

CHAPTER VI.

Central Council of Physical Recreation - Forcing a reaction - Badminton Coaching - Golf - Sailing - Lacrosse - Netball - Northwick Park Hospital - Dances - Divorce Reform Act - Property Rights - Arthritic Club - Late nights - Tension and Stress.

It was thought, by my mother-in-law Rita that I should take up an outside-the-home interest. This was a typical statement by Rita because she was very keen to see that individuals did not become hidebound and inward looking and tended to stimulate others to be outgoing.

I have never had to consider before why she should do this. It was if she had been bottled up, penned in, and corralled and did not want others to be in the same position. Rita was a frustrated dancer - liked the stage and was in her younger days a bit of a show off. She was also a frustrated musician - although played the piano charmingly and sufficiently accomplished to be in the string section of the Wembley Philharmonic, would have liked to achieve - knew she was capable of, Associate of The Royal Academy. She liked to dream of being close to the Arts and Crafts movement and its followers - read about design, colour and furnishings, collected poetry books, meditated and could discourse on literature.

However, I do not believe any of that explained why she pressed so hard to make others react. It is as if she wanted to get some sort of response... stand back and see a change in the relationship. All most odd but she were interesting to talk to and had a wide knowledge of the classics and poetry. She once told me that she would say something to her friend Beryl just to see what her reaction would be. The object was to stimulate argument - by goading - to cause a reaction.

Sally had the same urge as her mother - to make a statement to observe the effect...this invites, on the uninitiated, consideration - to make a reasoned response to continue a conversation or offer explanation. This may not be what is required the statement may have been just a remark to fill in space...

I took up badminton at an evening class having never played before. The class was about twenty strong with mostly women, which is quite normal for all evening classes being more socially minded - preferring to do things in company. Some of the class had played before but the majority had not. It did not take long to get in the swing of the game and in no time at all found, I enjoyed the experience. The small group of men, including myself, stayed together for many years gradually getting better whilst taking an interest in the professional game. We went to the all England competition at Wembley and took on extra tuition. Four of us stayed together for eight years, eventually I attended a British association course - became a qualified coach.

Golf was another interest, which caught my imagination. A near neighbour, Ian Cuthbertson, who had gone to the same school, played at the local course and invited me to 'have a go'. Thereafter, a regular Sunday morning game meant getting up very early - before six, to drive to the course and put a ball in the shoot - ready for an eight o'clock playoff. This continued for some time and only ended because he left the area.

I have explained that Rita was very keen that I should take up an outside family interest to make a change from routine, every day work - saying that spending a week away would also be a good rest. The local library had a book, which listed courses and venues for sporting activities, and amongst those was the Central Council for Physical Recreation at Bisham Abbey.

I went on one of their sailing courses, remembering my experiences during National Service. Another year, I went golfing, then pony trekking, both with my brother Derek, finally, Badminton.

These events were good experiences - well worth attending. However, I had a family that I missed... It was unsettling and could be disruptive. There were one or two occasions when relationships with the opposite sex could have been progressed... I shied away... knowing that it could be highly dangerous and only end in unhappiness.

Sally had her interests too. During and after school she played lacrosse, which continued right up to when we were married, until being pregnant with Simon prevented taking part. Later, but only for a short period, took it up again. She was an aggressive player wanting to be where the play was and 'to always win'. When her friends, at a keep-fit class, asked her to join a netball club this took over and became a weekly event - the family, me pushing the pushchair, watched from the sidelines, attending the finals at the end of the season.

Sally took up the Red Cross attending their weekly sessions. This she found interesting closely allied to her medical experience whilst making one or two friends. Being a medical secretary by training she went back to work part-time... until Rebecca was found a position at kindergarten at the age of four. She then took up a full-time vacancy in the audio pool at Northwick Park Hospital dealing with arthritic and rheumatic conditions.

