

## **CHAPTER SIX: IT'S HELL ON EARTH- FOR THE FIRST TIME!**

*My Family: A happy fortnight; Fatherhood; My unhappy wife; Another medium; Deteriorating relationship; Early morning experiences of Beauty and guidance ; At my father's grave; Another medium helps; Psychological hardness and devastated feelings; A "drowning" experience and gratitude: the truth is out; inner guidance; An H.M.I Inspection and near-collapse; Saved by Testing; Bonfire Night acceptance*

My first two weeks at home after my Congress experience were surprisingly relaxed. My wife explained her night-time absence in a way I found easy to accept (I think she said she had decided to go to stay at her mum's for one night "on the spur of the moment"!!). Certainly, she was more attentive to me and we were more relaxed together. Consequently, I was happier and more confident as a result. I was particularly appreciative of this because I was finding school life challenging and hard work. I felt at this time as if my latihan was forcing me to be more active in life: I visualised it as being like the drunk at a party who just refused to let you sit watching on the sidelines but insisted on dragging you up onto the floor, no matter how shy or reluctant you were! (Yes, I had experienced that at a number of family weddings!). The upshot of all this was that I had an uprush of energy about my working life and, instead of holding back as I still tended to do, I got more involved and put more into it. I could not help but compare myself at school now with three years ago--- I had come on a long way in all respects. I saw, too, that my "progress had been through difficulty, through feelings of humiliation, embarrassment and failure". Subud was no easy ride: it led through the jungle as a sure guide but it did not by any means take away the difficulties.

Up to this point in my life I had known difficulties, yes, but nothing like what was to come: this was to be nothing short of a hellish experience for me. I felt that of all that life might throw at me, the break-up of my family was nothing short of my "Achilles heel". I had been at the birth of both of my children and both had been "big" experiences for me. The birth of myself as a father was really special to me. It was a role in life that I very much wanted and I loved the experience, particularly in the early days before things went wrong between my wife and me. I can remember so much of those times even now--- building roads out of wooden blocks on the floor and driving toy cars all over the house, going round the carpet

with the “bit lorries” to pick up “bits”, while mum had her afternoon rest upstairs, being heavily pregnant with our daughter. Then, pacing up and down the house at midnight with my daughter, listening to a Max Bygraves’ tape (the only music that would make her give up and go to sleep!) or jigging about the house with her on my shoulders, with Beatles music on rather loudly and making her laugh almost uncontrollably by pretending to walk into doors and slowly falling to the ground with her hanging on for grim death etc. etc. There had been less of this, however, in recent times as it seemed right for me to be less involved with them; as if, long before it actually happened, it “felt as if those little lives were being taken away from me”. I was only now to really understand that feeling...

### *An Unhappy Wife*

Two weeks after the holidays, things plummeted with my wife again. She began to look withdrawn and gloomy and I could not get her to talk to me about it. I remember thinking: “In order for her to grow, must she grow away from me?” It certainly began to look that way. Then she went off on her own for the day and I had a strange phone call from her mum, asking what was going on: her daughter had just said to her that she was about to do something that would “upset a lot of people”. My wife arrived home with an intellectual clarity about things that was extremely impressive, although, for some strange reason, I did not feel it was her own “intellectual clarity”. I now realise that there was a new influence in her life and, perhaps, this was the voice I was now hearing. Anyway, she described me as being more like a brother to her, rather than a husband, and she was now feeling dishonest about our relationship, especially as she felt she could not give me what I wanted or should rightfully have. She did not want us to separate, she said, “for practical reasons” but she felt that I should look for someone else who would be able to give me what I wanted. She hoped she would be able to say to me one day “in the future” that she had found someone “she had grown quite fond of”. She was worried about me, she said, but she wanted to be honest so that I might be prepared for what might happen in the future...I was extremely impressed by this. Previously, I had found her to be secretive, brooding, tense, cold, uncommunicative; now she was confident, articulate, and sure of what she wanted to say. After her talk, however, I felt as if something inside me had now been taken away. There seemed to be no feeling between us at all then. It all felt so final that I felt as if there was no point in arguing or saying anything at all. It was simply as if something had been irretrievably broken between us...This was confirmed a day or two later when we had sex again: it was horrible,

completely feeling-less. I felt I had violated her; it was how I imagined sex with a prostitute might be! After that we slept apart; there was to be no more of that!

