

Pinner Green

Blessings Disguised, 1981-1987

Setting the Scene

In the eighties British society was, in-crisis. It was not just felt within the industrial sector, but in law and order and race relations. Undoubtedly, the standard of living for the majority of people was greater... mine, certainly was – particularly now - being a freelance colour retoucher as well as maintaining a full-time lecturing post. With this increase in wealth, for the majority, my own included, came greater personal stress – brought on by changes in working arrangements, moral values, mores, and social relationships. Society's libertarian attitudes towards: the break-up of marriage, its social welfare benefits - especially for children and the handicapped, reforms allowing greater rights for women, regarding abortion and property rights, and for homosexuals 'coming out'. This all lead to a freer less restrictive society. These benefits and personal freedoms brought greater responsibilities to the individual... not always easily coped with... something I was going to have to contend with...

Trying to retain some sort of mental cohesion after hearing those terrible words *'I love somebody else,'* bounced around in my head blotting out everyday matters and daily words of care, which I should have been directing towards my children. It made me feel physically sick. Personal fortunes - financial and social, would plummet, as the true realisation of that terrible Christmas 1980, slowly took its hold. My days seemed to pass with a permanent racing heartbeat and a sense of panic... I was not aware of all the consequences these feelings were to have although judging from the sinking feeling in my stomach it did not herald a bright future nor predict much contentment.

I had grown use to my wife's challenging statements which were proceeded by piercing eyes, head thrust forward and dismissive expression – these postures were often meant to draw out a rejoinder and stimulate an unequal debate in the adversary - to those who were not aware what was expected – how to deal with the challenge.

You may well try to imagine that awful night... going to bed, knowing that in the morning your children were to wake up to welcome Christmas Day... and that you would be expected to show bonhomie and good cheer... but knowing that your marriage was in tatters and the bottom had dropped out of your world. There I lay; next to my wife, staring into a black void... life was never to be the same again. The unexpected and previously unimaginable happening had occurred...

Gradually over the next few weeks, I pulled myself together with the help of my mother-in-law, brother, neighbours, and friends at work; but it was not easy trying to put a brave face on life whilst giving lectures and trying to teach... Often, I would hear myself speak, and wonder, 'what on earth I was talking about?' From the following January till May I tried to find a way to continue living with the terrible realisation that my life was to change irrevocably - that enormous emotional changes were to take place, especially if I were to remain living in the same house with Sally. After much personal thought talking the matter through with Rita - Sally's mother, the decision was made, I would remove myself and find somewhere locally where the children could visit and perhaps move in – if they felt the need or on a fixed rota. It did not take long to find a new home, furnishing it with second-hand furniture - from the council's house clearance warehouse at Rayners Lane, and move out.

While all this was going on, General Galtieri of Argentina stole a march on the British government and invaded the Falkland Islands. There was much flag waving and cheering when Mrs Thatcher commissioned the military to retake the Islands. It was assumed, by the country, that there must be far more in the objective - to take back the islands, than to regain a bleak and barren, rain and wind swept, group of islands! For me, it created a diversion from my dreadful home life. The war, for this is what it was to become, lasted from April 1982 until July of that year. The following year the election saw Mrs Thatcher and the Conservatives regain office mostly on the back of a successful mission.

My legal separation was to find an end in divorce... and loss of custody... with all the heartache and resentful aftermath. Many stories from other divorced men told how they had lost the bulk of their investments and

financial security... never to be able to gather a lump sum together again - to get back to a previously held position. It was impossible to know then, or to appreciate, until much later, how seriously this tragedy was going to affect all... In retrospect, it was to lead to broken extended family relations, torn personal friendships, and to a build up, over many years, of resentments that would last for a lifetime. As to my own feeling of self worth - that would suffer too, losing: confidence, my earned feel good factor gained over many years of management, the religious teachings and trust in my fellow man, my mental and physical well being... All would suffer an irreparable blow.

The unbearable daily reminder of what had happened forced me to distance myself - away from its heart-bruising blows, to purchase my own property... even with its attendant crippling mortgage repayments. I believed that a new home would provide security; it would set me a goal and give something to hold onto in my rapidly disintegrating world! The removal of the workshop to a new base - to continue with my freelance work, was a 'god's send', for it made the whole enterprise possible. The planning, daily reminders of things to be done - to bring about my change of home, and the sheer joy of positive action drove me forward... they were days of sweet dreams nothing could destroy.

Then my re-marriage - the pleasure of finding a 'like minded soul' who was looking for all that I was seeking. The sharing of all the difficulties of life whilst planning for a more secure future, contributed to the repair job needed to bring about something I had lost - my being. Josephine's family welcomed their mother's happiness - the entry into their home of a stepfather... It so pleased them that they made every effort to show I was part of their world; this welcoming gesture included her parents, brother, and friends. I knew I was very lucky and thanked god for giving me another chance to find a life-long partner!

The ever-changing print industry, working its way through a revolution - continually altering work routines and methods, all contributed to my position at the college being undermined. New technologies directed students away from craftwork towards Information Technology and the computer. The local authorities, who put into place early retirement practices, acknowledged these changes. It fitted into my new family's future. Sometimes in life certain events happen, which appear to be ordained... this was one such happening, a coming together of a series of events that gave meaning and direction...