

CHAPTER II

Pinner Green – Two up two down – Maintenance and Decoration – New Studio – Gardening – Finding furniture – Making a home – Coal fire – Love finds a way – Social services error – Lions – Badminton – New extension – Re-mortgage – Pay back Rita.

The next day, when everyone was out - at work or at school, I started loading up the car, taking great care that none of the neighbours were watching – piling the excess, including the mattress, onto the car's roof and tying it down. Fortunately, Leighton Cottages was only three miles down the road. With a racing pulse-rate, set in motion by a heady mixture of being excited sad and worried, first one and then all together, I set off. Making my way to my new home... I felt very exposed, slightly nervous and highly embarrassed, in case I met someone I knew.

I drew-up outside and started to unload... Fighting my way into the house... hauled the heavy double mattress through the living room up the winding narrow staircase into the bedroom. I was stuck halfway up the stairs unable to go in either direction. It was so heavy and unyielding. At last I crawled out from underneath and dragged it up the remaining stairs... one-step at a time, planting it with relief onto the floor. It was a well that the divan section folded in half, allowing me to cut them apart... I never did sew them together again. Attacking the problem of the stairs in the same manner - hauled each part-up-each-step, one at a time. By the time I had emptied the car and put everything away, I was completely done in. I was shaking like a leaf not just with the energy used but recognising the decisive moment... I was on my own for the first time in my life!

I looked about me, at what I had done, gathering all my little pieces around me to make a new life. These processions were the sum of my life – nearly twenty-five years of struggle, travelling up to London, working the maximum amount of overtime, one of the highest paid workers and managers in the printing industry. Not a very auspicious result!

I did not tell anyone, on the advice of Rita, who knew all my plans – that I was making a new home for all those who wanted to come and live with me. She said, 'it would only make parting difficult if you try to explain it all.' Continuing, said, 'within a couple of weeks, when you are settled in, I will let everyone know.'

Giving me a chance to get the place ship shape to receive my first visitor I worked hard all that summer holiday - particularly on the outside, to make the structure weatherproof and secure for the coming winter. I was up on the roof replacing slates, repairing gutters and down pipes, repointing brickwork, and finally, ended up painting the house.

Inside I redecorated, replaced the curtains, hung pictures, and rewired some electric points in the kitchen. Those fine sunny days went all too quickly. For the first time for many years, I was very engrossed in achieving all my goals to make this the very snuggest, securest home ever. The garden had to be tidied and I had to convert the coal and tool shed into a retouching studio. All this time I had to continue to work part-time to bring in the extra cash.

What goaded me to work even harder was the goal to make the place so attractive and homely that the youngest children would be drawn to its comfort and security.

Paicie, Rita's sister, bought me a radio and tape player, which I still have and treasure. My first set of four tapes I still remember for they kept me sane in periods of stress. One was of piano solos of all the well known classical composers; another of Sidney Thompson's Old Time Melodies which reminded me of life at home with my parents; a third which was a current pop tune by Shackatack, called I believe Trucking and my final tape was of Manhattan Transfer. Rita provided some linen; Stan bought me down some towels and spare utensils, the Lyons Club, through the welfare department at Rayners Lane, provided second hand furniture; I was all set on a new life...!The coalhouse produced enough coal for all the first summer and following winter. On cold evenings I

lit the fire, played my tapes and listened to my radio; enjoying my cup of coffee with a cigarette sitting on my two seater settee in front of the fire which crackled in the grate.

Rita was my first guest; she bought a friend round by car, and all together, we looked at every room; every new possession, and every item of furniture..., lovingly polished and carefully arranged. My little house had to be tidied and swept, dusted and washed, to show it off to its best advantage. Raspberries out of the garden with cream, and sponge cake on the cake stand - made for the occasion. They were highly impressed... the smell of coffee percolated the rooms and the fire crackled in the hearth.

Rebecca came round with loads of homework, which she did, sitting at the dining room table; speaking with her friends on the telephone to find out what they were doing and constructing her homework as she went along. She was my most frequent visitor – her voice gave the house a familiar ring, gave me company, and made the transition so much easier. Occasionally she stayed overnight at the weekends. It was a treat for me to have her there for breakfast and to fuss around her.

My freelance work was continuing well. The tool shed was now converted into a studio and all the chemicals and dishes were in place. Lines for drying films strung across the walls and a blower-heater speedily got them dry.

That year I replaced my Ford Cortina Estate for a later saloon model bought from Pauline, Stan's wife, which had been a used car from Stan's work place.

It was about this time that Rita asked for her money back – the five hundred pounds she had loaned me to by Leighton Cottage. At that time, I was paying a voluntary divorce settlement of over £174 per month, which was enormous – which I was continually falling in arrears with. Frankly something had to give although the freelance work I was doing made all the difference – just about enabled me to make some sort of payment, to not only Sally but her mother too.

That September 1981, just before I started back to college after the summer break, the Social Welfare Officer phoned to ask if she could come round to see how I was getting on. I was pleased to make a date, which she kept the following week. I had my little house ship shape and Bristol fashion - fire lit and coffee on. We settled down after showing her proudly round, pointing out all that I had achieved that summer.

