

Chapter 10 – Early Retirement

(1996 to 2003)

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(7th April 2014 – Penang)

Our World Rocked

1996 started well but ended terribly. I suppose the nest was really only half empty, Anna being away at Leicester University on her astrophysics degree course, whilst Polly was still at home knuckling down, studying for her 'O' Levels to be taken in May. I did do a little of home tuition with Polly on the subjects she was having a little difficulty with such as mathematics. I also became her artisan, helping her prepare her artwork, driving her to locations for photograph sessions, setting up art installations in the garden at The Maltings – wooden cubes hanging in trees, that sort of thing. Polly has a natural talent for artful creations of any kind, from oil painting to photography. Check out her website at www.pollywhitworth.com for proof positive. This was never more evident than when she came to set up her exhibition stand at St. Dom's in preparation for the external examiners' visit to assess the 'O' level course work. Polly's work was clearly 'fine art' in comparison to the work of her peers, which was all 'craft art'. Whilst Polly's paintings were abstract, her fellow students had painted pictorial or cartoony images. I still have some of Polly's paintings, the ones I managed to rescue from being over painted by her after the exhibition was over.

After the stress of the 'O' level exams, we decided to take a short driving holiday to Normandy in France for some sun and beach time. As the trip was a last-minute idea, we did not have time to pre-book any accommodation ahead of time. That was a big mistake in France in August. Every French family heads for the coast, filling up hotels and inns. For the week we were in Normandy, we spent most days agonising over where we could lay down our heads at night. The day the 'O' levels results came out, we were still in France and we rang St. Dom's from a telephone box to enquire after Polly's results. The result that pleased Polly the most and had her jumping for joy was the A** in art. A well-deserved A** I have to say. Polly started on an art course at Stafford College that September.

Jenny was slated for a University trip to Sri Lanka in the autumn of 1996 and as part of her preparations to visit a tropical climate, she went to the local surgery for a couple of precautionary injections against a couple of tropical diseases. The nurse doing the injections casually asked Jenny when she had last had a mammogram. It had been a while and so the nurse gave Jenny a quick breast inspection only to find a lump under her right nipple, which to cut a long story short, turned out to be a very aggressive cancer. Within three weeks Jenny was in surgery to have a full mastectomy and the lymph nodes removed from her right arm pit as a precautionary measure, as the surgeon thought the cancer might have already spread there. The operation was immediately followed by a course of chemotherapy, but this it was only the beginning of Jenny's tribulations. Following the course of chemo, a review of her progress found that she still had active cancer cells in her breast cavity. The upshot was that she needed a follow up operation and a six-week course

of radiation treatment which on top of the chemotherapy, really knocked Jenny for six. The whole process from the initial diagnose of breast cancer to the end of the radiation treatment took three long months.

This rocked our world, as no doubt you can imagine, from life going on sedately and predictably, to chaos and uncertainty in such a short time. To take a break from everything, during the Easter holidays in 1997 Jenny and I went away for a week to stayed at the 5 Star Portmerion Hotel in Portmerion Village on Wales's north west coast. Hotels were not our usually form of holiday accommodation, camping being more our scene, particularly when the girls were younger. So, a week's break in a very posh, exclusive place was just what the doctor ordered, and we enjoyed it to the max, eating well, taking time out and doing nothing in particular.

Jenny was not fit enough to return to work fulltime at the University until the start of the next academic year and even then, there was something not quite right with her, particularly with her memory. I did question the consultants at a follow up visit to the hospital for her check-ups, but they all reassured me that Jenny's memory loss could not be attributed to the post-operative cancer treatments she had received. In the beginning, I put this memory loss down to the onset of Jenny menopause, which had started around springtime 1996. But over the following twelve months I noticed Jenny's cognitive abilities started to wane too, to the extent that I had to persuade her to stop driving. She also started to exhibit repetitive behaviour, saying exactly the same thing every time we passed a garage or a house as we drove into work.

At the end of 1997 I decided we needed to take a break from our homework, work-home routine, including Polly who was also witness to her mum's decline. And so, Christmas of that year saw the three of us taking a three-week holiday in South East Asia.

(8th April 2014 – Penang)

Back to South East Asia

I decided that money was to be no object for this SEA trip. And the fact that I could make that decision serves to illustrate how much Jenny had changed over the last couple of years. With hindsight, a wonderful thing, Jenny's personality had started to change soon after she was awarded her doctorate back in 1992. Jenny had always managed the family finances but in 1992 or there about she started to mess up our monies to the extent that I had to take over the banking and food shopping and basically run the household. At the time I put this down to overwork, as she was doing a full-time job at the University as well as spending most evenings and weekends researching for her doctoral thesis. In the past, for a holiday like this, Jenny would have been searching out the best deals for the flights and hotels and enjoying the challenge. These days she was increasingly letting me do things without even a murmur, which was not normal for her. Her personality had changed.

Because I had left it to the last minute to arrange this holiday, and it being over the Christmas period, the only flights I could get to Singapore was with Cathay Pacific from Manchester via Amsterdam and Hong Kong, a bit of a phaff but it had to be. Hong Kong had just been 'handed back' to China in 1997 and I thought it would be interesting to spend a couple or three days there to see how the place was adapting to the new authorities. Ours was one of the last flights into the old airport, a new one was about to open on a manmade island some 45 km from the centre of Hong Kong. This old airport was practically in the middle of Hong Kong and the landing was as exciting as it had been billed. I swear you could see people in their high-rise apartments cooking their dinner as the plane sped past their windows. Very close.

The only thing of note in Hong Kong was the number of policemen and women patrolling the streets at all times of the day and night, as though the new Hong Kong authorities were expecting some trouble from the Hong Kongers. For a day trip away from the city we took a high-speed catamaran to Macau, an old Portuguese colony just down the coast from Hong Kong. Macau was still a quiet place back then but there were signs of the development to come. Macau is now a touristy destination for gamblers, a mini Las Vegas. Of all places to find miniatures, I found a dinner table and chairs set with inlaid mother of pearl flower motifs in a small back street shop. I still have this set in my collection of miniature. I did like Hong Kong, despite its hustle and bustle, at least you can look up and see hills around the city, which give you a sense of space.

From Hong Kong we next moved on to Kuala Lumpur for a few days to meet up with another ex-colleague of Jenny's but this time from Staffordshire University, Chris. After KL, we flew for a week's stay in Penang over the New Year 1997/1998. There was only one hotel to stay in, of course, the Bayview Beach Hotel in Batu Ferringhi, although by now it had been renamed the Bayview Beach Resort, with a new multi storey structure on what had been the grounds of the original homely hotel. I hired a car at Penang airport on arrival, but we did not use it much as we spent most of our time in Penang lounging about the hotel and on the beach. At the New Year's Eve party in the hotel Polly attracted the attention of a very shady looking Russian chap, who was accompanied by a what looked like a couple of bodyguards. He sent over an unsolicited bottle of cheap bubbly wine to our table, giving Polly and me a little cause for concern as to where this was going. However, fortunately, his wandering eye soon caught the sight of the two Japanese girls on an adjoining table and he backed off, much to mine and Polly's relief.

And so on to Singapore, where we were to meet up with colleagues of old from our time in the city in the early 1980s including, Philip Tan, Mui Hua, David Chan amongst others. Also, back in Singapore was Peter Creamer, now working at Temasek Polytechnic. It was he who arranged for us to stay at the newly opening Traders Hotel by the side of the Singapore River, having secured a good deal for our stay through a mutual friend. Polly did not seem

too enamoured of our return to the Lion City, going to see the recently released the film Titanic three times as she did during our one-week stay.

