? Did I not attend regularly at the Sunday School and services of the close-by Calvinistic Methodist church, when we moved to our new home; and did I not become a communicant there and, later, in Glasgow? And did I not then become a Roman Catholic, with full conviction, at the time of my marriage? And then did I not put much into the local church life and belong to the St. Vincent de Paul Society that is charitably working for young people? Having absorbed the tenets and practices of a Christian life with my childhood breath, I had only deviated from them in minor

ways, and yet looking back from the stance of maturity, I wonder and speculate whether I was confusing form with substance. There was obviously not a deep and abiding spirituality, however that may manifest itself, for where had been my resources when I so desperately needed that extra 'something' in hospital in the 'sixties and afterwards?

There were, anyway, new and imperative factors in my life that I would find difficult if not impossible to ignore. Could I put aside, turn away from the new knowledge that I had acquired, and the experiences that had been mine during the previous nine months? Had I wanted to do so, I would have found it impossible; entry had been gained into my mind and into my person, and now the question was to try to maintain control of as much of my thought and function as was humanly possible.

Yet again I have to ask your indulgence over this problem of communication; partly the choice of words with which to describe the indescribable; partly in how to assert my own personal certainty without in any way conveying a sense of 'spiritual superiority', or any form of exclusiveness. There are those who, having gained what they see as enlightenment in one or other of the world's esoteric philosophies, crushingly put down the neophyte with "If you have to ask *that* question, you obviously won't understand the answer!" No, there is nothing of that in me, nor in what I am trying to convey. I, myself, have never been a seeker after hidden truths - if anything, I went along in a sort of humdrum acceptance. I didn't see much future in the sort of analytically religious debates that sometimes went on in one particular naval mess in which I lived - the books of C.S.Lewis were making their appearance at the time and provoked new ideas - and yet, many years later, my friend David said that he had then admired my certainty. Who knows? Maybe I did have a solid belief that I applied in my life. My religion, if I thought about it at all, centred around the way in which I lived it and applied it, as a matter of *practice* rather than endlessly debating it, particularly if that debate was at the expense of another and different denomination or creed.

Possibly that is one of the keys to my way of thinking, to the ways in which I instinctively act, for the practical always seems to prevail - again a component of the intake of my infant breath, for the 'if you want it but can't afford it, you make it yourself' philosophy was around me from the beginning. Thus, in my early years, I wore clothes some of which my mother had made on her machine, or which she had knitted; ate food every bit of which, apart from bread, she had cooked; sat on chairs, or used other furniture, some of which my father had made; listened to a radio that he had constructed - I can still see the coils being wound, smell the solder and flux, see the outdoor aerial being strung between the chimney and a tall mast that he erected. I can still remember the tedium of taking accumulators into him at work where, as an electrician, he put them on charge. (Though there were benefits, for if I went to the works at a convenient time, I could stand above the coke ovens and watch the red hot coke being pushed out, and be smothered in the clouds of steam as the heat was quenched, and long to be the one who had control over

this great big jet of water. Or I could go, preferably at night when it was all so much more dramatic, and watch the blast furnaces being tapped, and see the flow of slag into the huge ladles, and the molten, glowing iron run into its pig moulds.)

This was the father who, outside work, slaved away as the local union branch secretary: who didn't smoke or drink, but instead was able to buy a small car long before they became a common possession; the mother who, with her north-country canny thrift, ensured that we were buying our own house, and also had money to finance an annual holiday, well before holidays with pay became the norm. Within the family from which my father came, there were the beginnings of a parallel innate 'compulsion', for want of a better word; a compulsion to be involved in activities for the benefit of others. Thus my grandfather, who had served and been wounded in the Boer War, had come back from service under Baden Powell and, inspired by him, had founded the first local Boy Scout branch. It was he, who, with my grandmother, had created the first local spiritualist church. They both worked according to their convictions and desire to help others in the early developing new approaches to 'healing' - as also, as I was later to find out, did my Uncle Gwyn. If I wanted to, I could go and watch Gwyn at the local copper works, where he skilfully turned the vibrating sheets of copper as they passed between the rapidly spinning rollers. Or I could watch him and my Aunt Grace in their other life as market gardeners, where the hands that healed had a way with plants also.

It was a family from which I came that, as far as I was aware or can recall, never sought 'preferment', never pulled strings. This has been the way of my life, of self-enrichment in the intellectual sense, of avoiding absolutely any self-seeking, self-advancing 'brotherhood' or whatever, and rejoicing in developing my life as much as I am able by means of my own efforts. How could it be any other way? One hears more and more of 'foetal programming', well, I haven't had much time yet to think about that and its consequences, but certainly there was 'childhood and adolescent programming' in its broadest sense, and for that I am most grateful.

I could not have been kept in closer touch with reality and the practical, than when ultimately I left home, and became a number, C/MX 656045, in the Royal Navy (where I did learn the *negative* preferment of a Welsh accent!). The greatest 'hands on' reality was in my work as a Radar Mechanic, which I have already touched on. The equipment for which I was responsible *had* to work and be kept working by my efforts, and it *had* to be accurate, whether it was 'ranged' electronically, or pragmatically from the harbour at Haifa to the distant Crusader fort at Acre. Without its function, it was useless hunting terrorist infiltrators at night along the Palestinian coast, while it also contributed greatly to the safety of the ship as it 'went about its business in great waters', as the daily Naval prayer has it. I had experienced the reality of German bombs and V2 rockets; had looked *down* from my training establishment, HMS Ganges, onto 'buzz-bombs', as they sped up the estuary of the Stour in

Suffolk. I had faced the reality of Irgun or Stern Gang terrorists in their attempts to put limpet mines on the ship as we lay at anchor in Haifa Bay. I had seen the reality of the destruction of cities and the impact upon their inhabitants, whether in Britain, Valetta, or Naples.

I began to experience a new reality when, following graduation, I began my career at the Windscale Works at Sellafield, for what could be more real than the nuclear weapons, that were the original purpose of the plant? I had no problem with that, for such was the thinking at the time, and nuclear bombs had been seen to bring to a horrible end, an incredibly horrible war. Nevertheless, I was more at ease within my involvement with the peaceful application of nuclear energy at the Calder power plant, even though I had an exceptional reality in my responsibility for its measuring and safety devices. Perhaps the *ultimate* responsibility and reality came on the day on which the Queen opened it, and the world was watching. Because of this very public gaze, it would obviously have been a great embarrassment if the reactor should shut itself down automatically, as the result of failure of any of the safety devices themselves. As many of the devices were new and innovative, it was a possibility that had to be faced. So, a piece of wire was put in place to bypass all of the automatic shut-down circuitry, and, during the Queen's tour and the official opening, I stood ready to snatch off that wire if there had happened to be a genuine operating reason which demanded that the plant should be shut down quickly.