We attended the Hospital dances and social events to back up their fund raising for various charities and societies. Sally made many friends with patients and members of staff and these friendships, within the department, involved many lunch time get-togethers which spilled out affecting afternoons, and then on into the evenings. These social lunch hours began to spill over - into work, exciting the department heads...

Office staff in hospitals, and other large institutions, are mainly women, many of whom are job sharing or on part-time contracts. A high percent of these are unmarried, single mothers, separated or divorced - the completely social mix. These groups can have a great effect upon each other - affect each other's happiness, stability and social relationships. Those dissatisfied, disaffected and unhappy... seek excitement to spice up their lives. This can have a knock on effect causing instability in others, particularly over a long-term, particularly if the person susceptible to persuasion...

Men working together, talk about work, cars, DIY, sport, gardening and television. They do not belittle their wives however bad their relationship. Women talk about family and the home, social/community life, holidays, television and children. These are generalisations but show that it is more likely that women in certain groups discuss between themselves their personal relationships sometimes in a disparaging way.

To the rising call for easier and speedier divorce The Divorce Reform Act of 1969 replaced the idea of matrimonial offence - usually adultery, with the breakdown of a marriage as due cause - it was also customary for the ex-wife to have custody of young children, which normally meant those children under sixteen - out of schooling.

The emancipation of women was clearly being achieved but at what cost? It believed in 1970 that sexual love, in all its parts, very important. Intercourse rate was believed to be twice a week as an average. Three times considered high and once thought low. The divorce rate was 10.4 per thousand of the married population - remarriage rate falling. There was a feeling by women generally that 'it's my time now', believing men had had it good, in their eyes, for too long - wanting to capture 'lost youth'.

Sally could not wait to find herself a full-time job now that Rebecca was going to school... being mindful there were to be no more children she was adamant that she had to have another interest to fill the gap. Having six children to provide care and continuity for at home - even though Simon was soon to enter university education, was not enough stimulation. The draw of, 'being wanted and rewarded too' plus the excitement, was enough to spur her on. Something had to suffer at home, and that something was, having a happy, calm, contented and fulfilled mother working for everyone's best interest at home - planning a long-term secure future for all.

Simon finished his 'O' levels in 1976 going onto Sixth Form College for his 'A' levels. Halfway through these he had his mocks followed by the normal routine, filling in his UCCA form. It was

thought he would be a doctor, subjects that covered: Biology, Physics and Chemistry. When Christmas 77 came round, I telephoned his tutor - to find out when I would get back his page three comments - a university application made. I discovered that the UCCA form had not been filled in. The tutor gave as a reason, 'Simon's lack of interest, in having a university degree'.

This set in motion a panic in me. It was too late now to make a normal application. Fortunately, at College, a Higher Education publication highlighted the need for applications, for a bursary of £100 per month to read an honours degree in Paper Science at UMIST – sponsored by The Institute of Paper Making. One year worked in a factory of their choice for industrial training purposes. I sent off post haste for the form, which when it arrived, was duly filled in and posted. With a great deal of good luck back came the acceptance and pages of information. Gone was all thinking about being a doctor for now papermaking was the 'in thing'.

As expected, Simon got good grades whilst keeping the schools tuck shop properly stocked. Off he went to seek his fortune in Manchester relishing an excellent social life whilst taking an active interest in rugby and hockey. His mini suffered loss of wheels, much overloading with barrels of beer and achieving a record for the number of passengers able to get in it.

Simon's out of school 'washing up' experiences, in The Hand in Hand, Pinner [which backed up his paper rounds and other means of making money], not only gave him financial independence but provided money to buy and run his own car. David also went to work at The Hand in Hand a little later.

Simon took his car with him to university, and it lasted out the full four-year course - giving noble service - putting up with intermittent servicing, dodgy petrol and serious overloading. I believe he came to know quite well one or two girls who complemented his dance routines delayed getting back to Hall. Being social secretary stretched his imagination and emptied his pockets. His third penultimate year at UMIST was spent at a Paper Making Mill in Snodland, Kent. The idea was to learn about the industry from the shop floor – to work his way round the whole factory gaining an insight into paper making practices.