We returned to the UK via KL, Hong Kong and Amsterdam. Once we had landed in Amsterdam, Cathay Pacific effectively kicked the onward bound passengers for Manchester, about 20 of us, off the plane and expected us to arrange our own way back to Manchester. For this, I will never fly with that airline again. It was only the intervention of a fellow stranded passenger phoning a friend in Hong Kong, who happened to work for Cathay Pacific as a manager, that the airline staff in Amsterdam did anything about getting us all home. What arse holes.

Alzheimer's Disease

Over the twelve months of 1998, Jenny's cognitive ability steadily deteriorated, to point where it began. to be noticed by her students. After our return to work at the University following the Christmas 1998 holiday, Jenny's line manager called me over to his office and showed me a letter of complaint about Jenny's lecturing. She was not making any sense. I was reminded of Iris Murdock, the authoress and philosopher whose dementia was first brought to the public's attention in a similar way by an incoherent lecture she delivered to some university students during a speaking tour in Israel. I had realised that this would eventually happen to Jenny if I did not intervene in some way, but how do you tell someone who is still managing to function that you think they are losing their mind? But it was now out in the open and clear that Jenny could not hold down a lecturing job, let alone her research posts in her mental state. The big difference, of course, was that Iris Murdock was 75 years old at the time of her fateful lecture whereas Jenny was only 52.

The day after my meeting with her line manager, Jenny took sick leave, but it took another nine months before Alzheimer's Disease was diagnosed for Jenny's condition. The reason for this protracted diagnostic process is that Alzheimer's Disease cannot be definitively diagnosed directly, only once every other alternative cause for Jenny's condition had been investigated and discounted was Alzheimer's Disease left as the only remaining explanation. The process of elimination involved multiple visits to various consultants. Over this period, I also did as much research on dementia as I could, using not only the internet but also the medical library at Birmingham University. The real clincher for me for the Alzheimer's Disease diagnoses was the neutron brain scan that Jenny had at the University of Manchester's medical research centre late in 1999, which showed very graphically just how bad Jenny's brain was performing. The imaging research centre at the Manchester was working on a new type of scanner for the brain, which not only showed the structure of the brain but also gave a pictorial image of the brain's activity. On Jenny's scan, more than half her brain was inactive, showing up as a large black area on the scan image. Quite disturbing to see, I must say.

It was not until we got a diagnosis confirmed in writing from the medics that we could apply for Jenny to take early retirement on the grounds of ill health. This was important because without it Jenny's pension entitlement would be adversely affected, i.e. reduced. Even so, but for a decision we had made 13 years earlier when we first came to Stafford from Singapore, without Jenny's principal lecturer salary coming in every month, we could have been in a bit of financial strife with both Polly and Anna being still in fulltime education. After thinking about how we could best protect our family against the unexpected, we had chosen to insure Jenny's salary rather than her life. I was totally uninsurable for anything as a consequence of my crap medical record, having been diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis and Crohn's Disease, both of which had been wrong, otherwise I would have been a long time dead already. Now we had a diagnosis for Jenny condition in writing, something that the doctors were very loathed to do given that Alzheimer's Disease in a person as young as Jenny was very rare, I could now make a claim against this Protected Salary Insurance. This, in effect, would maintain our family income at its current level, just as if Jenny was still working fulltime at the University. And this would pertain until Jenny died in December 2005.

Now I clearly had to reorganize our lives and plan for the gradual but inevitable decline in Jenny's health. I started to drop the extra administration jobs I was doing at the University and reverted back to just lecturing. To do this I had to give up my principal lecturer's post and go back to being senior lecturer, which fortunately entailed only a marginal drop in salary for me. I had also pulled out of the Morgan Sports Car Club Staffordshire centre's activities by the end of that year. Our lives had to change drastically to focus on caring for Jenny.

But I had a cunning plan. I decided that we would make the most of the time that Jenny had left with us to do as much of what Jenny liked most to do, which was to TRAVEL. We two had often talked about taking early retirement from the University on our 55th birthdays and perhaps try to get contracts at a university or college overseas, ideally in Singapore or Malaysia. That dream had now, of course, been shot to pieces but with our protected income, we could still afford to hit the road at every opportunity.

(9th April 2014 – Penang)

Crete

The first of these travel holidays in my cunning plan as a three-week fly and drive trip to Crete. Since I was no longer admissions tutor for the School of Engineering, my summer months were freed up, not having to man the University's phones over the UCAS clearing period in July and August. I had been to Crete the previous year to represent the University on a student recruitment mission just before I gave up the admission tutors job and had liked the island a lot.

This trip was meticulously planned, pre-booking into the best hotels and hiring a decent car to get us around the island. For the first week we stayed at what is now the 5 Star Megaron Hotel in Heraklion with a balcony view over the city's harbour where we could watch the comings and goings of the inter Greek island ferries with the odd enormous cruise ship thrown in as a bonus. It was amazing to watch one of these monster ships squeeze itself into such a small harbour space, nursed by tugs at the bow and stern. Once these ships had completed their stopover in Heraklion, and the tugs had guided them out through the tiny harbour entrance, the captains would put the pedal to the metal and the ships seemed to fly away from the island towards the horizon.

Before the trip I had done my homework on the history of Crete and had become fascinated by the Minoan civilization. Heraklion is home to the world's biggest collection of Minoan artefacts which are housed in the city's Archaeological Museum, a must visit place for me. I was totally blown away by what I saw there. I could not get my head around the fact that so many artefacts we take for granted as fairly recent innovations were used by the Minoans some 4000 years ago, things such as two-handed wood saws and leather shoes. Even the place of Minoan women in society was on a far more equal footing with men when compared with a woman's place in most 'advanced' societies today. The status of priestess in Minoan culture and frescoes showing men and women participating in the same sports together such as bull-leaping, have led some archaeologists to believe that men and women held equal social status in Minoan society.

Another must-visit place was the Minoan palace at Knossos, not far from Heraklion. The palace was built between 1700 and 1400 BC and had been excavated and partly reconstructed by the British archaeologist Arthur Evans in the early 1900's, although the structures he had rebuilt owed much to his own imagination as to what the palace might have originally looked like. The palace had at least three separate water-management systems: one for supply, one for drainage of runoff, and one for drainage of wastewater. The wastewater system included a form of flushing toilet, which reminded me of the 5000-



On the coast at Taverne Libiko, Ekklesia Agii Pantas, near Kanoupanki

year-old flushing toilet I had seen as a lad at other end of Europe when I visited Skara Brae in the Orkney Islands. Again, it had me thinking, how was it that the flushing toilet had to be reinvented by the Victorians? In Tudor England, people were defecating in the streets and even the King was shitting down a hole in his castle wall. Amazing.

I had been to the palace at Knossos the previous year with a group of academics who were on a student-recruiting trip

with me. Amongst our number was a classics lecturer who gave us an unlicensed guided tour of the palace. The authorities at the palace were very jealous about it so he had to tell us his stories in a very surreptitious way, with us all looking at anything but him as he told his tales. One of the gems he enlightened us to, was that of a recently discovered temple not far from Knossos, which had apparently been destroyed by an earthquake during a religious ceremony, which seemed to suggest that the Minoans had practised human sacrifices. The idea of a Minoan priestess conducting a human sacrifice was not what the interested parties in the gate takings at the palace wanted to hear and this interpretation of the archaeology was being hotly disputed.

I decided to 'do' the east of Crete, as from the guidebooks it looked the more interesting half of the island and so after a week in Heraklion, we set off to Sitia, a relatively tourist free town and port.