Sleeping apart brought sleepless nights and worry about what was going to happen. The tension in the house was so strong for both of us that there seemed no place of escape. We had middle of the night conversations that did no good whatsoever and neither of us seemed able to reach the clarity she had shown so recently. I remember feeling so bad about it all one night that I took a sleeping bag and went off in the car at 2a.m., pulled in a lay-by and slept, fitfully, until the cars started racing by so noisily they made my car shake. It was still very early and the dawn was magnificent: a real burst of oranges and streaky reds. A voice in my head seemed to say: "There is still beauty. That will not be lost!" There was little comfort in that and what there was lasted only until the day really got underway and the colours of the dawn had disappeared... Then my wife decided to go off to her stepmother's for the weekend, leaving the children with me. It was a little respite and I enjoyed having a weekend exclusively with them. I watched them particularly as they played. Neither of them seemed at all aware of what was happening. I watched my son making a "pond" in the back garden by digging a huge hole and lining it with plastic carrier bags- the remnants of that were to stay untouched for months after they left. My daughter entertained me (and most of the neighbours!) by standing inside a plastic hoop, which I guess served as some sort of spotlight (!), playing her violin---rather badly! I received several times in my latihans at this time that I should have days when I devoted myself entirely to the children and I am glad I did so---I now have many happy memories like these which are still very dear to me.

It was at this point that I was told of another medium who lived about a 10 minute drive from my house. I went to see him. Immediately, he picked up on the problems in my marriage: "There are difficult conditions around you," he said. "There is a barrier between you and your wife. She has a sense of constriction, a sense of restriction and frustration. She feels that life should be more challenging but each challenge she has does not live up to expectation and is not fulfilling. She has a great unrest inside her; she wants something but she doesn't know what it is. It is something to do with conditions in her own family background. There is nothing you can do. She appears lacking in emotion to you but beneath the surface she is very emotional and sensitive. She keeps it all inside herself. Hers is a problem of communication: she finds it hard to really communicate with people. The problem is you cannot keep loading the basket with apples." I did not really understand the last sentence-perhaps it meant she simply

could not take more and more pressure- but the rest of it sounded highly plausible. It also gave me comfort because it all seemed more to do with her and her past, rather than just being simply my fault!

### *Early Morning Beauty And Inspirations*

I had the distinct impression that my “spirit family” were lining up behind me at this time---and that they were closer to me than before. I felt I was going to need them! Then my wife went on a couple of day’s residential course and I experienced a new development in myself: I began waking up at about 2o’clock in the morning feeling overwhelmed by feelings of beauty! I would just lay there in the absolute quiet, watching the darkness slowly pass by and give way to the tremendous event that was the coming of a new day! These times were full of what I can only describe as the presence of beauty... If they could have lasted all day, I felt I could have borne anything. But, alas, they did not. Nearly all of the rest of my time I was in a state of abject misery now, seeing nothing but pain and struggle ahead. Instead of sleeping, I spent my nights wide awake and immersed in these wonderful early morning feelings. Sometimes they carried real inspiration to me. At first, they made me feel that what was happening was inevitable and unavoidable: “She wishes you out of her life now. Emotionally and physically she has to go out of your life. There is no love, no sharing. You will one day be completely independent of her and you will begin to experience success in other areas of your life. At school you will be more organised, more varied in your approach to teaching and more effective.” These words just went through my mind and I simply could not doubt them. I was to experience mornings like this over and over again for several months and they were an enormous help to me.

### *A Special Experience At My Father’s Grave*

Then I had the clearest experience of “hearing an inner voice” that I was ever to have in my life. Aware that my wife was looking for somewhere of her own to live, I went to visit my father’s grave. I had not known my father well but I figured that if he were alive, as something like a spirit, then he would surely be around for me now in my greatest hour of need. I approached his grave almost overwhelmed with self-pity and expecting a response of sympathy. I was full of “Oh, poor me!” thoughts. Instead I got a sharp telling off! “Pull yourself together, boy. Lots of people get divorced. Look at what happened to me!” Talk about being pulled up sharp! At first, I simply could not believe it. Then I realised the complete truth of it---of course, lots of people go through what was happening to me. I was carrying on as if I was being singled out for something horrible

and, of course, that was not true. More than this I saw for the first time something of what my father had gone through: his tragic drowning had brutally separated him from his wife and young son. And worse, within a year he had to witness his “wife” marry another man who was not at all the type of man he would choose to look after his family! Wow, I had not realised this at all. My father had gone through all of this and I had not had a clue- until now! I was both shaken and humbled by this experience and I have never forgotten it.