Completing his two-year 'A' level course in English and History David was undecided about which university to go to... It was decision time, although for me, giving him sensible advice difficult... nothing presented a clear path or served as a starting point.

During my summer vacation that year, I went up to Eaton Bray to see my brother Stan and his wife Jean. When I arrived, Jean showed me into the garden and bade me to sit down have a glass of cordial and wait, as Stan would be along soon. When he appeared they went off together - that I thought rather strange. When he came back he looked very annoyed. Anyway, we had a talk, the afternoon progressed, and after a cup of tea, I took myself off back home. It transpired later that Jean had been going out with her boss - she worked at a local car accessory plant in the office, for sometime, and this later turned into a permanent relationship. This was a totally unexpected event...

Stan and Jean had five boys ranging from sixteen to nine settled into schools and the locality for all their years together. Stan was going places with his company and not long made up to Director and General Manager. The house they lived in was in a crescent of new homes and had five bedrooms. Considered one of the better houses in Eaton Bray, had a relatively large garden neatly laid out and Stan's pride and joy.

Jean's behaviour was a total shock to Stan not knowing that her relationship had been going on for so long or that it had reached such a state. He gave her an ultimatum [my visit coincided with this event and therefore explains the rather tense atmosphere] which she accepted - to desert her family, which finally led to a Divorce. Stan had to re-mortgage his property to pay for the settlement, which made his finances very difficult - this coming on top of the added pressure caused by the fluctuating market in the motor industry as well as having to look after five boys.

Sally and I were not conversant with child psychology nor did we understand current thought on the socialisation of children within a family unit. Even though we had read Dr. Spock's book on having a family such esoteric notions were not to the forefront of our mind. There were more children to follow and more money needed to provide a home. Every day brought new challenges and young children are very demanding on both time and energy, feeding and comforting. Self-imposed as well as society imposed pressure can have an enormous influence on young people making them feel unwanted and uncared for.

Rachel was sixteen coming on seventeen, just like the song. She considered attending a secretarial college making office work her career. There were no pretensions about doing 'A' levels wanting to get out of education with all possible speed to start work and earn money. Boy friends were far more important without being too critical about their present and future occupations.

Being fastidious and having to live cramped together with little or no privacy has its own effect - causes strain on others as well as oneself. The three girls slept in the large front bedroom, which made it almost impossible to be private and to have personal belongings properly stored. Rachel being the eldest demanded conformity from the other two and attention by them at all times to her space. No matter how tidy each person had their belongings surrounding them, it was never close enough and there were frequent dissensions.

As I was home more often now - able to control what was happening, calm descended. Rachel was going out most of the time with her friend Zoë from Canterbury Road and her boy friend from the Army.

Ruth was in her last year at Whitmore Comprehensive leading up to her 'O' levels and CSE's. It was difficult to study at home or to do her homework. She relied upon her good friend Mandy for company when she was not attending the stables at Grimsdyke. Being a member of The Pony Club, having the club tie, with the boots, riding hat and crop she was a dedicated follower. Every Sunday I would take her to the stables to do her bit for the club and to have lessons, which she enjoyed, meeting friends and taking part in the jumps and dressage. Whilst she was having her lessons I would take pencil and paper draw a picture of some detail of architecture of barn and outbuilding and fill in the colouring when I got home.

Piano practice for all of them started to collapse soon after Simon stopped doing his through pressure of work. His next exam was his final, which required theory as well as practical. Miss Day, the family's piano teacher, having got marriage now started to plan for a family, which forced her to stop teaching. To find a new teacher was bad enough but to maintain interest and insist upon practice was getting to be impossible.