(10th April 2014 – Penang)

Whilst staying in Sitia, we drove for days out in the mountains, and visited another archaeological site near Kavousi, the site of a Minoan settlement discovered by an American archaeologist, Harriet Boyd Hawes. Whilst Evan's work at Knossos was lauded by the good and true, Hawes work at Kavousi was practically ignored at the time in the chauvinist world of the early 1900s, but her excavations at Kavousi were as equally important as Evan's, shedding light on how the ordinary Minoans lived. Again, looking at the remains of the stone built interconnected houses at Kavousi, I was reminded of those at Skara Brae.



Sunset from the top of an Athens hotel rooftop bar overlooking the Acropolis. Magic.

After our stay, enjoying the cafes around the inner harbour at Sitia, we motored over the mountains to the southernmost town in Europe, Ierapetra. Ierapetra had even less tourists, it being more of a working city, which suited me just fine. I have very good memories of our stay in the small family run hotel there.

Bizarrely, there are farms that grow bananas along the coast here. The trees are enclosed in large polyurethane tents to protect them from the cooler winters than banana trees would expect to experience in their natural environment, the tropics. Looking at the Google Earth photographs recently, it would appear that growing bananas is still practiced here. The photographs show large areas of the ground covered with the shiny poly tents. From

Ierapetra we drove back over the Ida Mountains to Heraklion and after a few more days enjoying the sun, we flew on back to Athens and eventually home.

You may be wondering how come I could take Jenny away for such an 'adventurous' trip if she was too ill to work. The answer is in the nature of her illness. If you had meet Jenny gazing out at the sun setting behind the Acropolis from the top of the Athens hotel on that holiday, you would never have guessed that there was anything seriously wrong with her health. And that is the bugger of Alzheimer's and is why it took so long to diagnose in someone so young. Jenny at this time could still look after herself and hold a reasonable conversation. In most people, Alzheimer's first affects a person's short-term memory, followed by a decline in their cognitive abilities, by which I mean their ability to reason and solve problems. That is the stage Jenny was at when she gave that incoherent lecture back in January. Given that Jenny's posts at the University required an enhanced cognitive ability, it is of no surprise that her condition was picked up on relatively early. Of course, as the disease progresses it destroys long-term memory, then motor functions such as walking and lastly vital functions which keep your body working without you having to think about it. In older people, the disease can take as long as a couple of decades to work itself through the brain destroying it as it goes, an older person most times dying of something else before Alzheimer's takes them. Early Onset Alzheimer's as in Jenny's case has a much shorter progression time, only six years from diagnosis to her death.

On the flight home I was already planning our next trip, a return to Crete to see the snow-capped Ida Mountains in the New Year. This coming New Year was, of course, very special as it was not only the turn of the year but also the turn of the millennium. Polly was finishing her art course at Stafford College and was planning to take the year out backpacking in Asia with her boyfriend at the time, Alex Shipley.

And so, it was that come the Christmas - New Year vacation Jenny, Anna and I were back in Heraklion staying at the same hotel Jenny and I had used in summer but this time with Russian tourist group. New Millennium Year eve saw us in the hotel bar with the Russians watching the new millennium coming in across the planet. Once 12 midnight had struck on the bar's clock, we all retired to bed a little worse for wear. Them Russians sure could drink.

(12th April 2014 – Penang)

Barcelona

Working life at the University trundled on as per usual. In 1999 I had been awarded a University Fellowship for my contribution to learning and teaching at the University, mainly because of my work using the University's computer network to management my design students' projects. This was the only 'handle' to my name that I did not have to pay for, as being a member of a professional body such as the MIED meant an annual subscription fee of a couple of hundred pounds. I have to say, I was very proud to have received this



Jenny enjoying her favourite ice cream in Barcelona, A White Magnum.

Fellowship, not least because it was not sought for and was awarded on an assessment by my peers. Between receiving the award and my retirement in 2001, I was asked to give a few talks to staff from other Schools across the University on the most effective ways to use the University's computers to promote their students' learning. However, in reality, my work had been done using very crude computer tools, writing my own HTML coded pages to upload on to

the University server to create the online learning environment, compared with what the University subsequently acquired for the lecturing staff to use, a fully integrated learning package called Lotus Learning Space. The fact that the 'innovations' I had introduced to the University in using computer networking as a tool to prompt student learn had been superseded in such a short time, illustrates the pace at which newer technology replaces new technology. With computers, whether it be new hardware or applications, new hat becomes old hat very quickly. But, no worries, I had done my bit, or so I like to think.

I picked Barcelona for our Easter holiday excursion. The plan was to stay there for a couple of weeks with Ruth coming to join us for one of the weeks and Anna for the other. The hotel where I chose to stay turned out to have a very quirky interior design, almost Gaudi like. It was walking distance from the top end of the La Rambla and not far from the Museum of Contemporary Arts. Ruth is a fan of all art but modern in particular of which Barcelona has a surfeit, Miro, Picasso, Gaudi, Dali works to name but a few. I especially like the Gaudi buildings. Antoni Gaudi was born in 1852 and tragically died in 1926 after a road accident when a passing tram hit him. When he died, he was still working on his magnum opus, the Sagrada Familia a structure that is still not complete today, 90 years after his death. An amazing aspect of his buildings is that they are over 100 years old and yet look so 'modern'. His architectural designs for the structures must have given the construction engineers and builders of the day nightmares, as most of the features and fittings such as doors, windows and roofs were quite individual in form, one from another. The reason the Sagrada Familia is still a work in progress today, I guess.

For a day away from the city we took a train north, to catch a ride on the cable car up to the Montserrat Monastery and take a walk along the mountain paths from which you can look back towards Barcelona city. The cable car was pretty ancient and had a cable with a single span practically all the way from the bottom to top station which on the way down caused the car sway alarmingly in the breeze. More than one person lost their hats to the

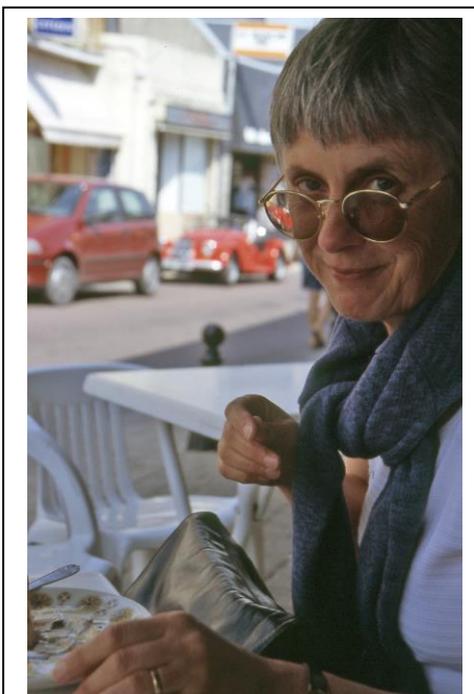
wind on the return trip. As the car bumped over the supporting wheel on the way down you were suddenly confronted with a void as only the cable was holding you up from the valley floor. A white-knuckle ride it ever there was one.

For the second day away from the City, I had a mind to visit Cadaqués up on the Catalonian coast, which along with Púbol, where Dali's wife Gala had a home, and Figueres forms the so-called "Dalinian Triangle". We took the train to Giron with the intention of hiring a car or a taxi to take us from the train station to the coast. Unfortunately, I had chosen a Spanish national holiday to make the trip, it being Easter and as a consequence there wasn't a car of any kind to be hired. Even the taxi drivers were on holiday. But nothing lost, we spent a very pleasant day walking the Giron town streets, just chilling out.

Loire Valley in a New Morgan

Soon after we returned home to Stone from Barcelona, I decided to buy a newer Morgan. Nine months earlier, I had started on a rebuild of the two-tone Morgan, a complete strip down again to the last nut and bolt. The poor car was in need of much TLC after being used so cruelly to get me to and from work each day come rain, shine or snow for the past ten years. With Jenny needing more of my time, I couldn't commit enough hours each week to have the car up and running again in a reasonable period. If we were to make the most of Jenny's remaining lucid time with us, we needed a new car yesterday.

