

CHAPTER III

Happy outcome - New family – Tinkers Hey – Appreciation of colour – Designing a new Course - Training for Industry – Moving in - Financial Services – Hill Samuel – Wedding – Holiday Home in Altea - Charmandean School - Aldenham – Selling the Cottage – Sadness.

At college I picked up a magazine called ‘Homes & Gardens’ which advertised, as part of its content, a friends and partnership club for professional people. I cut it out and carried this advertisement around in my pocket for a couple of weeks. Turning out my pockets one day I discovered it and finally after much thought decided to join the agency. I filled in their application form and waited for the result. I received my first three names and telephone numbers. I meet all three but found they were all tense and uncommunicative - displaying great disappointment with the way their own lives had worked out and not wanting to commit themselves to another relationship. They were certainly not the sort of individuals I had in mind to either to develop a lasting friendship with or to share an evening. Another three names were sent to me and after picking out one decided to write her a letter setting out all my hopes and fears – what I was looking for and how I wanted my future to work out, the sort of life I had led and wanted to get away from. How I had ended up feeling let down and nervous about starting a new relationship. I believed that life would be enhanced by sharing each experience, which came along.

I sent the letter not expecting any reply or telephone call. Within that first week, I had a phone call from someone called Josephine who lived in Tring, Hertfordshire. She said, “She would like to meet up and could I suggest a venue.” Just opposite me was a restaurant which always seemed to be an inviting place so I answered that I could, giving her a time, date and place.

Josephine called and we walk over the road to the restaurant and the previously booked table. I had never been to that restaurant before; in fact, I was never used to eating out at all. Josephine was forty-three but looked ten years younger I was forty-seven and felt much older. Here was a sparkling, eight stone, five foot three, bubbly haired, smiling extrovert; smartly dressed in a fawn coloured trouser suite, who had been driving a pale green Toyota Bluebird with élan, her parking was immaculate – this description referred to everything she did.

The evening was a total success. Time stood still, as the story goes, and we got on famously. This sounds like some Hollywood film story line but that was how it was. That was not because my life was so grotty that practically anything would bring sunshine to it or that the fog of depression had dulled down the scenery and life around me was making this moment appear in full Technicolor with an orchestra backing the dialogue. Whatever, as you may well imagine, life suddenly took on a rosy hue and the Walt Disney songbirds flew around chasing each other. My letter had born fruit because what I had written described exactly what Josephine felt - was looking for.

Josephine Mitman, nee Easom, was born in Hilton, St. Ives in Huntingdon on the 27th February 1939, to Harry and Eva Easom nee Martin. Educated at Nottingham High School for Girls and Nottingham University; she was determined to make her mark. Her father was a lecturer in engineering, a committed Salvation Army Captain and tireless Town Councillor. Her mother was also deeply involved with the army and local ‘good-works’ and brother, Paul, has a chemistry doctorate and worked as department head with Boots the Chemists.

Josephine was going through her final divorce settlements being married in 1962 and divorced in November 1980 – the reasons were very similar to my own except that she was looking after her four children who were all at boarding schools. The two girls, Helen, thirteen, was almost the same age as Rebecca just a couple of days older. Anna, Josephine’s youngest daughter, was nine. Both girls attended Charmandean School, a fee paying boarding school for girls, later to be changed in the final year to co-educational, established near to Buckingham town. The boys had both attended The

Dragon School, Oxford, their father's old school, and offered and accepted a music scholarship at Aldenham School, Hertfordshire. Anthony, the eldest, was a piano and oboe scholar, in his last year at school finishing off his 'A' levels, almost exactly eighteen being born on the 24th. January 1964, Christopher, the pianist and trombone player, was sixteen, seven days later on the 31st.

So began a relationship that was what we were both looking for. The letter sent to Josephine, written before we had met, set out what I was trying to find in a partnership. This had obviously struck a cord with her – we both knew what we wanted; we had enough experience to be sure and we knew how difficult our goals were to achieve.

We met regularly those first few months. I met the girls that Easter break and found them charming. Whereas the boys had been to the Dragon School, the girls had been to Arts Educational in Tring.

After a couple of months it became clear to us both that, we were suited and enjoyed similar goals and expectations from life. I gave her a key to the cottage and by that gesture I hoped would show that I considered we could make our friendship permanent. Later we often met at the railway station in London and journeyed back together. Therefore, I suppose that those train journeys were our courting get-togethers.

