

CHAPTER III

Letters home – Private Clients – Sir Joshua Hassan’s Agreement – Magic of Spain – Porto Casares – Bus to school in Estepona - Forest fire – Villagers gather round - Pension lectures – BCCI – Monks cottage – Work Permit arrives – University place - The Vanes - Decision to return to England – Decision not taken lightly – Trevor Dine helps out – Magic of Spain – Spring Exhibition – Morocco – Motoring Home.

Ever since I arrived in Spain, I composed monthly letters - a newsheet to everybody in England. At times, this amounted to twenty copies, which were photocopied and posted. As you might imagine an A4 sheet of tightly spaced lettering took me sometimes almost a day to type. I tried to include everything that each individual might want to hear so that all were included and involved; I then had to go to the coast to get them copied. I sat in my studio next to the window with Ruff cramped up sitting behind me, the desk in front held my very old portable typewriter. Little did I realise that in some cases this photocopied letter produced resentment and exclusion. I stopped immediately I got to hear of it and never produced another letter.

Josephine left Hill Samuels after first contacting Sir Joshua Hassan - putting to him the valuable service she could provide to his existing client bank, offering a full package of financial advice in-house, linking Spain and the UK to set up a Private Client Department.

Our nearest neighbour, just up the hillside, easily seen from my kitchen window, was Nick Carter, an ex-patriot from England who operated all sorts of deals on the coast. He spoke Spanish so acted as a go-between when arranging a maid to do the general cleaning – he bought round a number of teenagers and out of these we chose Pili Lopez who stayed with us all the rest of the time we were in Spain. She became a confidant of Anna’s and helped her with her Spanish - she became an indispensable part of our stay in Casares making my life much easier - allowing me to get on with the garden and gallery. It was a very happy home which ran smoothly, providing Anna with the right environment to concentrate on her studies.

The previous inhabitants of the basket weavers hut had been a family who now lived down the road. Their son acted a little strange and used to wander around his old garden at night and during the day scaring the living daylight out of anyone who stayed pressing his face up against the windows and suddenly dancing out from behind a hedge. I do not think he knew what he was doing; he was not violent just scary... We called him Ben Gun [from Treasure Island].

Whenever we stayed away from Spain, we parked Ruff with Lily and Ernie Soule who lived in a block of flats in Torrequadiaro. They were very kind and were another port of call for us on our way back from Gibraltar.

Later that July an agreement was drawn up and signed by both parties – Josephine and Hassans. Josephine then began to fly backwards and forwards to London, on a fortnightly basis; to link her clients with a servicing system - provide continuity, using the expertise and products of London’ financial sector to give a firm base to the scheme. This was a near perfect solution for ex-patriots - which kept them in-tune with the latest information and products.

With her new status I designed a completely new set of business stationery with an oval logo and company name of Opepas – ‘To Reveal a Priority’. Hassans paid for the printing and Margaret Stone gave it a wonderful ‘write-up’ for company brochures... registered 11th August 1989, the Articles signed, 10th November - that same year.

That first winter in Casares proved that: not only did it snow in winter, but the water froze too. The tops of the mountains held snow for quite some time and the sleet used to rattle on the windows. The rain beat down like a water power-jet, sometimes blown horizontal by the strong winds, turning the cobbled streets in the village into rivers - ‘in full-flood’ forcing its way into

houses - in through the front door and out through the back. The wind from the Levant was sapping in its severity making the unwary clutch onto trees and railings. It really was not a hospitable place. Mothers from the village would hurry by, with their long black shawls wrapped round the children – shielding them from the cutting blasts. The wind from the southwest swept off the coast bringing salt air and fine sand particles tearing at your face. The small stumpy oak trees suffered from the blast having their silver pointed leaves torn off, whilst others, already free, racing round the garden trying to find somewhere to lodge. The doors rattled and the wall-plates swung to-and-fro – greatly in danger of being swept off the wall.

The clouds raced by, building up to threaten rain, then hurrying on again. Any failure to hold on tight to an open door found it forced back on its hinges, ready to swing back – like the mainsail of a sailing ship going about.

In the summer, the already oven-baked rocks from previous days would reflect their stored-up warmth - to join that day's penetrating rays, to make the wise walk from shade to shade – proceed crab-like, close to the cliff sides. It made every breath feel like breathing before an open oven door... Woe betide anyone who grasped hold of an unpainted metal bar!