If it is not obvious, what I am trying to demonstrate is that I am not some head-in-the-clouds, ethereal, self-deluding being who is totally out of touch with reality. The converse is by far and away the truth. At a basic level, consider the room in which I am now, and every aspect of its function, in which I can see something from my own hands and mind. It is upstairs and runs at two different levels, north to south through the house. The computer is a bit of an oddity in this setting, but I have grown used to it. At the moment, a bright November sun is streaming in at the far end through a large picture window of my own design. The opening was enlarged by Oliver, whose house I can see nearly half a mile away, now that the trees are bare. Oliver is brilliant at working with the cobble construction of these thick walls. The window was made, installed and glazed by my joiner friend Alec, who has supplied me with much good wood and also contributed his handiwork over recent years, as time has become more valuable to me and I pay to have things done that hitherto I would have done myself. Beside me as I sit, and with a view to the west, is another window, hole courtesy of Oliver, window from Alec, and the distant Irish sea, viewed between three century-old pines, is where I often lift my gaze when short of inspiration. In the same west wall, towards the far end of the room, is another window, this one courtesy of my long dead friend Bob, also a genius with a cobble wall, while immediately on my right is a north facing window that I renewed myself. My gaze through the latter takes me to Lakeland's highest mountain, already with its first winter snow touching the summit. It is a room that is so full of light, and which is so nice just to be in, just to sit

and look out to sea, or south, through some more mature pines to the 'earth-mother' rounded contours of Black Combe.

However, going back to the early days of 1980, which is where my narrative had taken me, the room had more of the feel of a furniture showroom, so uninspired and cluttered it was. That was also the general perception of the house, for at that time, in truth, I still had no specific direction, no particular goal. Overcoming the hollowness left by the events that had caused me to retire from work, and still somewhat disturbed by the culmination of the happenings of the previous nine months, I see myself, in retrospect, rather like Mole in *Wind in the Willows*, as he emerges from his deep winter sleep, blinking at the sun, wary of predators and getting his bearings afresh. Just as Mole had Ratty to 'put some wind in his sails', to buoy him up and show him that there was a huge, undiscovered world, albeit fraught with unimagined dangers, but with exciting new experiences and such *interesting* new friends - just as Mole had all of that, I had - what? I had a new world, the existence of which, in reality, I had never truly sat down and considered as actuality; neither had I thought of the consequences of acknowledging its very existence. I had the parallel, interweaving world of the 'spirit' (Capital 'S' or lower case, you choose yourself, for you *have* to choose yourself, I can only tell you of my own experiences and derived beliefs and practices).

I can only write in the language and context of the contact that I was experiencing, namely the Christian one, but fortunately not the one of entrenched 'theology'. No, it was to be very 'hands on', in more ways than one. How, though, can one enter into something, ask for light if one doesn't know that one *is* blind - blind to so much that is possible once one's 'eyes' of intellect, knowledge and experience are opened? Thus, not knowing that I was blind, I had not stood by the roadside like Bartimeus of old and shouted out loudly "Son of David, help me, have mercy on me". Nor was I struck blind like Saul on the road to Damascus, only to see truly when his vision was restored.

Now, I had actually been on that self same road to Damascus - it seems a lifetime ago - in 1946. With the advent of peace, the Navy was able to resume many of its traditional peacetime practices, and one of these was to lay on transport and visits to whatever was worth seeing, wherever the ship visited. Thus it was that I had been driven along the Grande Corniche road in the South of France, visited the perfume distilleries at Grasse, and Monte Carlo with its palace and casino. When the Fleet was at Naples, I had been to Pompeii; when at Nauplia in Greece, I had seen many antiquities; when in Cyprus for the ship's boilers to be cleaned, I had 'holidayed' under canvas near Famagusta and in the Troodos mountains, and had fished all night in his boat with a local fisherman; later I had swum in the crystal waters off beautiful Skiathos. So what was I doing on the road to Damascus? Well this time we had tied up in Beirut, principally for oil, but there was also time ashore. Time to see such a jewel of a city; untouched by war, and certainly not aware then

of its ultimate devastation during the internecine wars fought around it and along its sweeping boulevards. And so it was that I (who "didn't smoke, drink or go out with dirty women", much to the disgust and total incomprehension of Scouse 'Spud' Murphy, whom I had encountered in a minesweeper on the Clyde) opted for the 'culture' and exploration, and found myself with several mates of similar persuasion in the back of an open truck as we creaked our way inland towards the Beka Valley and ancient Baalbek (or Heliopolis if you prefer the Greek). The road over the Shu'uff mountains was very hairpin-bendy, and very hair-raising in a truck with bald tyres and a body that indisputably had a detached life of its own, as the tailboard hung over a precipitous drop, while we edged and reversed, edged and reversed around any one of the many hair-pins. Up through the clouds, past gangs of men and women breaking stones and restoring parts of the road itself; then over the summit of the pass and the sight below of a road that seemed to vanish as a thread into the floor of the valley beneath. Unforgettable, as with so many other sights along the way - moving walls of straw that turned out to have camels inside them; people harvesting and threshing in ways that were timeless and so much more. But then, there it was, totally insignificant and unexpected, but awesome in its recollection, a simple signpost with the one word *Damascus*>... and in a moment we had passed. The day has many recollections, of Baalbek itself, but especially of friends who were killed at Corfu shortly afterwards - but no, I didn't experience blindness and revelation.

I didn't experience them in 1946, nor yet as 1979 changed to 1980, where I am in my story. Yes, my story. Sometimes when I stop and read what I have written in total, I spend a lot of time reflecting on *why* I am writing, for whom, and wondering whether I am achieving what I set out to do. Remember, I set out to inform and help and *encourage* individuals who are suffering in their minds; who cannot cope with intruding voices and presences; who cannot get anyone, lay or professional, to comprehend or believe what it is they are trying to convey; who suffer the indignity - yes, shout it loud, *the indignity* of constant disbelief; of being treated as a 'syndrome'; of having to submit without choice or understanding to mind altering drugs and 'therapies'. Partially isolated in my tranquil setting, it can be so easy to lose sight of you, or you who are trying to cope and give support to someone who is so difficult to understand and live with, someone whom you loved, still love so dearly, but who is not the same person you once knew. Sometimes as I write, I wonder whether my own reminiscences get in the way of my intention. Part of the reason, an almost instinctive ploy, is that reminiscing helps me to cope with the release of so much that is/was personally painful. If I can show to myself that so much of my life so far, the greatest part indeed, has been happy, formative and positive; that my personal distress and disasters had a cause and eventually a solution; if I can show this to you, then maybe you will derive comfort from the thought that there is a way through your own particular morass, if you can find the right guide or means of support. Acknowledging, however,

that you may have to find the courage to go it alone. For sometimes it is necessary to reclaim an identity from the amorphous categorisations and identity obliterating processes in which you find yourself.

More, and more, and more, life and technology are conspiring to obliterate the individual. It is the information age, we are told. Before long I am sure, people will be desperately seeking the age of the 'person', a living, breathing, walking human, not a web page, totally anonymous, without an identifiable author, devoid of human emotion and contact (except perhaps something 'interactive' and self-degrading). Returning to a point that I was trying to make in an earlier section - I was trying to illustrate how the world of academic, and particularly psychiatric, research is far removed from the individual. No test yet devised can equate the mental distress and problems of one person with those of another individual; nothing can harmonise symptoms and reactions sufficiently to use averaged results for the treatment of all, no matter how strongly it is believed to be so.