Benjamin was thirteen and not long at Whitmore. He was absolutely captivated by the cinema and all the technicalities associated with the industry, including film projection. It was difficult to keep him away from the Odeon, Rayners Lane, where he was to be found most evenings. He was also a keen player of early video games and pinball machines - found at the local amusement parlour. He collected films and often went to London second hand shops to see if he could pick up more. He could keep you amused for hours talking about special effects and the uniqueness of particular scenes from art films. His gang of friends roamed the streets listening; I am sure, to him talking about his absorbing hobby.

Benjamin had been most upset by not being allowed to go to Buckingham College, Harrow. He believed that everyone else in the family given a choice and that, 'if he were to be given a choice that is where he would like to go'. Unfortunately, Sally believed that there was not enough money available - the payments for Rebecca's School Fee Insurance Policy, and all the other out of school activities, was difficult enough - to pay for. This was just another pointer towards unfair distribution of resources and consideration - the whole family was being affected by lack of care - allowing outside forces to dictate an even spread of time.

Benjamin had his bed up in the attic extension with Simon, surrounded by books, films, a cine-projector and posters. They played cards and got up to all manner of pranks. From this time Simon was never again a permanent member of the home except those few holidays left to him in his final year before starting work.

Rebecca, now eleven, was an established North London Collegiate girl in her brown outfit and hat [skirt for summer and trousers for winter].

Stan eventually became divorced from Jean after a most stressful year of litigation. Later he employed, and fell in love with, Pauline to act as his personal assistant. They married in March 1980, which meant that Pauline had a ready-made family of boys to look after. Like the printing industry, motor manufacturing and ancillary trades were on the decline. It was a tough time and had not Stan met and married Pauline life would have become almost impossible.

During the summer holidays, I took the three youngest children camping. Loading up the Ford Anglia to the gills, with every space accounted for: boots, beachwear, ground sheets, lamps, cooking pots and all the other paraphernalia necessary for camping. After the annual trip along the A3, past Chichester, we reached Littlehampton where there were an organised campsite boasting toilets and showers.

The tent was a pneumatic arrangement, which relied upon air-inflated ribs - pumped up to form a dome, instead of a frame made of poles. It just about catered for us four, snug, although we had to be careful not to touch the tent sides when raining. In front, behind a beach windbreak, we had our gas stove and table. There were fun times on the beach jumping off the breakwaters, building the inevitable sand castles whilst trying to hold back the sea from smashing it. Littlehampton explored and the surrounding historic buildings were marched-to in turn. Our evening meals were usually fish and chips, which set us up for the return walk back to the campsite and to an early bedtime. It would have been lovely to have Sally come down to visit us just to see how we were getting on and to see how we organised the sleeping arrangements. I thought then how strange her not coming down - joining in, even if it had only been for the day, it would have shown interest and broken up the week for the children... she never did, which was a disappointment to us all: now she will never appreciate how a visit by her would have made the week more enjoyable for us all.

These camping holidays curtailed by a thoughtless fellow camper who purposely punctured the inflatable ribs. It was impossible to mend so that ended our own efforts at sampling the outdoor life.

However, we treated ourselves - to the French form of regimented campsite, which was an improvement on all our other camping holidays. It was an experience, which was exciting, entertaining and educational. We even came away with the knowledge of how to cook mussels in wine and cream.

To augment my existing qualifications I enrolled myself on two Harrow Borough training courses. One was instruction for Victim Support and the other for a Youth Leadership course - mainly to do with running a Youth Club and organising sports and social events. During both these courses, our team, under a tutor, had to visit many clubs and social events to appreciate what was going on. It was most interesting and it showed what other people were doing to interest young people in becoming socialised and integrated into their community and how they set about it. I came away believing that there were many individuals giving much time and great effort to worthwhile causes. Some of the time things were going on behind curtains to help underprivileged, physically and mentally impaired and otherwise needy people who in normal circumstances were not openly visible and certainly not gathered together in a group where their plight becomes more noticeable.