Enter our lives 147 WWP, a bright red +4 two-seater with a 2200cc Rover engine with a lot



Jenny somewhere in the Loire Valley with 147 in the background.

more grunt than the two tone's ancient 1600cc Ford Kent engine. 147 was literally the first car we saw in our search for the two tone's replacement. Jenny and I had driven down to Somerset one weekend to visit a Morgan dealer there. He showed us a number of cars, but as soon as we had driven on to the garage forecourt, Jenny had already spotted 147 parked outside the showroom. And that was it. All that was left to do was strike a deal. 147 set us back £16,000 quite a bit more than I had budgeted for, but the dealer agreed to take my incomplete rebuild of the two tone in part exchange. Well, what the hell, its only money with which we could not buy Jenny any time, but we could have a lot of fun with this red beauty. A few days later the dealer arrived at The Maltings with 147 on his towed trailer which he duly exchanged for the bits and pieces that were

the two tone.

Our first road trip in 147 was in July, down the Loire Valley in France. Again, we took the Poole to Cherbourg ferry, this time around I booked everything ahead of time not wanting to be caught out again by a 'go with the flow' approach to touring. We visited most of the chateaus along the Loire River and just a few of the wine cellars housed in caves cut into the riverside cliffs. These caves had apparently been the quarry sites for much of the stone that was used in the building of the chateaus. We motored each day with the hood down, not having to put it up even once for inclement weather. Just as well really, as even with the basic packing I had done for the trip, the tiny storage space behind the car seats was overflowing with our bags. Mandy and Peter had recently bought an American RV (recreational vehicle) and we met up with them in as they crossed our path on their way to the south of France for a summer holiday.

It was on this trip that I came to realise how vulnerable I was travelling on my own with Jenny in her condition without any backup for if things went wrong. During one hotel stay, I picked up a tummy bug and was laid low, being confined to our hotel room for a couple of days whilst the bug worked itself out of my system. This left Jenny literally help-less. Her short-term memory was so bad now that she couldn't even remember which door in the bedroom led to the bathroom. Any further trips I might organise would need a third person with us to ensure if anything did go aerie, there was someone else to take overlooking out for Jenny.

(13th April 2014 – Penang)

Adjusting the Sails

It's 5 o'clock in the morning and I cannot sleep. I gotten bitten twice by a mosquito whilst asleep and the itching has woken me up. The mosque man will start his morning call to pray soon which in the still of the morning air comes across very loud and it is impossible to get to sleep through it. So back to the writing

It was becoming clear to me that it was not going to be possible to leave Jenny on her own for much longer when I went to work each day, she was going to need someone to be with her 24/7. I explained the problem to the then Head of School, Tom Ruxton, and asked him if I could work half days at home, only coming into the University to give lectures and tutorials with the students. I had this idea of setting up a video conferencing suite in the small back room in The Maltings from where I could have face-to-face sessions with the students over the internet using the University's video conferencing suite. Perhaps even having a dedicated area set up in one of the School's laboratories. I had read about the new ISDN lines that had been installed in the London area whereby the transmission of larger amounts of data needed for video streaming had been successfully trailed. You have to know that at

this time the bandwidth on the internet had difficulty coping with displaying still images, even line drawings, never mind streaming live video. Any video conferencing that was out in the corporate world was being done on local, in-house networks and not across the wider internet. Bless him, Tom, said “Yes, OK. Let’s give it a go.”

Integrated Services for Digital Network (ISDN) is a set of communication standards for simultaneous digital transmission of voice, video, data, and other network services over the traditional circuits of the public switched telephone network. It was first defined in 1988 by the CCITT, the international committee that oversees telecommunication standards across our world. At the time I wanted to use the new system, there was a limit on how far you could physically be from your local telephone exchange to have the ISDN work effectively. Fortunately for me, The Maltings was just within that useable distance, but I still had to have a second, dedicated telephone line wire installed between The Maltings and the telephone exchange in Stone. At The Maltings end video conferencing I set up a computer screen display with software that allowed simultaneous, videoing and interactive page writing between the two sites, displayed in separate windows on the screen. So, I could not only see, and converse with the students, I could also effectively show slides and simulate a white board for chalk and talk sessions. All technically cutting-edge stuff this.

All that I needed now was someone to look after Jenny whilst I was physically away from the house and at work in the University each half day during the working week. Social Services could not help me, as they only had a mandate to provide relief to carers of the elderly, i.e. for people over retirement age 65 or over. This being the case I had to recruit the help of a local commercial care organisation to arrange three hours cover for me each day, at a rate of £8 per hour. Doing the maths, for three hours per day and twenty working days per

month, this meant paying around £600 per month in carer’s fees. I mention monies here to illustrate that without money, even with all the support from Tom and my other colleagues at the University, I would have been completely stuffed.

And the new set up did work reasonably well. I was able, with help from the School’s timetabler, to set up my working week so that I was in the University either for a morning or an afternoon session each day of the week. The technology did crash out now and then but both me and the students were on a steep learning curve as to what the new set up could do and not do. I found the system was best suited for me to watch student presentations remotely, which were a common feature of all design projects. With separate widows set up on the computers to display



Jenny and Ruth atop the Dome of Florence’s Cathedral.

the student slides, a live video of their presentation of the slides and a live video of myself, the whole split site session was a learning experience in itself. This I felt sure would benefit them in their future careers as collaborating over computer networks became a part and parcel of their working lives.

Florence

For the Easter vacation in 2001, I booked a week's stay through a website, cottagestocastles.com, in an apartment overlooking the Piazza Della Signoria in Florence. Polly had been to Italy the year before and was very keen for me to see Tuscany too. Well, on this first visit, I too gotten hooked on all things Tuscan, as many Englishmen have done in days past. Both Ruth and Polly accompanied Jenny and I for a week's immersion in renaissance culture. Florence was the home of the Renaissance, a period in European history, stretching roughly between the 14th and 17th centuries, from which flowed a stream of scientific discoveries and the beautiful art of Michelangelo and Caravaggio, amongst many others. As usual, I had done some reading up about the renaissance before the trip and was particularly keen to see Filippo Brunelleschi's dome atop Florence's Cathedral. I got a glimpse of the structure briefly from the train as we sped from Pisa, where we had landed in Italy, into Florence. It did look impressive against the skyline even five hundred and fifty years after its completion.

On exiting Florence railway station, Polly insisted that we four need not take a taxi to our apartment, as it was only a 'short' distance from the station, so no problem. Of course, we got lost. Once we eventually reached the right square, we called the apartment owners to let them know we had arrived on their doorstep whilst we recovered from our bag towing trek across the city with a cup of coffee in a cafe opposite the apartment's block. And what a posh apartment it was too. Very well appointed, with a fourth storey view across Piazza Della Signoria. The front window was a great place to people watch on the square below in an evening. We spent the week 'doing' the galleries and historical sites, only leaving the city boundaries once to take a bus trip to Siena and on the way catch a glimpse of the San Gimignano towers in the distance as we travelled down the motorway, the place I had planned to stay for our summer escape.

So why was I so fascinated by Brunelleschi's Dome? Well, the answer lies in the engineering. During the renaissance, architects were also engineers and builders, all-rounders that identified the essence of the Renaissance man. This had arisen out of the need for them to protect their livelihoods as there were no patent protection laws in the city at that time. To protect their commercial success in exploring new and successful methods of working, an individual's methods of working were a closely guarded secret. As a result hardly anything was written down for prosperity, the one exception being Leonardo di ser Piero da Vinci, to give him his full name, and even for him it is estimated that less than fifty percent of what he 'discovered' has survived to the present day.