Yet here is the statistical 'you'. Another tea break, and switch on 'Westminster' on TV, and what have we got? Mental health questions. Health Minister - "One in four people in the country will develop a mental health problem". What a prospect - and here is the point that I have tried to make in sketch outline, and to which I shall return in detail after I have completed the narration of my own story, - here is the point: I can guarantee that many of the so called mental health problems will have resulted from people being undermined and submerged by all the consequences of modern living - all the man-made and natural influences that I have touched upon, plus stupid diet and lifestyle; the very panic of trying to keep pace with all the 'must have', 'must do' compulsions that skilful marketing ploys thrust at one. Just take, for instance, computing - bigger, better, faster, more memory, this and that software, outmoded today, faster tomorrow. Must have it, must have it; and the kids have to keep up for school (if they aren't already mind-blown, overweight and asthmatic from the intensity of computer games and a computer in the bed-room), and *they* want the latest so they can have street-cred, school-cred. How my heart bleeds for you. If you haven't already fallen victim to the system, you had better take hold of your life or you will become the one in four who does end up as a mental health statistic!

But what chance does the poor, overworked G.P. have to help you as an individual? (He, possibly, is already a mental health statistic *himself!*). He has six or so minutes to analyse and probably prescribe - are you anxious, depressed, how's your sex-life -good indicator (or maybe the media have led you to believe that you must have bells and whistles, multi-orgasms and earth movement every time you perform, and maybe you feel inadequate)? Get your head around all that and try to describe it lucidly, then listen to what he tells you about the side effects of the drugs that you are going to take - *six minutes* - it would take six bloody minutes alone to read out and explain all the side effects of some of today's 'designer' drugs!

But you are at the far end of the chain that began with the original research - harking back to my 'second opinion' interview with Big Wheel, I sometimes wonder whether the reason that he didn't sit during the time that I was with him was that he would not have been able to see me because of the stacks of books ranged around his desk. If the length of time allocated to me is a guide, one wonders how much of the endless research that he has published is based upon direct human contact. I have a very good friend who has a son who is a professor in earth sciences, with many responsibilities world wide for projects initiated or funded by government or international bodies. Bolivia, Bangladesh, Mexico or Marakesh - the postcards arrive - from projects being advised, post-graduate students being supervised. Then there is this advisory body or that conference to attend - (while his mother frets about the effects upon his health that she can observe). He is, in fact, an expert in his field, and is doing a first-rate and very worthwhile job. Yet as he clocks up enormous numbers of air-miles, I am left to wonder in what manner, and from how many levels removed, does he have an impact upon my cretinous dwarf in Bangladesh, who only needed a bit of iodine in his diet. Or on the life of the riverside fisherman, whose fishery and livelihood are being destroyed so that some international conglomerate can build a dam to make electricity for the purpose of smelting aluminium, neither of which will benefit the fisherman (nor will the profit, that belongs to the shareholders). The aluminium will, of course, go to make soft-drink cans to create more health problems in the 'civilised' world! (My friend's son is, in fact, involved with many fundamental and valuable projects, and I don't want the hyperbole of my argument to detract from that.)

Nevertheless, my point is still this: you are, or the one you care for is, the individual at the end of the chain. A *unique* individual. How can anyone study, advise, prescribe unless that individuality is seen and acknowledged at every stage? But who can allocate time in the hectic world of national health, and the often under funded, under-resourced world of mental health, to cater for the needs of the individual? Obviously I am in no position to prescribe for you - wouldn't dare, anyway - but I can continue to do what I have been doing up to now and tell you what happened to me, and how I coped and developed a completely new life, and maybe I can help you to create your own coping strategy.

Possibly the greatest help that I was given came from a family. Not my immediate family; my brother had his own work and family to attend to, while my daughter was developing a career of her own at UMIST in Manchester. So what family? Whether you have a religion or not, it is profitable to look at the brilliant concepts involved in the origins of the Christian one. A family - the Holy Family - so called. A family with which anyone, no matter what their own circumstances, could identify. In this rural area where people stand out as individuals, the concept and working of a family unity can be seen all the time - craftsman father being followed by son or daughter; mother closely involved with the 'family firm', contributing, supporting - and the same in farming. An old-fashioned way of life maybe, but an effective one, and seemingly devoid

of mental problems, if my observations are correct. A family that, in this case, my case, came and absorbed me. I, as I keep on saying, had not been looking for *any* sort of outcome or development. However, as I came to absorb and understand a little of what I was experiencing, and what was opening up to me, the realisation and understanding of some of my personal 'revelations' within the tormenting time around Christmas, began to open my eyes. I am writing with the benefit of more than twenty years' subsequent experience, and the 'smoothing out' of my lack of immediate acceptance and collaboration - itself the product of a wariness that had been derived from those same Christmas experiences. I laugh sometimes at recollections of my own rejections of what I saw as intrusions, interference; but as the further realisation dawned at the time, and I *accepted* what was on offer, life took on a new meaning as I found help and support within a family that I never knew that I had. Just, as I shall relate in a little while, I found in Scotland a human family that I hadn't known existed, and which was to absorb me and make me part of itself.

I have some friends who, some years ago, were expounding their own attitudes to religion, and who came out with a memorable statement, that "Christianity would be all right if it wasn't for *Jesus!*". Jesus was perceived as some sort of wimpish adjunct that could be dispensed with, leaving the rest - a way of life. In some ways, you cannot blame them, for that is often the way religious art has portrayed Him and His family, and the whole of the apostle band. Dramatised with no doubt the best of intentions, but, more often than not, a set of ethereal wimps. I have had no personal visions or revelations on the matter, but recollect this - they were the working people of their day, and I see shepherds and craftsmen virtually every day that I live here. I also remember a fisherman.

I have mentioned already the time when my ship came to be tied up in the little harbour of Famagusta in Cyprus for the regular boiler clean, and watch and watch we had a week's leave. The first part was spent in tents beside a lagoon where the local fishing boats beached. A friend and I had a keen interest in fishing, and indeed had some tackle that we had bought in Malta to fish from the ship's side. But this was the *real* stuff, and we went to see what the form was. We watched and chatted as the long-lines were prepared for that night's fishing, and soon we were invited to go along. Thus it was that in the early evening we went down to the shore with our little packs of NAAFI sandwiches, and were soon afloat. The boat was typically Mediterranean, double ended and rowed facing forward. In the stern deck was a round hole, and in it sat our fisherman friend - yes, his name was Peter, believe it or not - baiting the myriad hooks that hung over the edges of a number of round baskets, each basket containing about half a mile of line. But this wasn't the fisherman who was so memorable; it was the one who rowed. His bare feet on the deck of the open cockpit were spread from years of thrusting at the oars - would ever shoes fit them? - and they were the

roots of a veritable tree that sprang from them, a tree that spread as it rose through huge leg muscles to a torso that would have a sculptor reaching for clay or stone, and upwards to shoulders so broad and to arms that made the stout branches; and all so effortlessly swaying as the oars swung and the boat thrust through the reef and out into the sea. Hardly a wimp.