By this time, I was an established lecturer with two teaching qualifications. Backing this up I had technical qualifications, which augmented my practical skills. Now at last I felt more able to look

around and consider the future... it had been a difficult and frustrating time getting used to a very different world.

British society had gone through a technological revolution and still there were enormous changes to come. I have already described how the printing industry changed. The rest of the UK's industrial sector had gone through a similar explosion dictated by computers and robotics. It would be fair to say that the average person lived with far greater horizons in all aspects... from holidays abroad, when to purchase a house, what means of transport suited the family, what type of diet they required and what form of partnership - conformed to their sexual needs.

Sally was working full-time at Northwick Park Hospital as an audio secretary in a large office with many other women some part-time working others working job-share schemes. The work force split up into groups concentrating on particular complaints and illnesses. Sally's area was arthritis and rheumatism and over a period had become very knowledgeable and sympathetic to those who suffered from those debilitating symptoms. Having been a member of The British Red Cross knew about first aid and minor accidents.

Hospitals, and Northwick Park was no exception, have clubs and societies associated with individual complaints. It is quite reasonable that they should have because they hold not only the expert doctors and consultants but also the files, literature and archives.

Sally was asked by the Arthritic and Rheumatism Club [ARC] chairman if she would like to be the club's secretary. Whilst acknowledging her expertise he admitted that the club was desperate because they could not find anyone with the necessary experience. She was persuaded and accepted devoting much time and energy to the cause - even to the extent of frequent fund raising and social events. These took up a lot of her time and became more and more important to her... taking her out in the evenings meant coming back later and later - at this stage Sally was going out most nights, including weekends. I was happy that she was finding an outlet to her frustrations - not having any more children especially that ARC was such a reputable institution...

Fortunately, I now had a shorter contact teaching time and could alter my time for class preparation to coincide with home affairs. Taking some evening classes also gave me some additional flexibility.

I was taking on more and more of the house work, as much because I was there as to cover for Sally being at work. Cooking was becoming a greater part of my life and I enjoyed it. I bought the ingredients whilst on the way home and then got down to it before the younger children got home. The garden I had always maintained, including house repairs and car servicing. At first, Sally found this helpful - different, after a while tiresome... I was taking away one of her tasks. Now that she was no longer going to have any more children she saw this as removing one of her remaining functions.

I saw to the evening baths and read the bedtime story to Ben and Rebecca. Rebecca stayed in our bed until we went to bed when I then lifted her out and put her into her own. This allowed Ruth to have a bedroom of her own - before Rachel came home... normally Rachel was out with her boyfriend Neil or at the Barker's in Canterbury Road.

That Christmas Eve in 1980, Sally came home late from an ARC social gathering. I had been pacing up and down - after seeing all the children to bed... as it got later and later... I began to get increasingly worried. When at last she came in, I questioned her about why she was so late, especially being Christmas Eve. She declared that, "she had been with someone who loved her and what's more she loved them"...!

In retrospect: I wonder what caused Sally to blurt out her news in that manner... I knew then as I know now, she was quite capable of making outlandish and rash statements without considering the consequences. But this was so earth shattering - so likely to offend, that even she might stop

before framing the words...! But no, here they were - the words - matching upto past events. She had said how she preferred certain physical forms and attributes... how past boy friends had provided more excitement. Still, to make such an entry, obviously had to be a planned event... needed confidence, assuredly and considerable nerve. Now I knew what she had meant by, 'you'll be sorry', when I had said no more children...! What about the children? There was such an age gap... the eldest at university and the youngest at junior school. There is no better time to announce this sort of news, especially at Christmas. I wonder what Sally expected me to do.

If someone had asked me prior to this happening, 'what did I think would never occur', this was it.

If asked, 'do you have complete confidence in your marriage I would have remarked, 'yes'... but, there were all those: drinking sessions, nights out, parties and coach trips. Didn't they point a finger and give a clue... was I blind or just stupid?