We discussed the whole situation - how things were shaping out, who had visited. All that had happened and who had visited me since I had left my previous home three months before. She said that, "she was pleased that it had all worked out fine and that she could see I was coping well. However, she, and the Harrow Social services, would like me to return to 68 and to take up where I had left off." I asked her, "what was different now, why were they asking this?" She went on to say, "events had proved you right, that they had been wrong - deceived - believing Mrs Kearey when she had said, 'I only leave the home to get away from my husband.' Mrs Kearey was leaving the young children alone in the evenings and at night – that the older children left in charge were not responsible and that they, the Social Services, were concerned at the breakdown of discipline and care in the home."

At last, I thought, the Social Services had come to their senses. I had told them all along that they should have looked into the situation more thoroughly. She, the Welfare Officer, had NOT believed what I had been saying and had caused the problem in the first place. It was however perfectly true that I should have seen them after the third child had been born – when Sally had wanted to increase still further the size of the family. That had been irresponsible, weak, and thoughtless on my behalf – taking the easy ways out by letting Sally eventually get her own way. Nevertheless, that was now all water under the bridge]. Here I was faced, I thought, by a situation, which would get me back in charge, so that I could bring order out of chaos and get the whole show

back onto the correct course – keep the younger children in the home doing their homework and not away, where temptations could easily lead them astray.

I told the Welfare Officer that, ‘I would be perfectly happy to sell up and go back to 68 Norwood Drive but if I did, would they in turn, give me their support?’ She asked me, ‘what sort of support would I need’. I told her that, ‘I would not want Mrs Kearey in the house - that would only lead to disruption’. The Welfare Officer replied, “I have no authority to ask Mrs Kearey to leave, you will have to go back under the previous arrangement or not at all.” My reply to that was, “You made the mistake, and you put the matter right.”

This was a most disappointing and discouraging answer. I told her that, “What she was saying was unreasonable: I had been right in my assessment of the situation; I had had to leave my home and buy another house, furniture and utensils; this meant leaving all that I had built up for the children who needed my support. What she was asking me to do was to go back but not to have any authority?”

I continued, by asking her to look around, see how I was placed – how I liked to live, in what circumstance and in what condition. What I needed was good will by all parties to ensure maximum co-operation. I went on to say, “Because, what they were asking was unworkable, I would have to say ‘NO’ to her request.” With that, she left never to be in touch again understanding that there was no other course of action left for any of us.

Sally controlled the situation: would never give up the house, move, change her mind, or let go of the young children. All these things were unthinkable; she was incapable of letting go of anything, raked by possessiveness and insecurity.

Gradually things worked out. I got used to walking to Pinner station to get the train to the Elephant & Castle where I taught most days. The return home was wonderful going to my own home making up the fire with all my own things around me. The freelance work had to be finished ready for the next edition and perhaps Rebecca would be round.

That Christmas 1981 was my first alone I do not remember anyone coming round or receiving any invitations except by the neighbours. I was very glad I had my own home: the fire lit up the room with its dancing flames, my new second hand black and white television set, received from the Harrow Lions Club, was my latest addition and my world was thus a considerable improvement on the previous Christmas. I hung paper decorations, put up fairy lights and set up a tree. My home was all very cheering and snug. My dear neighbours were ever on hand with a welcoming cup of tea and friendly word. This contributed towards my new feeling of belonging.

Further, up the road a young couple invited me in for a Christmas drink. He was a builder and ran his own company in league with his father. They were building an extension to his house, which was similar to my own. Naturally, he wondered if I too would be interested in building on – installing a new kitchen, upstairs bathroom, and further bedroom. I looked over his plans and could see the potential. I agreed that there ideas and suggestions were reasonable and would fit in. I told then I had no money and how I was placed with my mortgage. They were astounded by the amount I was paying and the rate of interest. The wife immediately went round to another neighbour who was invited in. He worked at the Head Office of Abbey National Building Society in London. He was shown my figures and personal details upon which he declared that he could arrange not only another mortgage for the original sum but an additional amount for the proposed extension. If I succeeded in eighty pounds, a month would reduce obtaining this new mortgage my outgoings. What fantastic news but how annoyed I was that I had been paying over the odds for something when it was not necessary - all because I had relied upon a so-called friend.

Eventually the plans were drawn up, permission was granted and a date set for when the building-work was to start. It was all very exciting and gave me an enormous fillip.

The Conservative Government sought a drastic reduction of coal. Pits closed and production reduced. The miners went on strike, which resulted in hardship, poverty, violence, and frustration. Thatcher demanded the industry to be self supporting – a rational if difficult and unkind goal. The unrest continued well into the 80s. The period was termed ‘the age of discontent!’

Sexual behaviour for women gradually underwent almost total liberation. Virginity declined. It was recorded that almost fifty percent of fewer than sixteen has admitted to an affair; that twenty-six per cent of fewer than twenty-ones claimed their first sexual experience before the age of sixteen. Thirty years before these figures would have been just over five percent.

The Social Democratic Party formed in 81 and the following year the Falklands war began. Prince Charles married Diana and inflation fell steadily; unemployment reached over three million two million of those jobs were lost entirely – mostly by men from manufacturing.