And shepherds - what wimp would spend his days, made easier admittedly since the advent of the 'quad' bike, going up and down the fell-side tending hundreds of sheep - not now and then, but constantly, day in and day out? Atrocious weather, snow drifts, sheep that seem to be prone to a multitude of ailments - scrapie, louping ill, gid, sturdy, foot rot and maggots, to name but one or two -and predators such as foxes or vagrant dogs. I see them, the sheep that is, being gathered and brought down from the fell-top to be dosed or shorn or tugged or to lamb, returning to the fell between-times. I have, myself, helped at times, at gathering and shearing, and sorting the lambs, male and female, each to a different future, and corralled the tups in my fields as they waited for the autumn 'off' - and been rewarded with huge meals in the family kitchen - "Reach up" is the welcome command. Wimps? No, *real* people. I could go on, drawing examples from my carpenter and metalworking friends, but I hope that I have already made my point.

It has only come to me over the years, this brilliant concept of a family - the Holy Family, so called, - a family with which, and with whom anyone, whatever their rôle or status in life, could identify. Mother, sister, female friend or confidante; brother, exemplar and rôle model - hero, even; and then the father figure, the universal worker, craftsman, home-maker.

So many individuals over the centuries have tried to convey their inner reactions and feelings as they have responded to the realisation of the core message of Christianity. The ecstasies such as Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Julian of Norwich, Hildegard of Bingen, have used language of the deepest love as they have tried to express the inexpressible - the language of the heart and viscera. Heroic was the language of a hero, Edmund Campion, as he uttered his famous 'Brag' from the scaffold at Tyburn as he was imminently, and literally, about to lose his heart and viscera to the executioners' knives. How can one compete if one wants to express one's own inner state? And yet, there is the desire both to shout from the housetops and at the same time to hug one's joy to oneself.

Can you recollect the first time that you were in love? *Really* in love; when you walked on air, unable to believe that this was really *you* that this was happening to? The sheer disbelief that this divine creature could actually love you in return? Recall that desire to go to the steeple top, ring the bells and tell the world "She (he) loves me" - yet at the same time, recall the great desire to hold on to this wonderful secret and, as with a jewel in your hand, contemplate the thought and the revelation just for one's private self, for *surely*, no one had ever been in love quite like you before in the history of time.

Recollect the words of Julian Jaynes that I quoted earlier:

*O, What a world of unseen visions and heard silences, this
insubstantial country of the mind! What ineffable essences,
these touchless rememberings and unshowable reveries!
And the privacy of it all!*

Yes, the privacy of it all. For what is visible of the mental processes and inner core feelings as one goes about the daily doing, of living, of performing the humdrum?

And yes, the humdrum. For revelation does not produce instant everything, like winning a lottery. Life still has to be lived in all its never-ending detail; yet it was through this humdrum side of living that the 'magic' started to appear. There can be little doubt if you have kept in touch with my day to day living through all that I have written, that my home lacked a certain order and deep-down cleanliness. Unlikely though it may seem, this is where I first became aware of what was 'on offer'... If you had been in this room with me now, you would have seen me gaze unseeing for some little time, almost oblivious of the brilliance of the orange of the sunset to my left, and very nearly 'unmanned' as I recollect that time.

In spite of the fact that I had very good friends on whom I could draw whenever I had need; in spite of the fact that I had been shown the wonderful actuality of what having a brother *really meant*; in spite of all that, I was at core so very alone, so deeply lonely, isolated by my experiences and a new knowledge that I was finding difficult to understand myself, let alone to share. And it was a recollection of that loneliness that swept over me now as I drew from my memory - but more than that, for there also came a recollection of a total *spiritual* ambience that began to be generated around me, and the warmth as from a deep and all-pervading friendship - memories that time certainly cannot erase and which are as potent now as they were immediate then.

I think that if one could see at the outset, or in any way catch an inkling of the potential, the reality, the knowledge and available power, one would be so overwhelmed as to be rendered overawed and impotent. And so it was that, little by little, virtually by infusion, the practical results of a new collaboration began to appear within or through me, at a pace and level with which I could cope. It might be assumed that with such strong spiritual association developing, all power would have been drained from the adverse spiritual intruders and that *they* would have been rendered impotent. Had this been so, I would have become totally reliant upon the cocooning and protection and would have learned nothing. I certainly would never have been able to write this account.

No: what I was being given were the *means* by which things could be accomplished, goals could be reached. When, on joining the Navy, I had begun to learn the skills of seamanship and all that that entails, I found that suddenly I was able to tie the most complicated of knots, knots that I had seen in diagram often before, but which had defied

all my efforts of interpretation. Indeed, it is hard to forget the first time that I had a complete and neat Turk's-head at the end of my practice piece of rope; give me a rope now and well over fifty years later I will tie you one with no effort - because I was well taught. Stage by simple stage the knot had developed under the tuition of someone skilled and patient, himself the product of a long tradition of skilled and patient instruction and practice, for the result, the product of the teaching, had to be someone upon whom others could put their trust, and upon whom others might have to rely for their very lives. Even if it was done by rote or by simple mnemonics, or by repeated practice or 'evolutions', it was done, and skilled individuals, part of a greater whole, gradually developed and integrated into a single acting body with a common purpose - the crew, the ship's company. It is unlikely that I shall again have to protect a rope from being chafed, but I know still how to do it, and that I "worm and parcel with the lay, and serve the rope the other way", or that when meeting another ship at sea at night, if it's "green to green or red to red, then perfect safety, go ahead".

Subtly and without fuss my new 'instructors' got to work. It is difficult now to recall that I, then aged fifty-five, should have *needed* instruction in life skills, but when I also recall how undermined and demoralised I was, then my appreciation, even now, is boundless. Although some of this may sound so banal or trite, it wasn't a game that was being played. My mind was very, very vulnerable, as I was, and I was then facing real and exceedingly potent and cunning adversaries.

Take a simple activity such as shopping, involving a round trip of twenty miles to my nearest 'metropolis'. My mind had to be collected positively, and lists and memory pads became the order of the day. In the car, before setting out, I was worked through a 'drill' that was aimed at focussing myself and my faculties. In the town, I had two or three 'stability' points where I knew that I could collect my wits before the next sortie- the library; a friend's men's' outfitters, and so on. Thus, slowly and imperceptibly, my confidence and my horizon both enlarged.

