

CHAPTER FOURTEEN : COULD THIS REALLY BE HAPPENING TO...ME!

Some disaffected Parents; A Difficult Inspection; Success-But At A Cost; At Last, A New Life Begins

So now I had another new routine for my day. My new home was only ten minutes drive away, so I had a fairly leisurely start to my days. I did not enjoy being in the car much, so this journey seemed just about right. Alas, as soon as I got to school the “leisurely start” quickly evaporated. It took me awhile to realise what was going on... As soon as I arrived at school, and at every available moment after, the same group of half a dozen parents would go out of their way to corner me and bombard me with questions about the school and, generally, keep me talking. It seemed that I could not walk along the corridor without at least one or two of them coming up to me and commanding my attention. I think their idea was to badger me in this way in order to make life as difficult as possible for me so that, perhaps, I might voluntarily leave! I later heard that this caused some resentment from people outside this group of parents because they could not seem to get any opportunity to talk to me about their concerns and their children. For a long time I just did not realise what was going on. You see, in spite of what was happening in my personal life, everybody was being as friendly as ever to my face, so I did not really have a clue about anything untoward going on. Then, one morning I had a phone call which changed everything...

“Mr.-----,” said a voice I had not heard for about two years, “I want you to know that I am not having anything to do with what those people are up to. I AM NOT HAVING ANYTHING TO DO WITH IT!” And after that she simply said who she was, repeated her message again and then hung up! I had no idea what she was talking about but it did not take much working out that there was something going on in the village that was anti-me! This parent who phoned me had complained a couple of years ago about the way I had handled a problem with her daughter. All had been resolved amicably I thought and I did not expect to hear any more about it. But here it was suddenly in front of me again. It turned out that this group of parents who were “talking” to me so “interestedly” every day were also contacting anybody they knew who had ever had a grievance or cause of complaint against me and asking them to write it down so that they could use it against me, presumably to get me removed from my job. They were also phoning my “wife” every few days and trying to involve her in their plotting! I discovered, too, that they had, also, been in touch with some un-named “people in the profession” to

find out how they could go about removing a Head! All this I learnt from other concerned and sympathetic parents and, later, this was confirmed by one of the parent group involved in it all. Phew!

I did expect some problems, quite serious problems, about my “conduct”. After all, here I was a Head in a small, very conservative area, where such behaviour from a pillar of the society such as myself, must, I thought, be seen as nothing short of scandalous. I even found myself looking at newspaper billboards, half expecting to read something along the lines of “Local Head Accused of Immoral Behaviour”! Not all that long ago, I knew I would have been dismissed and “shamed” for it. I did three-quarters expect this to happen to me anyway and I **could** understand why. After all, was I, because of my position in society, not expected to be a good example to all of that society’s highest values? And how could someone who got married and then immediately flouted the marriage vows - and committed adultery no less! - be a “good example”?! I knew, too, that it would be naïve to the point of stupidity to expect anyone else to consider any “inner views” of the situation such as I had. Why, I was having enough trouble with that myself! But then as the weeks went by and all *seemed* to be normal I stopped thinking about it---until that phone call! Now I realised that there was *something* going on and I prepared myself for the worst. I went in every day ready to face what some disinterested parents called, my “fan club” and awaited a summons from the Governors and/or the Area Office. That, I was sure, would lead to my dismissal. I would not have protested about this because I had flouted conventional morality in a way that I knew could so easily be offensive and intolerable to, what I imagined, would be many people. I knew, too, that had this not happened to me but to someone else, then, I most likely would, myself, have reacted, quite strongly, against it all. It was also quite clear to me that if it came to a choice between my job and my new relationship, then there would be no question which I would choose- and I would need no time to think about it! Yes, my life had become so lonely, unchallenging and unfulfilling that I was ready to sacrifice it all for this relationship which was giving me more happiness than anyone else had ever done in my entire life. I had been so low for so long that this seemed to offer me a completely new start and, if that meant, a new job, a new everything, then so be it!