And so, it was with Brunelleschi. The Dome on Florence's Cathedral is still the biggest brick-built dome on the planet, but he did not leave any record of his construction method, with scholars still arguing today about how he did it. Add to this the fact that Brunelleschi built the Dome without ground supported scaffolding, the mystery deepens. One curious detail about the Dome was that Brunelleschi's used mortar and not concrete in laying down the bricks, concrete having been discovered around 300 BC by the Romans and had been used in the construction of public and private building for over a thousand years thereafter. I remember seeing concrete arches in an amphitheatre on a visit to Volterra some years later, looking for all the world like the concrete used in the condominiums being built around us here today in Penang.

The construction problem Brunelleschi faced by using mortar and not concrete to lay his bricks was in that mortar hardens by a slow air-drying processes whereas concrete sets due to a much faster chemical setting process. The drying time affects the speed at which the build can continue once a course of bricks has been laid. The mortar or concrete has to harden enough to carry the load of the subsequent laying of additional bricks. Having chosen to use mortar over concrete, Brunelleschi could not keep secret his neat solution to the drying problem his builders faced, because it is there for all to see in the way that he had the bricks laid. The bricks were not laid horizontally layer upon layer but at an angle in herringbone arrangement and by so doing, spread more of the load of the subsequent layers of bricks into the bricks themselves rather than all of it going into the mortar alone. Clever chap Brunelleschi.

During our stay in the Florence apartment, it became clear that Jenny was no longer able to shower herself. What a shit disease Alzheimer's is, it slowly but surely shuts you down by stealing your faculties one by one, mental then physical. The strange thing was that at every change in her condition, Jenny made not a murmur of objection to me taking over whatever task she was unable to do for herself. This was not the case in other Alzheimer patients' histories I had read about during my research in Alzheimer's disease, with angry and sometimes violent behaviours from some sufferers toward their carers.

Well, it was clear that our situation vis a vis my work and home arrangements for looking after Jenny would have to be revisited yet again. I would most likely have to take early retirement from the University that October.

(26th April 2014 – Penang)

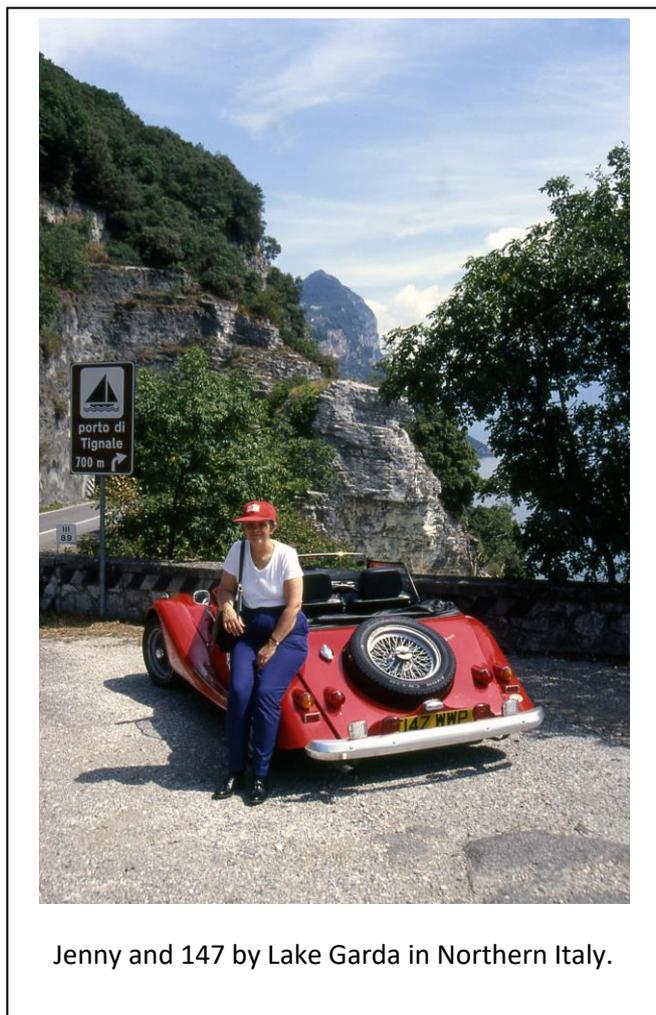
Tuscany in the Morgan

But before my retirement, another trip to plan, this time a six-week driving holiday in 147 to Northern Italy and Tuscany. Instead of driving across Europe to Italy, I fancied taking the overnight Motorail from Brussels to Milan, a service that does not run today. This was an overnight train with sleepers, which carried your car on a specialised roll-on roll-off truck.

The service started from just outside Brussels on the English Channel side of the city, meaning it was feasible to drive down from Stafford and cross the channel on the Eurostar in one day to catch the evening departure of the Motorail to Milan. The place where the car was loaded onto the railway trucks was not at all easy to find, it being in a remote railway goods yard, requiring us to make a number of 'U' turns to narrow down our search area and home in on the place.

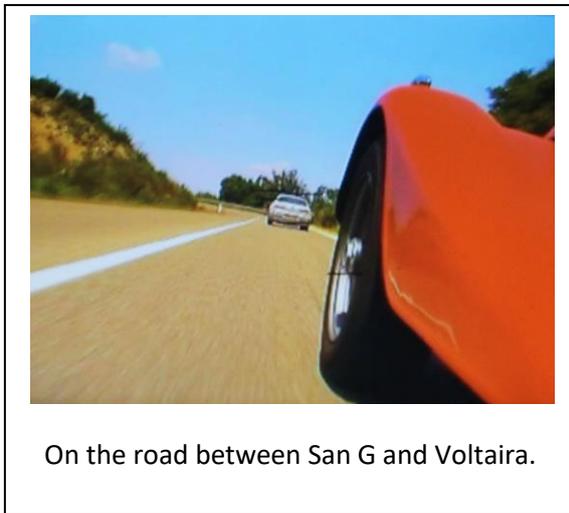
But once the car was loaded and we were comfortably installed in our overnight cabin, I could relax. Unfortunately once the train had gathered speed after leaving Brussels central station where the train picked up car-less passengers, our carriage began to rock from side to side, quite alarmingly, to the extent at I was awake practically for the whole twelve hours ride to Milan. To make matters more exciting, the guard on the train advised us not to leave our cabins or open our cabin doors to anyone knocking on them in the early hours of the morning if the train stopped for any reason along the way. It had not been unknown for 'highway' robbers to board the train having switched the track signals to red and rob the passengers, usually those in the last carriage. As we were in the last cabin in the last carriage, this news was not a little disturbing.

Fortunately, we made Milan in one piece, 147, Jenny and me. By the time the car was unloaded from the train and we were driving around the Milan ring road heading for Lake Garda, it was the City's morning rush hour. I had hardly slept the night before and a little hungry not having had any breakfast, now I found myself driving a tiny open topped sports car, on the 'wrong side' of the road, sandwiched between two very large lorries whose wheels seemed to tower above my head. I was worried neither lorry driver would notice me there and that we would be squashed between them if they moved in towards each other. If ever there was a time to use the 147's grunt, this was it. Pedal to metal and we shot out from between them, no doubt eliciting expressions of surprise in the lorries' cabs. To remember this lorry encounter so vividly after more than ten years must mean I was a traumatized by the experience! I was more than a little



Jenny and 147 by Lake Garda in Northern Italy.

glad to hit the open road after that, heading down along the southern edge of the Italian Alps towards Verona.



On the road between San G and Voltaira.