Josephine home was a detached chalet bungalow called Tinkers Hey that was perched at the top of Tring Hill close to Tring in Hertfordshire. There I met the girls, Helen and Anna, who on a regular basis had long weekends away from boarding school. They were fresh, keen and charming, naturally welcoming and unaffected. I slipped into their routine as naturally as if I had known them for years instead of days. I did for them exactly what I had done for my own children and was adaptable enough to quickly become conversant with their mode of living, habits and special requirements. Josephine introduced me to her home help Florence and her daughter Iris. They were always so kind to me, providing me with a cup of tea and a slice of cake whenever I went to their house. They were a wonderful couple of characters who I immediately got on with and grew to love.

Josephine was working for Hill Samuel Insurance Company as an Investment Adviser – part of the Hill Samuel Merchant Banking Group - she had been with them for about a year and based at St James', London. By chance, she had been introduced to them and had immediately clicked with the existing team, their working arrangements, and the need for such items by the public. It is not often that individuals starting in a new career find that they are very suited but for Josephine she had found the job fulfilling, enjoyable and challenging to the extent that she became within a very short period one of the key workers with the group. She was a round peg in a round hole. She is naturally interested in finance - how it can be managed and made to work - what it can provide and how it can be protected. Having run her own company, promoted its wares, engaged its staff and travelled extensively probably knew more than the average financial adviser.

I soon took Josephine to Rita's to show her off. They got on famously and chatted away as if they had known each other for years. Rita was impressed and said so. I still went round to have lunch on my half days. Rita was fully conversant with that was going on. I used to pick Rebecca from North London and take her back with me to her grandmothers. It was the only place we could meet which provided a warm comfortable environment. It worked out very well.

With my holidays and working arrangements, I was on hand to look after the home whilst Josephine was out. Being an Adviser meant that she worked unsocial hours; having to know each of the products well; able to use a considerable amount of personal initiative whilst being self-motivated. I took off her shoulders all the problems of the home not just the cooking and cleaning but also the maintenance of the property and grounds. This allowed her to concentrate on the job in hand without having to worry about what was going on at home.

The construction work started on Leighton Cottage that summer 1982 with an increased mortgage from another lender – Abbey National with an interest rate at six and a half percent. What

an enormous difference it made to me, I could pay Sally's maintenance whilst having a new loan to cover the extension.

At this time, the number of marriages braking-down was half of all the total of those marriages taking place. Splitting up meant a lowering of life styles of all concerned – probably one of the worst aspects I found after working so hard to build it up; with children receiving little or no pocket money - my children experienced this and found it very difficult to manage making them feel underprivileged in front of their peers.

Society, at that time, recognised there was a general lowering of moral behaviour - extra marital relations were freely talked about, dating agencies were used as pick-up points for sex and pre-marital relationships were accepted... As a father of girls, this behaviour worried me enormously.

Homosexual relationships were included in TV plays and revues which was for my eyes was taboo coming from the sort of Victorian home and environment I had grown up in.

There was a rise too in the taking of drugs as well as solvents and an increase in sexual crimes. It described 'the upset society' because all these disruptive, anti-social habits came close together, rising up over a twenty-year period. These social changes, together with high unemployment and union unrest, stimulated a feeling of hostility towards management and business institutions. This ultimately led to The Tebbit Act in 1982, which restricted aggressive union behaviour – bullying, when taking industrial action – making unions legally liable for infringements in their agreements with managements. What played into the Tory's hands was the monumental increase in unemployment. Between 1981 and 83 there was a one and a half million reduction in trades union membership. It was to get worse! By a system of 'monetary policy', inflation, in the same period, fell from 18 percent to 4.5.

The Court granted a Decree Absolute, in 1982, and with it I received the Courts decision for a 'clean break,' - an agreement that satisfied both Sally and me. The settlement stated that Sally would be awarded the property and contents but only until the youngest child reached school leaving age – full-time education, or earlier by agreement. I was to receive twenty percent of the value of the property, by valuation at the time payment made. I was also to contribute towards Rebecca's educational fees. This was to end when the Insurance Company started their payments to cover school fees... and when Sally received top-up financial help from the school's welfare fund in 1981. The property mortgage was my responsibility held by Provident Life not to end until later in 1982. Because Sally was in full-time employment with the Local Health Authority, on a rate paid for a senior medical secretary, I would not have to pay towards maintenance.