Now I knew more about what was going on I began, in a sort of perverse way, to enjoy these daily encounters with this little group of parents. I realised that they were playing a sort of game, albeit a rather nasty one, and I began to take some of my ideas and plans to them and to try to get them to do more and more for the school! And to their credit they did this

with admirable enthusiasm. They proved me wrong when I said that we would never raise enough money for some scheme or other because we had never managed to raise that amount in the past. In fact, by fund-raising so successfully they raised more money in one year than the school had managed in the five years previously! And we had to work quite closely together to achieve this, so to all outward appearances it must have looked as if we had the best of relationships! I guess all the time they, like me, must have been congratulating themselves on how well they were “acting the part” and how well they were keeping their real feelings from me! So, financially, at least, the school gained a lot from their efforts and, as a result, we were able to improve the resources the school had quite significantly. We even installed some playground play equipment and created a sheltered play area for the children together.

Help From A Medium- Not For The First Time!

It was at this time that my partner was given a message by a local medium that was to give us some encouragement and support. She said that although there was a lot of trouble and difficulty around our relationship at the time this was not “between the two of us” but was rather coming from “other people around us”. She said, it was as if we were “inside a bubble that was protecting us”! We discovered that this was exactly how it was: I never knew that my parent-group had taken their complaints to the Area Office until much later, for example, by which time the trouble had passed. There were several other examples of things going on that would have been extremely worrying had I known about them at the time but by the time I knew anything about them the need for worry had gone.

Another Inspection- What “Good” Timing!

I was told later by some of these parents themselves that the reason nothing came of their efforts to remove me was that they could not get enough support from the parents as a whole. “Everyone we asked said that you were too good a teacher to lose!” one of them said to me, and that, of course, was a real boost for me. So I did not lose my job and it looked as if the storm had been well and truly weathered when this small group of angry and offended parents were unexpectedly presented with what must have looked like a golden opportunity for them to make things difficult for me: we received notice that the school was to be inspected for the second time. Now part of the inspection process is a “Parents’ Evening” when the lead inspector listens to parents comments about the school, answers questions about the Inspection process and so on. The

Head and staff are not allowed into this meeting. Usually very few parents bother with it but, of course, such a meeting can so easily provide an opportunity for anyone with any sort of grievances to come and air them publicly with no-one from the school staff being there to answer them or even defend themselves if that is appropriate. The inspectors then have a duty to check out, and look into, the things said at the meeting during the inspection itself.

When I first met the Lead Inspector it was before the Parents' Meeting. We got on well and the discussion between us seemed both friendly and professional. He was impressed by our first inspection report and must have thought that this was going to be one of his easier inspections. Then came the Parents' Meeting! I was not allowed into the meeting, of course, so I sat alone in the staff room *all evening* while the meeting took place: it was my job to unlock and lock the school, check the heating was comfortable and that was about it! At the end of a long evening the Lead Inspector came out of the room visibly shaken! He hardly said a word to me, picked up his coat and suitcase and fled the building! I immediately heard from some of the parents what had happened. Two parents had dominated the whole evening (I did not have to be told who they were!) and they had savaged me and the school! Fortunately there were others there who tried to speak up for the school but the general feeling was that it had been an awful, negative and complaining meeting. People who felt for the school and supported it were almost unanimously depressed and upset by it. One or two looked genuinely perplexed and shocked as they left the school that night. It must have been very bad because I could not get anyone to tell me **exactly** what was said! I knew from that moment that we would be really up against it in *this* inspection.