I had us booked into Grand Hotel in Gardone Riviera, a 5-star hotel fronting directly onto Lake Garda. A beautiful hotel, in a beautiful location, just what I needed to see after a night in an ancient rattling railway carriage and a nightmare drive on Milan's crazy ring road. We had a brilliant week, taking day drives out along the lake's shore-hugging road. Driving through rock cut tunnels, hood down and hearing the beautiful engine note from 147 echoing off the tunnel walls was quite something, had me grinning from ear to

ear every time.

After a great week by the lake, we set off again to drive the 225 miles south through Modena, round Bologna and Florence to San Gimignano. I would have liked to have stopped at Modena or at least driven around the Ferrari factory there but we got held up in a long, slow moving traffic jam on the approach to the city, so I decided that caution was the better part of valour and skipped the idea. For our 5 weeks stay in San Gimignano I had again used the Cottages to Castles website and, once again, it came up trumps. The first-floor apartment I had booked was only a two-minute walk to the famous square at the heart of town. Our landlord owned a garage not far away where I could garage 147, a service he was only too glad to provide. Having an eye-catching red English sports car on your forecourt cannot but be noticed. Both he and his wife were lovely people and even with our limited ability to communicate, you could tell he was a very nice chap.

When I was organising this six-week trip I was mindful of the Loire Valley experience when I had become incapacitated which put both Jenny and me at risk. For this trip I had booked a two-bed roomed apartment so that I could invite different people to come stay with us for a week or at least a few days at a time. And so, it was that for four of the five weeks we had four different sets of housemates: Polly on her own, Mark and Gail, Rosin and Ian, followed by Anna with her fiancée, Peter. Each visitor hired for himself or herself a car at Pisa airport so that



Mark and I having a drive out in the Tuscan countryside.

we could take days out, all together in one vehicle. I did get to drive 147 around the twisty Tuscany countryside roads but not as often as I would have liked. Mark did take a video of a drive out I took with him which I still have, all very exciting.

(30th April 2014 – Penang)

Of the towns we visited around San Gimignano, Volterra is my favourite. The town was built on a hill, as were most medieval towns in the Middle Ages and was the place the Romans quarried alabaster marble for their statues. There are still stone carvers working in the town's backstreets making items mainly for the tourists. From the west side of the town you have an almost uninterrupted view west, out towards the Italian coast. I have a favourite restaurant in Volterra, because not only was its food delicious, but also because of the two sisters who waited on you at table. They both looked as though they have stepped right out of a painted scene you find decorating Etruscan vases. Classical features from antiquity. Volterra also has one of the best-preserved Roman amphitheatres which has the seating area built into a naturally occurring curve in the town's hillside. This is where I first noticed the ancient concrete used by the Romans in the construction of the terraced seating.



Garaged with a view.

After a very pleasant five weeks of touring and being with close friends and family, it was regrettably time to plan the return trip home to the UK. After the difficulty Jenny had had in coping with the night train from Brussels to Milan on our outward journey, I decided it would perhaps be better for Jenny if she flew home rather than come with me on the train with the car. To this end, Polly agreed to fly to Milan for an overnight stay and take Jenny home from there by plane, whilst I brought 147 back on the Motorail. My journey back on the train

was no more comfortable than the journey out to Milan. I was assigned exactly the same cabin in the exact same carriage for the return journey. But I made it home without any further dramas to be greeted by Jenny at The Maltings with a huge grin and a big hug.

Retirement

Having already decided it was time for me to retire from the University on my 55th birthday in October, returning to work for the new academic year was all very strange. As I would be leaving my lecturing post a few weeks after the start of autumn term, there was little point in timetabling me in for any of my usual modules. I was in limbo land, being at work with no work to do. As it turned out, it was perhaps as well that I had chosen to retire at this time.

The organization that provided cover for me looking after Jenny whilst I was at work decided that Jenny had reached a stage in the disease where she would need two carers to be with her each day. Jenny's behaviour was becoming more unpredictable and there now needed to be a second person with her just in case she became aggressive. This extra person, of course, doubled the fees I would have to pay for the cover which would really make it a no brainer that I should leave work to look after Jenny fulltime myself. If I had not retired, I would be working just to pay for Jenny's carers. I did look at other options. I looked into perhaps putting Jenny into a care home, but after a visit to one such place, I decided I would not be able to live with myself if I condemned Jenny to live out her time in such a place. Terrible places. The only one I found that came anyway close to being suitable as an alternative home for Jenny was a specialist unit up in Manchester, which catered solely for dementia patients. But to move Jenny there would have involved selling up at The Maltings and moving our home base to an area near this care home so as to be there for Jenny every day.

I knew already that I was going to have to sell The Maltings and buy a single storey bungalow as it was, though. Whilst we had been in San Gimignano, Jenny had started having problems getting up and down the stairs to the holiday apartment there. As her fear of steps would only get worse with time, I started looking at suitable properties for sale in the Stone area, and put The Maltings up for sale

Almost as soon as I had put The Maltings on the market, I had a couple of offers for it, one of which was from a young couple currently living not four doors away down Aston Lane, which in spite of them putting a slightly lower bid than the other prospective buyer, I accepted. As for the bungalow to buy, I was looking for a basket case of a property with a view to refurbishing it to suit Jenny's future needs, such as a walk-in shower and a reasonably sized garden for her to walk around. And yet again, I dropped lucky with 19 Stuarts Close North in Walton, a small suburb of Stone. No. 19 was a detached two-bedroom bungalow with garage and manageably sized garden. With the cash differential between the £174,000 I received for the sale of The Maltings and the £64,000 I had to pay for the Walton bungalow, I calculated that I had more than enough money to get the needed work done using contractors for the major works such as installing a new bathroom and kitchen.

11th October 2001 was my last day at the University and my retirement day. A very low-key event it was too. I suppose as I had been withdrawing from the Schools activities for over eighteen months, my final departure from the building went almost unnoticed by most of my colleagues. In fact, the only person I have met up with since leaving the Stafford campus that day in 2001 was my old friend Tariq. I went to visit him at his home in Stafford just before I went off to Mongolia in 2006. Not that my quiet departure from the University bothered me in the slightest, I had a new project in hand and a different path to follow now.

Before the actual day of my retirement, I had already started to clear the stuff accumulated over the fifteen years living in The Maltings. We were 'downsizing' from a large, five bed roomed house to a small two-bedroom bungalow. Polly had already left home to study art fulltime at a college in Nottingham the year before and so the nest was truly empty by now. She had continued to stay on in Nottingham and was starting a photography degree course at Nottingham Trent University in October of this year. Clearing 'stuff' from The Maltings I did with a vengeance, no sentimentality at all for any of our possessions. Nothing was sacred save for 147, our photographs and the Bose system together with Jenny and mine's CD collections. Even five of my six dollhouses had to go.

There was no way we could have moved into No. 19, the bungalow being in a terrible state of decay, nobody having lived there for a couple of years before I bought it and hence the very reasonable asking price for it. It is strange how prospective buyers are invariably unable to see the potential in a rundown property such as No. 19. As for me, I could almost instantly see how this dump of a building could be turned into a cosy home for Jenny and me. I guess having a bundle of cash to throw into the makeover helped just a little. For somewhere to live whilst No. 19 was being transformed into a little palace, I took a six-month rental lease on a house in Bridge Crescent in Stone which was within walking distance of the town centre.

I engaged the services of local contractors to fit a new kitchen and bathroom and a landscape gardener to create a low maintenance garden at the rear of the bungalow. I even went as far as having a brick driveway laid and an electrically operated door fitted to 147's new garage. The only physical input from me was the interior decoration. The whole restoration project took around six months and by May 2002 we were ready to move into our new home. But not before a trip back to Tuscany in April.