Or returning to the mundane, the domestic, the *cleaning*. Consider the small conservatory attached to the back of the house. The floor had become a depository for all sorts of bits and pieces, items in transit, in or out, with only a narrow 'trodder' enabling me to pass through to the back door. It was a clutter and scrow that I didn't see any more; I simply walked through it. Then, one morning, the 'day dawned', the sun shone, and imperceptibly I was guided. The junk from *this* side all over to *that* side. Scrub the exposed floor. Everything from *that* side over to *this* side, taking the opportunity to 'skop' (lovely northern word, full of meaning) anything that was dispensable. Scrub exposed tiles. Re-examine all items, and continue the 'skopping' process - I learned the importance and joy of a *large* waste bin (essential for skopping). Result: one clean and *usable* conservatory. By extension, the process began to become part of my personal repertory, and the orderliness of domestic work and an understanding and acceptance of its inevitability conspired to remove much of the attendant tedium, making what followed so much

easier and even pleasurable. For the reality of the concept of a 'Holy Family' whom one desired to take up residence and for whom the house, and by extension, one's personal life and thought, must be immaculate, was particularly potent.

It is difficult, virtually impossible without resorting to what could be construed as hyperbole, to describe this developing reality: so please accept that for me this is what was happening. However, just as in most normal families individuals don't live in each other's pockets, but are 'there' for each other, so it became the case then, with the core knowledge that love and support were unquestionably available, and prayer became as normal and acceptable as everyday conversation.

And so it came about that, after about twelve years absence, I began to go to church again. I had thought about it generally at Ash Wednesday; much more actively at Easter; then finally, on a bright Sunday in the spring of 1980, I was there, to a liturgy that had become even more open than the one that I had left, to the voices raised in 'Morning has broken' and, at the (to me) newly instituted exchange of a 'sign of peace', the firm handshake and welcoming look of the man standing next to me. A new communion and a sense of homecoming. Yet, it was not the presence and participation in the Mass that was so important as what was released, what flowed from it all, and what I became involved with as a result. Thence, life began to flow with an increasing force and into several widening channels, although, just as a rope is the sum of its strands, each interdependent, so it was that the total flow of my life became the sum of the seemingly independent channels.

Inevitably, the house became the centre and focus of much of my activity, although it would be tedious for you to have to read through an inventory of everything that was attempted and achieved. I shall confine myself to the developments and achievements that are germane in the rest of my tale, or in the ways that they relate to the flow in the other channels. Essentially, my first moves were triggered by the consideration of the plight of a friend of my daughter, and one of my regular visitors. She had been crippled whilst in a psychiatric hospital. Confined in a first-floor ward, disturbed by the sudden change in her drug regime and wanting 'out', she had chosen the first available route, namely a window that was in process of being repaired. A broken spine, severely damaged feet and legs, left her wheelchair bound, and with limited social outlets. Conscious of the lack of holiday accommodation specifically adapted for disabled people, I began the process of creating on my ground floor, facilities suitable for the ambulant disabled.

Anyone who has become seriously involved in DIY will recognise what I have discovered over the years, namely that it moves on from being a chore, a necessity, and becomes more of a hobby. I need no excuse to buy a new tool or piece of equipment, particularly when I soon realised how life could be eased, and jobs speeded up and completed more professionally, by using the specialist devices, and whereas in the past a lady might buy herself a new hat to give her spirits a lift, I buy a

new tool. I frequently ponder upon the *honesty* of tools. They are inanimate but not soulless. Each is the result of years, centuries even, of pragmatic evolution, and provides a link within one's hand to countless generations of craftsmen long gone. I recently made on my lathe a couple of carvers' mallets, each of subtly different design, but in all respects replicas of a design that was old when the Romans ruled. No one has ever bettered it. How could they, for the mallets sit in one's hand in perfect balance; left or right hand it doesn't matter, and always presenting a correctly angled face to the butt of the chisel or gouge. A masterpiece of simplicity and suitability.

The earliest records relating to my house that I have seen date back to 1715 - annual letting agreements as a small holding - and there can be no doubt that it existed for an unquantifiable time before that. It is of random 'cobble' construction - an outer and inner wall linked by 'throughs' and resulting in walls at least two feet thick. A construction that requires the skill of a 'native' to modify. Fortunately I have had the ready help of two such craftsmen, Bob and Oliver, without whom, over the years, I could not have made progress. Times I have viewed with trepidation the enlarging hole, as cobble after cobble was removed and the remainder subtly propped, then gradually breathed again as the lintel was worked into place, window sides rebuilt and sill constructed - and a wonderful view was opened up and light allowed to stream in.

Internal development has been made even more 'interesting' by virtue of the fact that there never seemed to be a true vertical or horizontal, nor a corner that met at ninety degrees. But I learned, and as my skill and confidence grew, enjoyed the learning and doing. Carpentry, plumbing, central heating, additional wiring, tiling have all come together into a home that affords me much delight, and in which I take immense pride. Purists and fundamentalists will tell you that pride is a sin. Poppycock! Pride in achievement is natural, justifiable and healthy, and not just in one's own successes, for I am equally proud of the accomplishments and association of all who have contributed over the span of twenty years. I have mentioned already Bob and Oliver, whose skills ranged well beyond the manipulation of stone (Oliver is as fine an amateur plantsman as you could wish to meet). Then Klaus, and sons Patrick and Jason, can be seen in different metals, from the beautiful copper hood over my fireplace, to specialist brackets spread through the premises. Alec and son James figure in wood everywhere, in pieces that they have made, or in the raw materials for my own handiwork. The Two Geordies come to life in many places - porch, garage, sunroom, stable, which all rest on the foundations created by the 'heavy gang' - Graham, Andrew, Joe and Ian, who also reside in memory in the paths in the garden and in the structure of ponds. Myles, Jack, Peter, Bill and his grandson, Des, all have a real presence throughout the house and workshop in a variety of artefacts and constructions.

And the ladies; who could ignore or forget the ladies? The results of their skill with needle, paintbrush and trowel are everywhere in house and garden. I hope that I remember to include them all. The two

Jeans, the several Margarets, Annes and Marys; Stephanie, Brenda, Diane, Edna. Not to mention washing and ironing and mending and cleaning, and lots of lovely, lovely grub!

Help also came from anonymous sources, via the mind. Does that sound strange? I write at great length about the adverse spiritual intrusions, but what about the positive? Yes, *what about the positive?* I have written about this new territory of craftsmanship in which I found myself, tackling projects in which I had no previous skill, and working into a construction of heavy granite boulders and thick, iron-hard plaster, or plaster that would not take a fastening. I could have been way out of my depth, and there was a limit to the frequency with which I could call upon Bob. But then it started to come, virtually by direct transference, subliminally, as it were, the *total concept* of a process or mode of construction transferred without 'words', but rather by complete inspiration. But not only the knowledge, the know-how, but the *resolve* and active support to help me to go forward, for many times I was daunted and demoralised. Let me illustrate. I was needing a link unit between two elements in my kitchen, and had constructed something almost in desperation, then went to bed not truly satisfied, aware that I had virtually 'cobbled' something together that would just about do.