When the inspection came, my "Link Adviser" and myself were expecting the worst- and true enough that is what we got! The Inspectors were obviously looking as closely as was humanly possible at what was going on in the school. I think they began the inspection thinking, because of whatever happened at the Parents' Meeting, that there might well be something seriously wrong in this school. I had the Lead Inspector in all my lessons on the first day and one inspector in every lesson I took during the whole inspection. When I went on the playground for playground duty, the Lead Inspector came with me: in fact, I never got a moment during the whole inspection when I was not shadowed. I was questioned at length about just about everything in the school. Nothing was too petty for comment and I thought a lot reported on was both petty and unfair and so did my Link Adviser and several of the Governors. In fact, my Link Adviser made a formal complaint about

the inspection and came close to losing her temper with the inspectors at the end of the inspection meeting. The final report had to be re-written three times! Nonetheless the report, whilst not as good as the first one the school had, was both positive and complimentary, although this time it made sure we were left with a lot to do as just about everything in the school was put up for “review”!! Some of the comments I particularly liked, though were:

“The aims of the school reflect the high focus on personal development and all pupils are encouraged to personal independence, the ability to be reflective and thoughtful and to have an awareness of self and others within a “family school” atmosphere.”

“Pupils of all ages and abilities like coming to school.”

“The governing body has established a good working relationship with the head teacher and staff.”

“The teaching is good...The pupil results are high in comparison with schools nationally.” And one that gave me a special satisfaction:

“The school has a caring ethos, and the head teacher in his own teaching and conduct in the school gives a good lead in ensuring that relationships between teachers and pupils are positive.” (I especially liked this one!)

I felt, as one of the Governors did, that “the Inspectors had tried hard to find something wrong in the school and had failed!” So, that was another big challenge successfully over with! Now we could expect to be left alone for another six years and maybe more. Gradually, after this inspection, things began to get back to something like normal, although I did have in the same year as the Inspection, a formal complaint to deal with from one of my “support staff” and two official parental complaints, all of which had to be officially and formally investigated by the Area Office. I really did not worry about them or see them as at all serious and, sure enough, they soon passed with little or no effect. Compared to what could have happened to me and the school (e.g. in the Inspection) this was “small fry” stuff! Other than these two events the school went from strength to strength over the next couple of years. Why, we even received a “Government Achievement Award” for further improving our “standards”(as judged by the S.A.T.’s results, of course) and, for the first time in our teaching careers, all staff received a financial bonus because of it (!)... Little did I know at that time, however, that, once more, events were to, unexpectedly, take over in my life, so that I was not, in fact, ever

going to face another inspection again or even any such upheaval with the parents...

Too Busy Outer Life

Meanwhile my home life was to become very busy and demanding. Our new home needed furnishing, painting and decorating and this took care of just about every holiday I had! Each weekend I went over to see my “wife”. I helped her out financially and found myself helping her with jobs, like lawn mowing etc. Generally, the relationship was quite amenable and for a long time my “wife” felt that I was the only person helping her in any way at all. A lot of the people telling her to give me the angry rejection and the hostility I deserved were not prepared, it seemed, to give her any of the practical help she was getting from me. I am pleased that she felt that way and was able, for a long time, to feel that I genuinely did support her in these, admittedly, small ways: it seemed the very least I could do. And this went on for the next several years.

All this busy-ness meant my spiritual life was now running at a rather low level. I still had my times of Quiet but not as often as I would have liked and even then they could all too easily be overrun with thoughts and feelings about my outer life. I suppose I was, for a long time still, to feel as if I was on a psychological roller-coaster ride. My new partner and myself went to the Subud latihan as much as ever and, after things settled down outwardly, my latihan seemed to become more settled and predictable. I was not sure that was a good thing but that is clearly what happened. I began to notice, in spite of myself, really, that our latihan all seemed to have become rather repetitive and that began to bother me. I felt my own latihan was not really going where it should. I began to worry that it was all becoming too much a mindless routine like getting up in the morning! There seemed to be no growth or even change in it. My own testing was ill-used and unclear at this time and I am not sure why. I had not tested about my second inspection as I did for my first and I had, for some time now, stopped testing my own problems, or even non-personal issues that had been so helpful to me in the past. Perhaps, for too long now, my attention had simply moved from inner experience to a concentration on outer things. If that were true there was soon to be a heavy price to pay...