The brilliant morning light would shaft through the trunks and boughs outside the open kitchen door, onto the kitchen floor; vibrating with the activity of many insects dancing in its beams. One day you would be breasting against the penetrating blasts of the winds, and on another, shuffling from one patch of shadow to the next - least the un-shaded sun touched your skin. Even with all this there were many times when the day's heat would be perfect.

The autumn air would be crisp, clear and still; the raked up braches - the debris from the olive harvest, would be lit; the sweet smelling smoke, from all those bonfires, spiralled up through the branches and the ground would be crunching under the soles of your feet, as you trod the traveller's footpaths and donkey trails. These wandered through the hills and valleys, which dotted the landscape.

The little meandering stream in the valley bottom would be sparkling and clear, sometimes sandwiched between the planted vegetable plots belonging to the isolated white, lime-washed huts, which sometimes held a tethered donkey but was always home to a full compliment of crowing chickens. Every drop of water, in its turn, fell down its course to the sea, not far away. Each turn in the river caused a sheltered meadow formed within its bend, which always held a walnut tree with its brittle twigs and boughs. The panoramic views would be spectacular - would remind one of all the romantic tales ever told of majestic Spain.

On the hillside would be grazed Pepe's goatherd, which traversed both sides of the ravine. The tinkling bells echoed from rock to rock to make a musical backdrop to the days work in the garden.

Every school day I took Anna to the bottom of the road - to catch the bus that stopped on the coast road in Porto Casares. The road wound its way between crags - beside the steeply banked, rock faced, hillside, on one side and on the other - the road fell-away to the ravine below. Past the deserted restaurant, that only opened its doors on very rare occasion... to the fields of course brushwood and deeply knar'ld cork trees... onwards, to the vineyards and salt flats close to the sea. The goats, with their melodious bells, ranged the hills whilst the sheep occupied lower ground - closer to the valley bottoms, watered by a tiny stream as it meandered, bubbling and chuckling towards the coast. It was about three miles of jerking, lurching, swaying propulsion, always done a breakneck speed – so as not to miss the bus.

Before the influx of English tourists along the coast – from Gibraltar and Malaga airports, about the time General Franco died, very few Englishmen lived in the hills - behind the coast. This was the road Anna and I travelled on, and was the only road – indeed a track... it was once travelled by horse and cart and donkey train... When the bottom of the road reached, I dropped Anna off,

parked the car, and walked Ruff along the beach. To the right facing out to sea, was the port and marina of La Duquesa, to the left the rocky cliffs - coming down to sea level, just before the town of Estepona and its esplanade.

Ruff would bark at the waves but never go in - race up and down having great fun. I would browse amongst the piled up miscellaneous items on the beach. They were magical times – beautiful beaches of fine yellow sand with the sunlight bouncing off the limpid blue sea just Ruff and I and not a soul in sight.

Sometimes during the day, I had to go down into the village to buy vegetables or some meat, pay a bill or visit the bank. I set off with Ruff following. Ruff never ever needed a lead - she always stayed at my heel or if I sat down was under my chair. This was not 'taught' behaviour she just did it. If I were in the garden or maintaining the fabric of the buildings Ruff would always be laying down just beside a bush near the path, just up from the lawn. At one time, she had seen a lizard come out of that bush - it was her goal in life to catch it. We walked up to the top of the road - to Marie's family shop and restaurant, and then made our way down through the tiny lanes between the white, lime-washed, terraced houses. The cobblestone lanes were tightly cambered on either side to allow the storm waters to run off and we always kept close to the shady-side to keep out of the sun.

At the very bottom was the village square, with the fountain in the centre; the restaurants, circling around, with their chairs dealt close to their sides- making a circular back-drop to the daily play being enacted out front. This was the place where all the village activity occurred summer or winter, sunshine or rain – with the old folk sitting on stone benches close to the house fronts and the small children racing round on their tricycles and push cars.