I woke early next morning to a feeling that, over time, I began to recognise - the feeling that the right day has dawned, that the tide is flowing, the wind is in the correct quarter, and that nothing will hinder progress. Thus I was encouraged and buoyed up, as I completely dismantled the efforts of the previous night and reappraised the design. Although much more intricate work was involved, I, nevertheless, achieved a much more satisfactory result, aesthetically and functionally, having been given directly into my mind, insight into a mode of construction of which I was not previously aware, and about which I had no other source of information

Advancing with my physical and practical activities were the internal and spiritual, and yes, the *reality* of interactive spiritual beings - you can deny their existence, wish the concept away, but I'm afraid that you are on a loser. Have no doubt about it, such do exist. Take for instance the little shelf above the cooker in my kitchen. I was building in a large electric oven into a previous cupboard space and needed a shelf to link the upper and lower sections. It could not be regular, and would involve a different curve at each end. I drew these out on my chosen piece of wood one evening and took the wood to my bandsaw the next morning. Unfortunately, the tide was not flowing, nor was the wind in the right direction, and I made a bit of a cock-up of the curve at one end. Disheartened I went and had my breakfast and considered the situation. My craftwork prayer focus was St Joseph - he the craftsman and worker, and the ear to which I raised my invocation. I finished my breakfast and washed up, then took my shelf back to the bandsaw and presented the other curve to the blade. Immediately I, myself, was 'locked on', and the wood went through the saw in such a way that even if I had wanted to, I

would never have been able to deviate from the curve. So remarkable was the feeling that even if I had been levitated and propelled out of the house I would not have been surprised, so great was the sensation of being held in a strength and focus that I am afraid defies description. This second curve only required a touch of sandpaper; the other needed a rescue operation with rasps. But there the shelf is, a constant reminder of what is possible.

Not everything was portentous and awe-inspiring, for there were light-hearted events and humour aplenty - take this for instance, as when I had cause to replace the hot water cylinder in my bathroom. When installed, no provision had been made to allow the cylinder to be drained, and there was quite a residue of water that prevented me from completing an awkward lift. So I connected up a pipe that reached to the loo, and then blew into the top of the cylinder in order to displace some water. It was quite a blow, and I paced myself so as not to do myself a mischief. After one such blow, I sat back gasping, when a voice in my head said, "We would love to help you, but we've all run out of puff". Not the most hilarious of jokes, but in the location and circumstances I found myself rolling on the floor in laughter.

On another occasion, I had been following on the radio a serialisation of Fielding's *Tom Jones*. It was broadcast at nine on Sunday evenings, and this particular Sunday was to be the last episode. It was a beautiful evening and I had had a number of friends for meals during the day. I was finishing off, washing up and musing as one does after a very enjoyable occasion, and was completely lost to the world, when suddenly there was *blasted* into my mind the rumbustious 'voice' of Squire Western, - "Zounds Tom - a pox on it!". I managed to keep hold of the dish that I was drying, and came to my senses realising that it was exactly nine o'clock and time for the finale of this radio romp.

I can put no worthwhile time scale on the progress of the work and developments, but I am almost at the ultimate point of completion. For some time I have had a ground floor that is very accessible to anyone in a wheelchair - bedroom with en suite shower (which could be fitted to take a loo), cooking hobs at knee-height for a wheelchair, two accessible loos and a sun room with easy access and paths with gentle slopes. Though, strangely, it has not been the *physically* disabled who have come to take advantage of the facilities, as time will reveal.

After a few weeks of regular church going, I found a sort of pattern developing, although attending either of two available churches required a round trip of twenty miles. On shopping days, if I arranged my timing correctly, I could hear Mass and receive communion on occasional weekday mornings, while at the weekends I decided to return to the church that I had formerly attended. Such is the way in which the liturgy works that the 'vigil', i.e. the evening before a particular day, has the validity of the day itself, and thus attending Mass on a *Saturday* evening was the equivalent of Sunday attendance, which is required of Catholics. This became a regular feature of my weekends and allowed me, having descended from my 'mountain fastness', to follow on with some social

visiting, and at the same time leaving me free to be at home on Sundays when friends were most likely to call.

The sense of 'homecoming' and belonging added greatly to my inner composure and developing strength, and my 'world awareness' began to re-emerge as I took my part in an organisation that reaches to the remotest regions. One could not fail to have been aware of the African tragedy, as famine killed millions. Not having a lot to be able to give to charity, I wanted what I gave to make its mark without loss to any administrative costs, and so I chose to join an organisation called *The Little Way Association*, which guarantees that every penny will make its way to the needy through a network of missionary priests and nuns. I also participated at home in the regular prayer activity aimed at supporting these front-line people and their works. This was fine up to a point, but the far-flung individuals remained as shadowy figures working in the remote desert or bush. I needed a face, a focus. Such a face came via a photograph in the *Catholic Herald*, which I had started to take again.

The face was that of a nun, a 'Missionary Sister of Our Lady of Africa', a so-called White Sister - they and the White Fathers used formerly to wear a white Arab-style burnous to identify themselves with the local populace in Algeria and North Africa where they first operated - and thus they got their name. Joy was then an assistant chaplain at Liverpool University, and I wrote to tell her of her new role as my 'focus'. She replied, and sent me details of some prayer events and retreats that were scheduled at 'St. Beuno's', the Jesuit College in North Wales, one time home of priest and poet Gerald Manley Hopkins. In particular, she had circled and recommended a weekend in February (1981), and thence I went. This was an entirely new venture for me, as was the setting; and new was the contact with a young Jesuit priest, recently returned from a part of his training in Japan, at the Jesuit University there.

He brought to us concepts of stillness, breathing, sitting, meditation, derived from Eastern, and particularly Zen Buddhist, traditions, for part of the remit of this University is the promotion of dialogue and understanding with Zen Buddhism. I also, for the first time, became aware of the spiritual ambience of a place, a group of people, for the place had focused many years of prayer, while in the group there were a number of nuns of teaching orders taking their half-term break, and nuns are not strangers to prayer. Practically, I brought away the design of a simple meditation stool, a virtual bridge across the ankles that enables one to kneel/sit effortlessly and comfortably for long periods.

Much flowed from that encounter with Joy. She, additionally, had a job as an 'outreach' worker at a school in Liverpool's deprived Toxteth district, and, amongst other things, she asked me to pray for these needy children. Prayer, for me, is a call to action, and so I asked what I, personally, could do. Reply there came: the children needed holidays. And so it was that the house began to find its purpose, and the combined forces of the Seascale churches kicked into action. A group of ladies, the Co-workers of Mother Teresa, were the first to answer the call, and a posse descended on the house with besoms, mops and polish. Jack

came with wife Edna and helped me to lay some new carpet on the stairs, that I hadn't yet got round to. Fresh curtains appeared; bunk beds were donated by a local hotel; towels and sheets, crockery and a *large* cooking pot arrived courtesy of a local Spastic Society school that was closing, as did some extra kitchen chairs. And the *large* cooking pot would definitely be needed, for, whereas the first contingent was going to be West Indian lady, Jenny and her five children, it was now also going to include her friend Carol plus her son. Good old Val, who twisted arms at a local bedding manufacturer and obtained additional duvets and sheets. And so we were ready, and with extra transport as the train rolled in, and out poured a seeming host of black faces as Peter, Alicia, Nicola, Darren, Sonia and Wayne descended to the inevitable Cumbrian rain - it was spring bank-holiday week.