An Important Inner Prompt

It is interesting that the beginnings of any sort of awareness of any such a “price” should come completely from some inner “promptings” which

became more and more insistent as time went by. Every time I walked down to the group latihan, I would think that I should now change my G.P. to one that was closer to my new home. This was a surprising thought to me because I had moved home previously and not bothered to do this-and then I was living further away from my Doctor's surgery than now! In fact, I hardly ever went to the Doctors and had decided that on those rare occasions when I would need to I would simply make the slightly longer than I would choose journey to my old surgery. This I had done for several years but it would not seem to do now and not only did these thoughts become insistent but my feelings began to get involved and I felt there was even some urgency about it! They must have been pretty strong feelings because I eventually found myself actually ACTING on them. I went to register at a local Doctors, only to find that, nowadays, a change like this involves what is called a "new patient check". So, I was measured and weighed and then fitted up to have my blood-pressure checked. The first little "modern" device failed to work-and then, when I was wrapped up in the older instrument, we discovered why: my blood- pressure was so high that it could not register it! My blood-pressure was so high, in fact, that the nurse taking it went immediately to try to find an available Doctor to come and see me and left me with the instruction that I was not to leave the surgery until I had seen a Doctor. So, I was left in this room surrounded by oxygen tanks and all sorts of scary-looking "surgical" equipment, wondering what on earth was going on. I had no feelings of being unwell (apparently you don't with B.P – described as "the silent killer"!) and yet I had visions of being rushed off to hospital in an ambulance or something equally scary! Eventually the nurse came back to tell me that there was no Doctor available to see me there and then but I was to make an appointment to see one the next day and to begin to take some "ominous-looking" tablets she had in her hand! Good heavens I could hardly believe this! I was so confident that my "health" was not so desperate as this that I refused to take the tablets until I had seen a Doctor to explain what they were and why I needed to take them and worse, I declared I could not afford the time to see the Doctor until a week's time. With that, I said I was off to "have my tea"! What that poor nurse must have thought I just do not know!

Anyway, a week later I was back at the surgery, this time having my blood-pressure checked by a Doctor. Sure enough it was "sky high" and I could see why the nurse was so concerned. It looked as if I was at high risk of a stroke, or worse, and I needed medical help straightaway to try and get this B.P. down and, hopefully, thereby reduce the risk "significantly". This actually proved extremely difficult to do. Why, I

even had another occasion at the surgery when, in spite of medication, my B.P. was still so high that the nurse went off for a second time to get a Doctor! After years of hardly ever seeing a Doctor, I now went through a long period of seeing one every two weeks, then every month, and that is how it stayed for at least two years!! Wow, how grateful I am to the inner promptings that urged me, so strongly and insistently, to change my Doctor. If I had not heeded that I would almost certainly have had a heart attack or stroke and goodness knows where that might have left me! Such is the significance of such inner “prompts”, inner thoughts and feelings, huh?!!

School Is So Demanding Something Has To Give

Over the next year, I began trying to look after my health a bit more. I had always exercised in the mornings for about 20 minutes and, in fact, prided myself on keeping that going. I tried to be slower and less mad at work with no more than “intermittent” success. The teaching day might be short but, my goodness, it is intense! Sometimes I would dash into the toilet, unable to leave it any longer, (!) and I would almost always hear a voice outside asking someone where I was!! Worse still, the school, because of its reduced size, had no Deputy Head now, so virtually everything came my way. I had also, against my better judgement, taken on a bigger teaching commitment since the last inspection and that was to increase my workload significantly. I was now feeling that I was doing at least two jobs: teaching almost full-time and trying also to manage the school as its Head at the same time. With only a part time “administrative assistant” and an ever-increasing amount of bureaucracy, I was really at full-stretch. I managed this for two years and then fate intervened. I had long had negative feelings about my job; these were to come at me with a vengeance now. I asked, in prayer and Quiet times, for Divine Aid but it seemed to show a great reluctance to come. The only way I could see for help to come was for me to have a lucky monetary win somewhere but, alas, that, too, showed no likelihood of coming. Help was to come, in fact, but not in the way I was expecting it...