That summer, in 1989, we experienced a forest fire, for the first time. We saw the smoke in the distance and the pall of smoke drifted towards us making us increasingly aware that this was could be serious. Gradually the cracking of the sap in the branches and the bursts of flame from the dried grasses not only gathered apace but became clearly seen in great detail - as it made it's way towards us. The wind was blowing the sparks and flames our way... the massive generation of heat created an added disturbance of air - a further sucking in of new oxygen. Planes circled overhead, dropping gallons of water, their tanks filled by trailing scoops in the sea. Helicopters rattled and darted overhead - like errant hornets, radioing instructions and directing fire engines, bulldozers and beaters. It was late that afternoon that it became obvious that we would not escape. The fire began to lick the outside of the sunroom cracking the panes of glass and rushing round the base of the lower terraces in firework-frenzy. The irrigation system did not stand a chance to quieten the cracking glass or dampen the flames. I turned it on as the flames circled round section by section to get the maximum from the system.

By this time, the whole village had turned out to witness the event and lined the road above our estate. We ran round with buckets putting down the fires nearest the house. The irrigation system had now melted – the rubber hoses buried under the soil had become too hot allowing the water in the system to spill out - in all the wrong places. Water levels in the swimming pool quickly dropped as the buckets filled. The inflow of water to fill the pool halted due to the mains being turned off in the whole valley by the water-board. We just had to stand by and watch. It was fortunate that at last the wind changed pushing the flames down into the valley and away from the house. We escaped the worst ravages and suffered just two broken panes of glass. What was serious was that our beautiful valley was now blackened and bare with coils of smoke spurting up from wizened tree stumps.

The place was never the same again. Two years later you could still see what had happened. The oak trees killed were at least twenty years old if not more; Even the undergrowth was bare and thin. The blackened rocks never became washed even after the winter storms. It was only the vegetation at the foot of the valley, which stayed the same. Pepe's goats had to graze in the other

valley taking their bells almost out of earshot. I never replaced the melted irrigation system to the lower terraces for the fire had finished of the citrus trees, which I had so carefully nurtured.

Towards the end of 1989 and into 1990, Josephine was spending yet more time in the UK, servicing her existing client bank, and giving many retirement talks to both British Telecom and Reeds International Paper Group. These talks in themselves provided more clients which needed looking after so that to return to England was in itself not only a more simple arrangement but more convenient. Josephine, had returned to work full-time for Hill Samuel, being invited back with a special agreement which provided no gap in her length of employment – this would allow her ‘pension’ and possible ‘buy out’ to be based on a continuous employment record. She left Hassans Solicitors Practice - mainly because they never really fully supported her position.

The Bank of Credit and Commerce International, Gibraltar had used Josephine’s services as a financial consultant, for much the same reasons Hassans had thought of – to offer privileged clients an increased investment service. They too failed to make full use of her expertise - BCCI being afraid that their clients would fear an airing of their financial state to an outside body.

Owing to US fears of money laundering by Columbian drug barons, they had been declared unfitting to operate – in turn, closed down by fears of illegal money transactions by the British, who were in league with the United States Government. This was not so for all branches, and in this case, not the Gibraltar Branch. The closing of the bank's resources was another reason why there was so much fear and worry by the residents along the coast who had lodged their money with them - used their services. The money I had invested, coming from my divorce settlement, sales from the gallery and Josephine, lost for the time-being – until paid by the firm of Gibraltarian loss adjusters in dribs and drabs.

This should not have surprised us. We had contacted a number of solicitors both in Spain and in England to extend their interests into financial services – using their client bank as an introduction - to offer a personal and private service. These offers had not been taken up. The conclusion being that solicitors did not want to lose power over their clients nor take any supposed risks.

Back in England Helen had finished her Drama course, obtaining her certificate. The first task for her was to have a studio photograph taken so that she could send it round to prospective auditioning agencies. She attended many auditions meanwhile having singing lessons to be able to offer a complete set of skills - for musicals and plays. A demonstration tape was made by Anthony to accompany the photograph – both were well made and presented a good introduction.

To earn money she took on a position with the local cinema flexible in their hours understanding her reasons for having to be available for auditions at a moments notice. From that time, she found Christmas work during the pantomime season which gave her experience and the necessary equity card.

Ever since attending Arts Educational School in Tring she had carried the banner for a lifetime in the theatre. She lived and breathed acting and singing, practicing daily. There was never a more dedicated exponent or interested follower in the latest film, play or musical – able to sing along with their score, and recite the lines, dreaming of that moment when a call was made...!