Josephine and I came to the simple conclusion that it would be sensible for me to spend more time at her home to see if we were suited – as compatible as we imagined we were. The girls applauded the decision and so that is what happened. I became integrated into their world, visiting their school, talking to their teachers and generally doing all the things a father would do. They enjoyed the more even tenor to their lives having a man about the house doing all the odd jobs and the gardening whilst enjoying a far happier mother. Meanwhile I shuttled backwards and forwards to work using Tring station often meeting up with Josephine. It did not seem to make a great deal of difference in journey time - they were about the same. It was just nice to be going back to company and to be wanted. We went as a foursome camping up to Ripon and Durham and we got on extremely well, the girls finding that the pleasures on a campsite can be a challenge especially using the wash-house and toilets!

That Christmas I helped collect the girls from school – sorting out their trunks and this time the boys came home too. I fitted in as best I could with all the arrangements, including the children visiting their father. Therefore, this was to be my new routine. It seemed perfectly settled and enjoyable and what was important I felt wanted making my past life back at Leighton Cottage, rediscovered on those few occasions I went back there to see how the building was getting on,

lonely, uninteresting, and very quiet. I knew now what I had been missing. How much better it was to have said to you, "I love you," and mean it!

I saw Rebecca on a monthly basis at Rita's house. This eventual seventy mile round trip had to be undergone to coincide with her leaving school. I would wait outside to see her coming out with her friends; that I would load into my car to drop them off on the way. We ended up at Rita's house to spend over an hour together after which I took her home. It was the only arrangement possible although very unsatisfactory. These visits ended when Rita said that she could not bear them any longer because she could not stand the disruption. I think really it was because she was being sidelined -wanted all my attention.

Unfortunately, I never received an invitation to view Rebecca's work at North London or to attend any of the school open days, meet the teacher events or sports days. Her mother naturally tended to be first with the invitations and coming events diary, which was understandable but annoying. I saw Benjamin a few times coming out of the amusement arcade in Rayners Lane but that was all he never came to Leighton Cottage no doubt preferring the cinema or arcade. It was enormously difficult to see any of them at all; meeting on street corners or in the park was not realistic. Whilst I had been at Pinner, only Rebecca had been a regular visitor on a weekly basis – for much of the time the only visitor.

The whole object of buying a house in walking distance of Norwood Drive was wasted – it was also not really a satisfactory situation because I knew every street corner; every twist and turn of every road. Each area had a memory and of course, there was always the chance of bumping into Sally or her friend. Fortunately that was now all outdated I had a future with Josephine and that is how we saw it - Rebecca got on well with her and could always stay at Tinkers Hey if ever she felt the need. It was a very happy period – one of hope and very forward looking.

My brother Stan began to suffer from a weakening of the muscles in his legs and had many examinations to try to find out what was the cause. This had been an on-going condition for almost a year – he had put it down to stress and lack of exercise, but it turned out to be a muscle wasting disease called Muscular Dystrophy. From that moment, in 1982, his life changed - it was now one of planning for his long-term medical care and this was made more critical because Pauline was pregnant.

What a thoroughly awful thing to happen to Stan now that he was gradually getting his life together. It is never a good time for something like this to strike one down but in this instance, it was dreadful. Their son Tim was born in 1983 and almost from that time Stan could see that his life and his family's was going to change. Stan managed to keep-on in the motor industry for a further three years all the time becoming weaker. This became more trying because the truck and bus industry was in the doldrums forcing employers to lay off staff, which is the way he ended his career.

In 1983 there were nearly three and a half million unemployed and the future was not so predictable nor settled – it was believed that computers would completely take over all aspects of life - planning, hand skills and labour intensive manufacturing leaving just the service industry. Like all predictions, this did not come about quickly but lasted another twenty years.

The printing industry, led by the newspaper industry, was deteriorating in both profitability and print quality. Firms were folding up almost weekly. Information Technology in the shape of computerised print production including colour reproduction was being produced using all new electronic equipment. The hold previously maintained by the strong unions undermined by the changing technology coupled with increasing high unemployment. Firms abroad won orders for printing contracts. Production methods and labour produced cheaper, faster print runs at a higher standard. This created a disorientated, disillusioned workforce, which lost its union strength. Workers became adaptable, which is exactly what the managements wanted.

Within Further Education Colleges, and in particular the Pre-Printing Processes based at The London College of Printing, there was great disquiet. Gravure suffered most for there was very little of the department left; Letterpress relied upon flexography to support its staff; Lithography although on the rise as a process gave way to rotary scanners for its reproduction technology and Screen Process continued to expand having more packaging and front of store advertising to deal with. There was talk about new forms of image production including ink jet and photocopies, which were all, encompasses in the new reprographic technology.