A book would be necessary to relate the mixed activities and emotions of that first encounter, and all that followed in the subsequent summer holiday as Little Ground became fully booked for the season. Evenings in that first week provided a memorable picture as the area around the fireplace filled with a variety of sitting, lying, wrestling bodies, while to one side hair was being teased into tight, tiny plaits. I soon found myself whittling knitting needles and huge crochet hooks from dowel to occupy idle hands, and looking around, I saw my mini harem, but without the sultan's privileges! We alternated the catering, and the large cooking pot did full service, although its walls were fully proof tested by the force of cayenne pepper and chillies, as chicken or sea-fresh fish were absorbed into its interior, emerging as highly charged but superb meals.

The summer holiday filled a much greater need for these and other children, for it was in the intervening months that the infamous Toxteth riots occurred, and while the visitors weren't actually traumatised, they were all glad to be removed from that violent atmosphere for a while. Jenny and her gang returned for a fortnight, when they found a much wider range of activities as the sea became warmer and the shore beckoned, and beckoning also were the ponies of my neighbours' daughters. Next to arrive were Elizabeth and her mother, who immediately found a place in my life, where Mum stayed until her unfortunate early death, and where Liz now remains, a science teacher, married with three young children. They also came twice, once by design and the second time to fill a gap created by the early departure of a family - mother (plus her sister) and six youngsters all under eight. They were overwhelmed by the open space and silence, and having come on a Saturday, vanished on the Monday. The immediate gap was filled by two delightful girls, their mother and an unpleasant, and basically unwelcome partner, whom I hadn't bargained for. The girls were left mainly to my charge as mother and mate went around pursuing his activity of trying to wheedle antiques out of unsuspecting country folk. I later had police enquiries about him and his local escapades, and also heard about his imprisonment for GBH. Interesting times!

Once one opens one's door to life and its huge diversity, it seems impossible to stem the flood of so much that is new and exciting, and, well, *interesting*. I recall one particular day on which I heard a Radio 4 broadcast that effected a major change in my life - as if there hadn't been enough already. But, as the Bard correctly says, "There is a tide in the affairs of men which, if taken at the flood...". My tide was certainly flooding, but was it I who was allowing the flow to increase by continually opening the sluice gates myself? The broadcast centred on a man who was to have a significant role in my subsequent life, and continues to have even after his untimely death. I refer to Bruce Macmanaway. A former Major in the army, he had, as a subaltern during the Dunkirk retreat, been inspired to 'lay his hands' on wounded men, resulting in bleeding being arrested and pain eased. He went on, both during his career in the army and subsequently, to become a renowned practical and very effective Healer and teacher, who influenced *many* people, as I was to find out in the years immediately following,

I still have a tape of that broadcast, and revisit it and the two key elements that stood out to me at first hearing. The first was that Bruce described quite openly the use of a pendulum, and his own use of one in diagnosis. It made me quite concerned, because I was so very fresh from my own pendulum adventures, and concerned because he included no reference to the unwise uses of pendulums, or the possibility of unwelcome intrusions. The second element, which jolted me and my life, was his description and use of 'hands on' healing. No great hype; just matter of fact acceptance and practice. Now it so happened that a number of individuals had responded to the touch of my hands in a way that had been puzzling me. I had learned and freely gave gentle massage to anyone who would 'submit' as I improved my skills. People reacted to my touch in ways that suggested that there was more coming out of my hands than I was consciously putting in.

So I wrote concerning these two matters, and received a reply that said that after forty years practice he was truly aware of the first, and that also included details of courses that he was about to run, courses which, he assured me, would give me some answers to the second. The courses that year were to be at two centres, the one at his home (and teaching and healing centre) at Strathmiglo in Fife, and the other at an hotel in Mickleton in Warwickshire. I opted for the latter, for a plan was forming in my mind. The first part of the plan was to travel via a place in Carmarthenshire where I could buy some first-class leather to feed my burgeoning hobby of leatherwork, and then to stay a few days in my hometown of Port Talbot, where I planned to visit my remaining relatives who had formerly been involved in healing work. Remember, I had shied away from any contact with this aspect of the family's activities, being embarrassed by the whole involvement and concept. Now I was curious.

I had arranged to stay at the home of 'the girl next door' and her husband, who still lived in the family home, my last visit having been when my father lay dying in a nearby cottage hospital. I soon went to call upon Aunt Grace and Uncle Gwyn. Only Gwyn was at home together with

my cousin Eleanor. We chatted a while and it emerged that he had withdrawn from his mediumship and healing work because his breathing was becoming limited following years of exposure to all the fumes of copper and other working. But, surprisingly, he was soon showing signs of 'activity', and then lapsed into a trance. Gwyn had two of what are generally called 'guides', and who, almost inevitably, seem to be North American Indians and Chinese. Thus the two, Great Heart and Xiang, began to speak through him. There were initially domestic comments about the health and general well being of Gwyn and Eleanor, and some remarks to me and what I was embarking on. Then, as I was waiting to see or hear what next would transpire, my cousin gave a gasp and an exclamation - "It's Uncle Tom!" Now Tom had been my father, and as Gwyn stood up his whole demeanour, stance, and walk as he came over towards me were indeed those of my father. I stood and met him, and the hugs and emotion were immense. Then he took my hands, which were so hot that they were almost steaming, and held them towards Eleanor saying, "Look at the power, look at the power".

I cannot remember how we parted, and though the next day produced another domestic 'séance' with Grace being present, nothing as dramatic and so personal emerged. However, I felt that I had received the family accolade, and travelled east two or three days later, to my destiny!

The Macmanaway course assembled in an hotel run by a group of people united in a form of religious association, and which was in a delightful setting. Bruce and his wife Patricia led us, and talked to us on a variety of topics. Principally, we were shown Bruce's techniques of using a pendulum to dowse for trapped nerves within the spine, and for other structural abnormalities, and then we learned basic manipulation methods for their release. We started the day with yoga, which was skilfully led by Patricia, ate superb food, and mixed with each other in a close association of like minded and spiritually committed people. So close was the bonding that one evening when Bruce, in the middle of a manipulation, made a throw-away remark, slightly inappropriately, we were all conscious of a cold 'stab' that went through each of us in a remarkable way, sufficiently for a number of us to exchange comments afterwards. There were undoubtedly areas of disagreement and dispute, such as Bruce's propagation of the 'mystical' ley-line concepts, but for the rest, the whole week was inspirational.

Undoubtedly I learned many things, one of which was that in a skilled led meditation it was possible for one's own mind to enter a trance-like state. I only allowed this to happen once, and kept my own awareness thereafter, for I was determined, following my own experiences of the previous eighteen months, not to relinquish control again. I had a long conversation with Bruce about these past happenings, and one also with Patricia, out of which came some good advice, and an agreement that I could go and stay and *learn* and gain experience at Strathmiglo in the near future. A rewarding and genuinely mind opening week, and the beginning of so much more.