(1st May 2014 – Penang)

In Search of a Tuscan Home

During Roisin and Ian's visit to stay with us in San Gimignano the previous summer, we had taken a drive together over to Castellina, a small town in the Chianti wine producing area just to the south of Florence. Chianti, by the way, is my red wine of choice and the one I always plonk into my shopping trolley when passing through a supermarket's booze section. In the early 2000s there were quite few UK TV programmes about buying a second home on the European continent for holiday stays and the Chianti area had become a very popular place for the English. So many Brits had bought properties here that the area had been nicknamed 'Chianishire'. A chance remark by Roisin as we passed the Italian equivalent of an estate agent in the town's high street that day, observing that some of the properties were very cheap when compared to similar properties in the UK and what about me buying one, got me to thinking. I did not particularly want to stay in 'Chianishire' with a load of other Brits, but Volterra, now that was a different matter. On our return to the UK the idea

of having a property in Tuscany grew and grew in my imagination, in spite of all the other stuff going on in our lives at that time, retiring from the University, downsizing and moving to a new house etc.



Inside the St Gotthard Road Tunnel.

I had done the maths and I had worked out that we could afford to spend up to £50k on a holiday home, which at the time was more than enough to buy a place in Italy. In April 2002 we packed our bags leaving the contractor to finish off the work at No. 19, notably the bathroom and the brick driveway, and set off for Italy again, this time in our newly acquired Ford Puma. This was our first drive to Italy and ahead of time I had bought a route planning software package to sort out a route across France and Switzerland. Today you can use

Google Map to plan a route, which even has live data displayed warnings of the road works you are likely to encounter on route. As was to become the pattern on these drives to Italy, we would have at least one night's stopover on the way out of the UK, at the Holiday Inn on the Greenwich Peninsular. Ruth and Richard lived not far from Greenwich in Blackheath and we would spend a couple of evenings having a meal and a few beers together.

We took the Eurostar car-train from the terminal just outside Dover, a much more organized affair than the Motorail terminal I had used a couple of years earlier. And after having passed under the English Channel to Calais, we headed southwest on the E17 towards Reims to avoid going through Paris. Our route took us to the French-Germany border, just south of Strasbourg before heading south to the Swiss border at Basel. We took three days to make the 850 miles to Tuscany taking two one-night stopovers, the first being at the Ibis Hotel on the outskirts of Nancy in France, and the second night at another Ibis Hotel in the Kreins district Lucerne in Switzerland. Ibis hotels in France were back then the equivalent of the day's budget hotels in the UK such as Travel Lodge and you could pre book them over the internet, an added bonus for me.



Comune di Montecatini Val di Cecina

I had chosen this northern most route over the other more obvious southerly routes to Italy because I wanted to pass through the Alps via the St. Gotthard Tunnel. The St Gotthard

tunnel is the third longest tunnel in the world at 14 miles and as I was soon to see, is quite a hair-raising drive, given that there is only one tunnel through the mountains with traffic flowing both ways simultaneously. And no emergence lanes in case your vehicle happens to breakdown. Commercial vehicles also use the tunnel making the drive even more exciting. The Alpine scenery on either side of the tunnel entrances is quite breathe taking and I had the idea that on some future day I would drive over the St. Gotthard Pass taking the old route between France and Italy taken by travelers in the 19th century.

I had found an apartment for this, our third visit to Tuscany in less than a year, yet again through the Cottages to Castle website, this time in Gambassi Terme, a small town just a few miles to the north of San Gimignano. The ground floor apartment was part of the landlord's home in the Via delle Monache on the corner with Via Volterrana. The apartment was absolutely fabulous, we were the first holiday makers to rent the place, everything from the pots and pans in the kitchen to the bathrooms were brand spanking new. What a find. Polly came out to spend some time with us here and the three of us used the time to go and search the local area for prospective properties to buy.



The first area we had to look at, of course, was that around Volterra, given that I was so smitten with the place. Properties in Volterra town were a little beyond my budget, it being a popular tourist destination, but we did go to view a likely candidate to buy in Montecatini Val di Cecina, a small village atop a hill on the west side of Volterra town. But as with most of the properties we subsequently visited, it had two storeys with very uneven steps up to the first floor, not at all a suitable place for Jenny to live in. The location of the village was



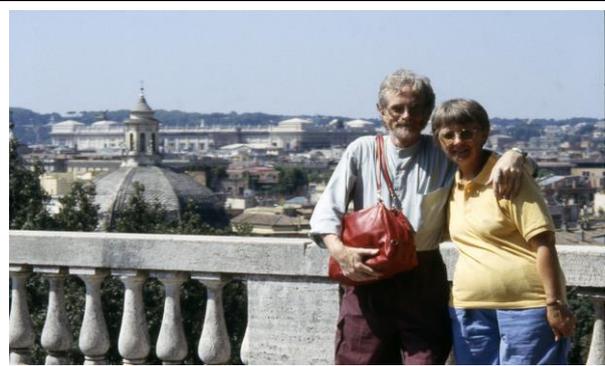
perfect, it was just that the places we could afford to buy were all very small and very old, and I do mean very old as in a few hundred years old. Some even older than Pen-cae-Di our Welsh home back in the 1970s.

(2nd May 2014 – Penang)

On hearing of our search for a holiday home in Tuscany, our landlord of the Monache apartment told us of new development he had heard about over in Borgo di Colleoli just outside the hill town of Palaia. We drove over

to take a look at it but finding the place locked up, we called the telephone number displayed on the gate and arranged to meet the estates selling agent there the next day to take a look around. Not that I was going to buy the whole estate, you understand! The Borgo di Colleoli had been part of Tuscany's history for well over five centuries. The 'Castle of Colleoli' was one of the largest manors in the region when it was bought in 1494 by the eminent Aristocratic Agostini Venerosi Della Seta family. Their family crest, which dates from this time, can still be seen today above the entrance. It was fashionable in medieval times for the gentlemen of Pisa to buy holiday villas in the hills as a summer retreat. However, Borgo di Colleoli was a working farm producing olive oil, grapes for wine production and crops until the 18th century.

The estate had recently been bought by a developer as a failed hotel with a view to dividing the estate's building into small self-contained apartments that might appeal to buyers like us on the lookout for a foreign holiday home. The only apartment that was affordable for us to buy and one that could accommodate Jenny's needs was a small, one bed roomed studio which was being built as an add on at the back of one of the Borgo's



In Rome with the Vatican as a backdrop

original buildings. At the time of our visit, only the concrete base had been laid for the studio. I was tempted enough to buy the place to arrange a follow up visit to the estate agent's office in Livorno, a port on the coast just south of Pisa, to discuss how I could go about buying a property in Italy. The lady estate agent that we were dealing with was a very pleasant young woman, always being very helpful, and I left this second meeting with her, very hopeful that this was the property for us. However, there was a niggling doubt in my mind about the state of building work we had seen on our visit to the estate. There had been no work going on at all on the day of our visit to the Borgo and by the look of the building materials strewn around the place and the grass growing in amongst it, there had not been any work done there for quite some time. So, I left the decision to buy to dwell for a while whilst I mulled it over, asking our new estate agent friend to give me the option of first refusal when the studio apartment was completed.