In the newspaper industry the development of an interaction between telecommunication equipment, computing - the storage of information, office/desk top equipment and picture manipulation; growth in the application of optical fibre systems in rotary scanners which pass modulated beams of coloured and white light to make the separation printers. These all contributed towards the new printing and image technology, which would revolutionize newspaper production.

Further Education – the Industrial Training Boards took up Training for Industry. The government acknowledged it by instigating a new concept called industrial training boards. Industry recognised that vocational training was at an all time low in terms of both quality and worthwhileness. The Industrial Training Boards were set up to try to make sure reasonable standards of up-to-date information and relevant skills were both taught in the workplace and further education colleges. All these things had to be able to be tested assessed and marks given. Every trainee or apprentice had to have their standards entered into a training manual, signed by the students, the student's firm and college. Finally, the Board Inspector checked these reports.

On a bright, sunny morning that 10th of May 1983, Josephine and I got married at Aylesbury Registry Office. I had Duncan Kirby as my best man and Josephine had his wife Gelia as consort. We were very happy to be there and to share what was to be a very joyful union. Before getting married, we had discussed between our Solicitor and ourselves the consequences of altering our name so that both sets of children would not feel excluded. We therefore had all the paperwork ready to get married using the name Mitman-Kearey. Josephine's boys never used this facility but the girls did when they felt able or felt using the name gave them security.

The agreement to get married and to hold the ceremony unknown to everyone else was exciting, intimate and wholly in keeping with what we felt at the time. We never thought that this to be a selfish, unthoughtful or disquieting act, but wanting, perhaps even needing, something to call our own, after losing such a great deal. We thought that we were doing right by those relying upon us, namely Helen and Anna. Had any of my children decided to stay with me then they too would have been included in our thinking.

When we got back to our home, Tinkers Hey, I carried Josephine over the threshold and we celebrated with our friends cutting the cake and toasting the occasion with champagne.

Our marriage prompted us to give much thought as to how the girls were going to be educated - whether Charmandean was fitting or not. They wanted to become daygirls and live at home. Anthony was finishing his 'A' levels and Christopher had another year to do at Aldenham.

The paper manufacturing Industry was suffering from competition from Scandinavia and Canada, which was undermining UKs production - Simon, would have to seek work abroad to get the most out of his qualification. Because of this and other reasons, relating to future prospects Simon changed direction and became an Accountant after graduating. His first job was with Knox Cropper, Accountants based at Blackfriars, London. I often met up with him at Blackfriars when walking between the Elephant and Castle to Back Hill, Farringdon, where the college had an annex.

Josephine and I had both driven up to Manchester to witness Simon's graduation. It was something of a challenge to get him kitted out in his mortarboard and gown for the official photograph. Eventually Simon trailed us back south in his trusty mini.

After our wedding in May, home life for me was at Tinkers Hey. Leighton Cottage was still in the hands of the builders - although almost finished, I went back there at frequent intervals to see how they were getting on. When the extension had been built, I placed the property on the market. Thankfully, it was soon sold, covering all my expenses with a few thousand pounds to spare. All the furniture so lovingly and carefully gathered together was sold or given back to charity. The two clocks used as part exchange for a lovely Vienna clock and the surplus goods given to Florence and Iris.

I was very sorry to see not only my little cottage being sold but also all those things I had collected, to make it so comfortable and snug, got rid of. Leighton Cottage had been for me a fine bolthole from a not very nice world. Still, there was excitement in the air and a new beginning to contemplate.

That Easter as a family we went to East Anglia to spend a week at the Trust House Forte – that was our initiation to the region, little did Josephine and I know that we would return many years later?

All the children came home at the end of the summer term - Anthony had finished at school and took up part-time work as an organist at the local church whilst cutting out a career as a rock group musician playing keyboard and composing. The girls were to go back to school as weekly borders. Helen, who had a serious allergy condition, was finding it very difficult to control the symptoms, even though she was religiously maintaining the course of treatment laid down by her doctors. Whatever was done to alleviate the problem the eczema persisted? I do not believe - at that time with the knowledge we had, we missed out any prescribed medical course of treatment or environmental change, to defeat the problem.

Josephine and I were asked to join a team in Hertfordshire to discuss and formulate a plan for the county if there were to be a nuclear attack. This was to last for a number of weeks and we were introduced to all the county's special fall-out shelters and emergency equipment. The lectures were eye-opening and very informative although quite frightening. It showed us how expected an attack was thought to be and how prepared the country was to such a thing happening.