It began on the first few days of the long summer holiday. I had kept going and got the school successfully to the end of the academic year (This was the year we received the “Achievement Award”, in fact). I had this annoying cough that just refused to leave me. I carried on going into the school every other day or so during the first two weeks to check up on the builders who were supposed to be installing another new heating system. As seemed always to be the way of it, there was nothing but hassle as pipes were being put in the wrong places, there were days when

nothing was done etc. etc. I got steadily more unwell and, in the end had to go to the Doctor's. First, I had antibiotics for a chest infection, then more antibiotics for bronchitis, then another lot of antibiotics that were supposed "to kill virtually all known germs"! They had no effect, so back I went again. I walked to the surgery because it was so near to my home. This time the Doctor said I should go for an X-ray immediately! The X-ray department was just over the other side of town so I slowly walked to it, following the signs. I was worried because of the urgency of it and also because the Doctor had said I should leave my mobile phone number in case they should need to contact me with the results. I was supposed to be going on holiday to the North of England and, after giving the matter a few minutes thought, the Doctor had said I could go (abroad, definitely not!) provided I left my mobile number and "got to a Doctor if there was the slightest change". Unfortunately, someone had turned the signs round and I walked about a mile in the wrong direction! By the time I turned up for my X-ray I looked and felt really ill and absolutely exhausted! It seemed I had... pneumonia!!

We had half the holiday we had planned. I stayed in the chalet almost the whole time and the rest of the family were able to get out and about and have something of a holiday themselves. This turned out to be ideal for me. I was able to sit, doze and just rest. I did nothing but write, sit and think and it was a mercy to me not to have ANYTHING to **DO** or anywhere to have to **GO**... And the view outside the huge chalet window could not have been better: I watched squirrels running up and down the branches of the huge trees that came right up to the glass; I looked at the sun glistening in, or the shadows of the leaves dancing across, the river at the bottom of a flower bordered path or I turned my gaze upward and followed the tree tops into the blue expansive sky... At times it felt blissful!! I had one bad time, however, which was alarming. Suddenly, one afternoon, when everybody was out, I felt *freezing cold* in the middle of a summer day! I turned the central heating up full, covered myself with blankets and lay on the sofa, waiting to see what was going to happen. I remembered what the Doctor had said about getting medical help immediately "if there was any change" and this alarmed me even more. Then the rest of the family came home and, for awhile, sat with cold wet towels on their heads to try to bear the heat in the chalet! By this time, I began to feel it was all going to be all right and, sure enough, after a few more minutes, I began to feel normal and VERY hungry! Fortunately, this never happened again although, some weeks later, I heard of a local girl who went into her parent's bed one night because she simply could not get warm and she died, lying between her parents – of pneumonia!

I spent the whole of that summer holiday, feeling physically too ill to do hardly anything at all. As the start of the new school year got closer and closer, so I got more and more worried – and my illness got more complicated. I just could not get myself going: everything was too much effort or, if I did start doing anything I got so exhausted and tired that I soon gave up. I was not sleeping properly now. I delayed going to bed until the very last minute and then would wake up *without fail* at about 2:30 every morning. It did not matter what time I went to bed or what I did during the day, I would wake up at that time without fail. It amazed me that it should be so exact every morning. I, who had for a long time now slept like a log, glad to put an end to my day, could not now enjoy such oblivion except for a couple of hours at most. I was also having those awful sweats again, especially in the middle of the night and the early hours of the morning...I occupied myself in the long, dark, slow-moving, lonely hours by watching Open University programmes on the T.V. or old videos and black and white films...

My feelings were so, so negative! Everything seemed full of bleakness, especially the future. If something could go wrong, I was sure it would and in the end there was so much to cope with that I just felt overwhelmed; in fact, I wanted to give up. It seemed that everything depended on me; that I had *everything* to do and if I did not do it then it would never get done. Worse, I could see no way out. I wanted rest, quiet, time to think, to feel, to DO what I wanted to and not to be always doing what had to be done...I prayed about this, of course; I took it to my Quiet Times but everything just seemed to get worse. In the end, I felt that the only way out was finally death! But could I bear it until then...? The Doctor explained that the “virulent bug” that had made me ill at the start of the summer had now attacked the neuro-transmitters of the brain and, thereby, caused changes in my mood and a worsening of those tendencies in me towards the negative. He felt that the original bug had now gone but it had left me with “agitated depression”. So, now I had to take anti-depressants as well as four tablets a day for my stubborn blood pressure! The bug had also left me with asthma, which I had never had in all my 50 odd years, and so I had two inhalers that I now had to suck on four times a day to ease my breathing and help that irritating cough that was still with me!