After finding this prospective apartment to buy at Colleoli, we did not look at another other alternative properties and decided to take a couple of days trip down south to Rome, a city I had only transited through in 1969 on my way to Ghana but had never visited. We took the train from Florence, arriving at the Santa Maria Novella railway station an hour earlier than we had intended as the clocks had been moved back to summertime the night before which none of us had noticed. Well you do lose track of time when you are on holiday, don't you? Literally lost this time. That was my excuse anyway and I am sticking to it. We did the usual

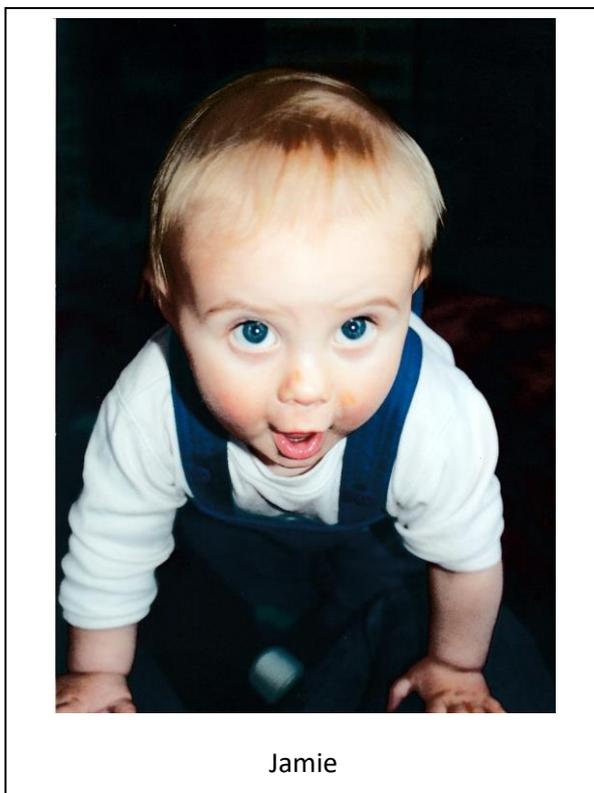
round of tourist sites, the Coliseum, the Trevi Fountain, the Pantheon, etc., all fascinating stuff to me, given the reading I had been doing about all things Roman.

I had not booked our return tickets, not anticipating any problem in just turning up at the station on the day to buy a ticket for Florence. I had not realised that there were in fact two types of trains running between Rome and Florence, a slow train and a high-speed train. On the way down to Rome we had bought tickets for the slow train, which I thought at the time was surprisingly empty of passengers. In my ignorance, for the return journey I just bought any old tickets again not realising that they were in fact for the high-speed train this time and were for standing room only as all the seats had been pre-allocated as on British Rail trains. This I did not twig until we were aboard the train and under way. Poor Jenny had to stand in the packed carriage corridor for an hour or so before a seat became vacant for her to sit in. Not a very comfortable journey that one.

Not long after our return to the UK, Jenny and I moved into No. 19 and spent the next couple of months getting settled into our new home.

(3rd May 2014 – Penang)

Doing a Reset



June 2002 was the month you, Jamie, arrived on the scene to begin your own life's story and become a part of mine. Your mum and dad had married in August the previous year and were now living in Gosport and soon after you were born, Jenny and I rented a holiday apartment in Lee-on-the-Solent just along the coast to the west of Gosport and came down to see you. Also, with us was your great Grandma Annie, my Mum, making it a three-generation gathering. You were, of course, very cute and I am not only saying that because I am your granddad, you were very cute.

It was during Mum's stay with us in Lee-on-Solent that I first noticed she was showing an early sign of dementia as her short-term

memory was clearly not working very well. Perhaps I was being a little over sensitive to her memory loss, given Jenny's problems, and a bit hasty in assigning the memory loss to dementia, I don't know, but it had me a bit concerned, nonetheless. Concerned enough,

that is, to be thinking about how the heck I was going to manage to look after two people with dementia. Well, basically I would not be able to and would be crazy to try. The only feasible way forward then, was to try and persuade Mum that she should seriously think about moving out of No. 105 and take up residence in a care home somewhere in Darwen, or if she was agreeable, somewhere close to us in the Stone area. Of course, she point blank refused to even think about moving anywhere and continued refusing to think about it in spite of me bringing up the move topic at every subsequent opportunity. So stubborn. One consequence of this new development and my reappraising of the future was the cancelling of my interest in the apartment in the Borgo di Colleoli with the Livorno estate agent. I guess my concerns over Mum's health coming on top of my suspicions about the viability of the site's developer, it was really a no brainer decision to make.

The winter of 2002/3 was a very quiet time for Jenny and me. Far too quiet for me, really. The bungalow setup I had devised to help me cope with for Jenny's deteriorating condition was working well. Her short-term memory was now so bad that as she walked on a circuit through each room of the bungalow, by the time she reached her starting point she thought she was in a completely new room again. And walk she did all day every day, only sitting down to eat her meals. Jenny also had become doubly incontinent by now and had to wear adult diapers. I had been helping Jenny with her toilet for some time following an incident during an hotel stay when she had wiped her bottom on the bath towel. We were attending my nephew David's wedding in Wales at the time. At first, I used the diapers on Jenny just for her night-time sleeps, but eventually, she had to wear them both day and night.

To make the feeling of isolation worse, I had had to start having groceries delivered by Tesco's home delivery service as it had become impossible for me to take Jenny with me to the supermarket, as she would wander off while I was doing the shopping. Our new neighbours at No. 21, Vera and Ted an elderly couple in the 70s, would pop round to our place for a chat and a cup of tea at least once a week, but apart from Polly coming over from Nottingham most Thursdays for the day, I was on my own and beginning to develop cabin fever. To address the problem, I decided to buy a collapsible wheelchair so that when I did take Jenny out, she would at least be under control as it were. Sounds terrible to say that, but to be out with someone who, on a whim, might suddenly take it in to their heads to set off across the road without even looking, is not at all easy. You have to be alert to all the potential hazards around you 100% of the time. It is like expecting a two-year-old child to observe the rules of the road whilst out on his or her own and survive without any guidance from an adult. I was a bit dubious as to whether Jenny would submit to being wheeled around in a wheeled chair, but to my surprise and great relief, she meekly went along with my suggestion. The wheelchair became a fixture in our lives for the next three years allowing me to take Jenny out and about with a lot less hassle than before.

By the spring of 2003, I was ready for another holiday and planned a trip back to Colleoli to stay this time at the Fattoria di Colleoli, a set of barns converted to self-catered holiday

Granddad Stories.

apartments on the hilltop right next to the Borgo where I had thought to buy that studio apartment one year ago. On our return to Stone, I set in train a series of events that had quite serious consequences for not just Jenny and me but also for Polly and had us setting off for Tuscany once again, this time in an American RV.

Memory Litter Bin.

- 1. Adapting The Malting's garden for low maintenance** – As Jenny became progressively less able to do even the most simple tasks around her garden, I put in place some low maintenance systems to compensate, such as laying a semi-permeable membrane over the flower beds to discourage weeds from popping up everywhere. This membrane was then covered in pieces of bark to give the garden a lasting well-tended look. I also installed an automatic watering system for the large green house we had so that we could take extended absences from The Maltings without losing our crops of tomatoes and green peppers we used to grow in there.
- 2. Anna married** – In August 2001, Anna and Peter were married in Gosport, Hampshire.
- 3. Giving away the dollhouses** - The dollhouses I gave away, with their contents, to family and friends. Roisin and Ian had the first house I had built for Anna, the blue San Francisco house: to Mark and Gail I gave the Tudor black and white coffee shop: the fisherman's cottage I gave to one of the lady carers who had been looking after Jenny: the Victorian shop house I gave to Angela, a colleague at the University, for her daughter: and finally the new project I had started, my own design of a San Francisco Queen Anne style house, I gave to Peter Creamer's wife Cathy. Peter was now back in the UK and working at the University in Portsmouth and living on the Isle of White. The house I kept back for myself was my favourite, a yellow house of an American Victorian style design. I did keep all the best furniture and fittings, which I still have and now use to furnish Gek's model Singapore Black and White house here in Penang.

Notes