That year we flew to Venice, to take part in a conference – to the Danieli Hotel, where we sampled all the delights of that magical city plus a gondola ride and masked ball. On the return trip we took, the Orient Express back to Paris dressed in outfits representing the nineteen twenties.

My efforts in the garden at Tinkers Hey was beginning to show – the trees were now minus their suckers and the broken branches lopped and the grass was cut in sculptured heights to give variation

That summer we took by car Flo and Iris, plus Rebecca and the girls, to Warner's holiday camp on the Isle of Wight - although arriving in a thunderstorm was not on the cards at all. It was a thoroughly enjoyable experience having such a diverse group who were all mucking in - using every camp facility to get the most out of the experience – I must say that we all enjoyed the dances in the evenings and to see Flo and Iris doing the conga was an event not to be missed.

One of Josephine's clients owned a property in Spain. He was a builder wanted to sell up and offered the house and its furniture to us. It was for just over fifty thousand pounds, had all the usual accommodation plus use of the community pool, and was almost new. It was located not far from Alicante near to Altea and Polop de la Marina and close to a golf course called Bernia Golf. We spent a delightful holiday there and decided to buy it using our imagination to furnishing it, planning how we would alter the layout, and wondering whether the girls would like to spend their holidays there.

Anthony's band was performing in pubs and halls in the Watford area trying to penetrate the closed shop of the few really well attended venues. His composing became perhaps his greatest

strength, which gave the band its individuality - a sound within the category of American Rock music.

Josephine again succeeded in achieving a place at the next convention venue held in Athens where we, throughout the week, took in all the well-known archaeological sights. We extended the week to fly to Egypt and the Aswan dam to sail back down the Nile past Karnack on the Nile Queen.

We decided that for the time being at least the girls should stay at their school in Buckingham. To accommodate their request to be weekly borders we would move nearer to the school. We consulted Estate Agents both to look for a property and to place ours on the market. Whilst this was in progress, Josephine continued her work, which took her on a regular basis to London.

On arriving, back home from Spain we continued to look for possible homes near to the girl's school at Buckingham. Our own sale was proving to be difficult. We just did not have many viewings and the market proved to be slow.

Whilst all this was going on, we organized a trip out to Altea for the girls and Chris in which we all piled into my Honda Accord to motor all of the way. It was a challenge to drive that far and live off the land in so far that we did not previously book up places to stay but took potluck. As it turned out it was thoroughly enjoyable and we all have to see something of Spain as well as our house in Bernia Golf. The girls sampled donkey riding and the delights of the pool, strolling around Altea whilst taking in the local atmosphere, and taking the lemon express train up the coast.

This was the time of Conservative rule under Margaret Thatcher [1979 – 1990]. It was about free markets, reducing public spending, privatization, monetary control - a union jack, flag-waving society that applauded self-help - each individual looking after their own interests regarding education, pension, health, and long-term care. It brought about trade union reform – outlawing secondary picketing, made inroads into the eventual banning of closed shops; they made unions legally liable for infringements to negotiated settlements, promoted regular election of union leaders, and made it public knowledge about union funds donated to political bodies. It was all a means to limit the strength of the trades union. This assisted by a reduction in union membership brought about by mass unemployment. Together these all made the conservative governments position stronger.

Halfway through Thatcher's reign the miner's strike took place, which lasted a year? She had been very secretive about the amount of planning which had gone ahead of the strike to hoard large stocks of coal at all the generating stations. About the same time, the print unions stripped of their power by the move from Fleet Street to Wapping – by forcibly changing their working practices.

Maxwell created a massive print and communication business, taking over and stripping out - laying off redundant workers. Unemployment was at its peak in 1986 with three point four million workers out of work. At the end of this period, the public held the conservative government responsible for the inflation that was rife.

That summer Chris and I painted the outside of Tinkers Hey whilst the girls cycled round and round us making Chris furious because they were getting in the way. We had our breaks sharing a convivial smoke in the garden shed with a cup of coffee. It was a very happy period and a great deal done to the garden to make it all more attractive. One of the ways I thought would improve the vista was to cut a gate shaped hole in the high hedge, which surrounded the garden. This had the effect to give the impression that the garden extended further down the valley. Trees lopped and the lawn shaped by allowing different heights of grass to grow; the garden took on a very different appearance.