For the first time in my working life, the new school year began without me! I was going to the Doctors every two weeks and was to show no improvement for some months in spite of an increased and large dose of anti-depressants every day. Mornings were easily the worst: I felt too ill to get out of bed until late morning and then *that* was with reluctance; I

could hardly get myself to do anything except sit about enjoying the undisturbed peace and quiet of everyone else at work! Eventually I was able to get reading and writing again and I went out for a walk every afternoon and I enjoyed all of this. My Quiet Times became deeper very quickly and I soon began to feel that this was what I was really born to be doing! The hectic mornings of my school life had gone and, by the afternoons, I could really appreciate having time to myself. Solitude and Quiet began to feel like a therapy to me in themselves but I still could not summon any energy for doing much else. Each visit to the Doctor led to a change or increase in the medication and the feeling that I would be on my feet by the next visit in a fortnight. But it was not to be. After about a month I was sent to see an Occupational Health consultant who warned me not to expect an early improvement in my condition. He gave me another appointment to see him in three months time and suggested that I get some counselling to help. So, after this, my G.P. referred me for counselling and, as part of the process, I was referred to another G.P. for an initial assessment. I filled in a couple of Beck's questionnaires for anxiety and depression and came out as having, in spite of the high level of medication, a moderate level of anxiety and a moderate to severe level of depression. So counselling was seen as a definite need.

Perhaps the most helpful part of the whole process was this initial talk to the second Doctor as part of my assessment for counselling. As I recounted my symptoms to her I began to hear myself talking just as I had heard people in my profession talk when they were "burnt out", as it was colloquially called. This was an expression which meant they had run out of energy and had used up all their reserves so that they could, in fact, no longer do their jobs. I began now to see my illness in a completely different light. I, who had for so long seen myself as the "strong one" who kept everything going, had now to accept that I had come to the end of my teaching life; I simply could not do it any more. This became something of a turning point. I saw the Occupational Health Consultant again and a Consultant Psychiatrist who both agreed with my two G.P.s, and counsellor, that I was now too ill to continue teaching either now or in the future: I was permanently disabled! I left teaching with high blood pressure, agitated depression and asthma, all of which had come upon me in the last two years. I, who in the past had hardly any absence in all those working years, was now permanently too ill to work!

Counselling then became a matter of coming to terms with the idea that I would have to leave my job and look for another, more fulfilling, and not to forget, easier job *eventually* ...and it began to look as if eventually would not be for another year, possibly two, *at least*...I think this was

shown immediately to be true by the surprising **EASE** with which I did this. After all those years in schools, after the initial shock had worn off, I hardly gave school life a serious thought. I suppose at last I had realised that my health was more important. So there, then, began a period of slow recuperation and adaptation to a completely different sort of life. I began to spend lots of time on my own, walking, writing, reading all sorts of self-help and psychological books, quietly thinking and, of course, sitting as quietly as I could and just absorbing the atmosphere of the ever changing days and seasons. Soon some of my creativity was to come back but the depression was never to leave entirely although it became less threatening for most of the time. Unfortunately, the slightest set back or misfortune or bad luck would plunge me back all too easily into its black helplessness and hopelessness. So, I was left with a number of annoying health concerns and an all too fragile state of mind. There were to be many days of walks across the fields and meadows near my home which helped my spirits a lot and even got me feeling like I had nearly 40 years ago when I was a student with time to think about all sorts of interesting ideas as well as time to discover so much that was new to me. I looked forward to more of this even at my advanced age! And I wondered if my life had any more big surprises in store for me?