Returning towards home, I detoured via Liverpool, staying for a few nights at the White Sisters' house there, and to where Jenny and her brood and a number of their cronies came to give me a party, ending in a West Indian knees-up, or 'merry neet', as in Cumbria. Also to this house there came two nuns, sisters from the Mother Teresa missionary organisation. They had got wind of my presence, and came to ask whether a day visit to my church in Seascale could be arranged for a number of their down and outs. They could provide the coaches, could we, i.e. the church, arrange the rest? And so I came back with a project to put to our small congregation. Instant consternation, then realisation, as ideas came forth and a combined churches task force swung into action. It had to be on a Wednesday when the many alcoholics would be all spent up, and there would be no truants to the nearest pub. Food was planned, extra cooking organised, the hall booked, sightseeing planned and entertainment by the 'Evergreens' laid on. Apart from a major delay because the coaches took the longest route to travel, everything went as planned, and another organisational milestone was passed as the sisters and postulants marshalled their charges, did a head count and vanished into the night.

What a year for new faces, and how easy they can be recalled - Joy, Jenny, Carol and all the kids; the Macmanaways and many on the course; Sisters Jose-Ann from India and Aurore from France; and many faces in the two church congregations and in the prayer group to which I now belonged. As time went on, I saw more of Jack and Edna and a strong friendship developed, and their roadside home became a frequent and convenient stopping and 'watering' place. It was in their lounge that another face came into focus. Judith. In a photograph. Their elder daughter, she had died of leukaemia a few years earlier, leaving a husband and two young children, and in the picture she was in profile, looking into the cot at her baby as only a mother can. Every time that I passed the photograph, as I did on entering and leaving the room, I felt a pang at the poignancy of it, and yet felt the warmth of this lovely view of motherhood.

Gradually, over a period, I began to sense Judith's presence in an indescribable way. Not as a wraith, ghost or physical presence, yet certainly full of obstreperous 'life'. I do not like messages from 'beyond the grave'. I do not seek them, and resist any that are apparently there, until I have tested and re-tested. But increasingly it kept coming into my mind that Judith was happy, and that I must tell her mother it was so. For some time, several weeks possibly, I resisted, for how do you broach such a subject? Then one Saturday evening, I called on my way to church, to give Edna a lift to join Jack who was umpiring a cricket match. As I was passing the photograph on my way out of the house to go to the car, I felt such a thump in the middle of my back between the shoulder blades, and 'heard' the command that was intensely strong in my mind - "Tell her now. *Tell her now*". During the short journey that followed, somehow I managed to find the words, and was so relieved when I had done so, for Edna's joy was boundless. She had fretted inside since

Judith's death, conscious of her (Judith's) loss and potential for unhappiness, and to learn now that she was indeed happy so gladdened Edna that, she told me later, she walked on air for days afterwards. She also confirmed that Judith had been so full of life, but also was so definitely *obstreperous!*

It was about this time that the 'Africa connection' began to develop and expand. "Could you" wrote Joy, "manage to send copies of the *Catholic Herald* and *Observer* to a friend in Uganda?" How could one refuse, and weekly I rolled newspapers to send to Marie, and began a very long and enthralling correspondence and association. There were four White Sisters staffing and running a dispensary in the bush some distance to the southwest of Kampala, a dispensary that had been a hospital until Idi Amin had wreaked destruction on his own land. It was functioning again, fulfilling a vast local need and stretching meagre resources beyond limit. Regular probing produced for me an appalling picture of shortages and lack of funds, and of a national economy so completely devastated by Amin's depredations. So affected was I, and disappointed at my own inability to do much financially, that I used to look begrudgingly even at the tin of cat food that I dispensed daily to my two moggies. Fortunately, one could be returned to its former home where the family generated enough waste food to feed it, while sadly the other fell victim to one of the occasional car rallies that like to use the narrow winding roads of my neighbourhood.

As soon as I was able, I covenanted the cost of my one daily, medium sized tin of cat food for the benefit of Marie's dispensary where, and it still amazes me to recall, it paid the wages of *two local nurses and a midwife!* Even now, after twenty years, I cringe at the sight of the stacked super-market shelves of pet food.

Much developed from this contact with Marie, some of which will emerge as my narrative continues, but I must move on as the flow in the other channels gathers force. However, before I leave Africa temporarily I must tell you about George. Once the doors of awareness of need and suffering are opened, it is impossible to close them again, and one would indeed be hard hearted even to try. George brought into my ken a swarm of blind children who needed people to write to them. He was actually in Kenya. A Scot, he had lived in East Africa since the end of World War 2, and now, after a number of traumatic events resulting from the Amin regime, resided in a school for blind children for whom he wrote letters, sought contacts and read replies. So it was that I began to write to Mary, Ruth and Respe. I had been fortunate in acquiring a decent type-writer, courtesy of Edna, which had revolutionised my then letter writing almost as much as my PC has done in recent times, otherwise I could not have managed this burgeoning correspondence.

I still have the letters written in George's tiny hand, and some of the copies of my replies, which I retained to be able to keep track of the three individuals and George himself. Character and life story began to emerge, and how one wished one could do more. Mary was completely

sightless from river blindness; Ruth still had vestigial sight and went on to the high school at Thika (of *Flame Trees* fame). And Respe, who could not weep for Respe? Let anyone try to tell me that *real evil* does not exist! Respe at twelve, a strong healthy girl, was raped, and so that she could not recognise him, her assailant gouged out her eyes.

After some time had passed, the letters via George ceased. On enquiring, I found that the staffing policy of this Salvation Army run school had changed to employ solely local people, and that George, who had also succumbed to malaria, had left for England. Surprisingly, and after much phoning and detective work, I tracked him down to a hospital not twenty miles from my home; and so we met. Gradually, as he recovered from the stroke that had put him into hospital, his story emerged - far too intricate to relate, even in synopsis. However, it was an inspiring story that fired many to emulate his dedication to the needy of Africa, and each time I visited him, beside his bed would be at least one nurse or therapist listening, and being inspired to take up voluntary service overseas.

George went later to a Salvation Army retirement home in Bath, where he eventually died. But he left me a sort of legacy. Divorced, George had married a Ugandan lady with whom he lived in Kampala until the uprisings and civil war, during which his wife had been killed and, beaten and injured himself, he had moved to Malawi, losing touch with his daughter Doris and stepdaughter Kate. I had written for him to Kate, now tracked down at University in Kenya, but heard nothing. The letter must have had a long gestation period, for nearly ten years later I received a letter from Doris. She was in London, to where she had come earlier as a refugee. Kate had remembered my original letter, and so I found myself involved in yet two more lives, as I wrote to an uncaring bureaucracy to support Doris' attempts to get a British passport on the strength of her parentage. Kate, meanwhile, has worked for a Master's degree in Kenya, but, like many single African girls, is facing a life of chosen celibacy because of the prevalence of AIDS in a country of male promiscuity.

However, I have gone ahead of myself, so let us return to the spring of 1982 and my journey north to the Kingdom of Fife, where.....