### *Yet Another Medium Helps*

Shortly after this there was a demonstration of mediumship in the town hall near to where I lived. For a couple of pounds you could have a 10minute “reading” from one of several mediums. This I did and the reading was thus: “I see that the material conditions around you are very difficult. They are a kind of preparation for you. I see that you are becoming aware of your psychic gifts at this time and it is as if there have been barriers around you, like a wall. The worst is over. You will no longer have to keep your two lives- the spiritual and the material- apart now. Your father is working with you in spirit and he is especially concerned for his grandson. November will be an important time for you.” Again, this was intriguing for I had never met this woman before and yet she was able to pick up on my time of difficulty, know that my father was dead and “with me in spirit”, that he had a grandson who gave him concern (quite rightly as it turned out. He was to have by far the harder time of it all) and November was when two of the biggest challenges of my life occurred. And just as important: at a time when everything was so confusing, she was able to offer some positive explanation as to why things were happening as they were. Again, this was very helpful to me at this time. I did not know if these spiritual explanations were true or not but I had no others and there was comfort in them!

### *More Solitude*

My wife was now away from home a lot of the time and I was to experience both the joys and loneliness of being alone. At its best there was time to enjoy the slow, undemanding passing of time, to relax as long as I liked, to go for reflective idling walks and simply to enjoy the peace and quiet of a silent house. At its worst, the house screamed absence at me, nothing in it moved unless I moved it (I was not used to that!) and the loneliness was truly painful, tearing at my insides like some physical hurt. I learnt that I did not want to be a solitary; I needed people around to

mess around with, share ideas with and do things with. True, I needed some time on my own, perhaps more than many other people, but I did not want only that in my life. I felt, then, that I needed someone to share with and someone who would not feel rejected by my need to have time on my own as well. I think the problem in my first marriage was not my need to be alone (I did think this at one time): it was more that there was nothing to share at those other times. My wife and I had simply discovered that our values and interests were diametrically different---e.g. my wife liked to be around people who were not my kind of people and vice versa; I would play games with the children while my wife would spend time taking them to various clubs and social events. Really that was good for them but not so good for our relationship, especially as I think we both belittled the other's contribution, quite wrongly. So whichever way I looked at the relationship it was doomed. It was my wife who found the strength to end it; I never would have done. I had the view then that marriage was for life come what may and even up to the very end I thought something "miraculously Subud" would intervene! After all, I thought to myself, Subud has clearly done some amazing things with my life so why not in this important area? I realise now that for this to happen we both would have had to have wanted it, even if only partly, because there is no control or forcing in Subud AND, just as importantly, it would have had to have been in the "best" interests of all of us concerned in it. I had lots of "indications" by now from mediums and my own "receivings" that there was some sense behind what was going on, something to do with long term benefits and growth for my wife and myself and, perhaps, there would be some benefits to the children from their having "new influences" in their lives. Looking back now it seems clear that having such dissimilar parents could not have been good for them, especially as the tension in the house grew and grew. If we could have handled it differently it might have worked - like our Doctor friends who stayed together until their last child went to University, then, after years of "pretence", separated and the children said they had not a clue that anything had been wrong. I was much impressed by that and would have liked to have protected our children in the same way. However, I was soon to discover, somewhat dramatically, why that just could not work in our case...

### *My Wife's Decision Is Final*

Once again, events began with my wife having a week away from home. As the week progressed I began to have mixed feelings about her returning. Every time I thought of it, I had an impression of her having a "psychological hardness" about her which I was sure meant more trouble

ahead. Sure enough when she returned she announced that she was moving out in “two weeks time”. In spite of all the preparation, all the difficulties etc. I was devastated. The finality of it was awful; I felt totally broken. Inside me was this unyielding pain as real as any physical pain could be. For months I was to live as if “my insides were bleeding”. I felt I had no control over what was happening at all; no matter how badly I suffered, how painful it all was, nothing would change. I felt totally rejected by this “special” person who had been important to me for all of my adult life. Everything I was going through was seen by her with a remarkable detachment, as simply “my problem”. At this stage she wanted no involvement at all; and such was her strength that she could carry it off. It was then that I discovered where she drew that strength from...

### *A Night-Time “Drowning” Experience And The Truth Is Revealed*

There came a day when I was so exhausted that I had a day off school (amazingly I kept working through most of all this but that is another story which I will come back to!). I went to bed that night in a worried, frightened and “stirred up” (to say the least!) frame of mind and this time instead of waking in the early hours with feelings of beauty and peace (as was common then) I had a kind of dream in which I was drowning. I even felt as though I could taste the salt water! My whole body was shaking and I could hear myself saying “Oh, dear! Oh dear!” over and over again. At the same time as I was gasping for breath I had what I thought were crazy thoughts going through my head about my wife having an affair with a mutual friend (the first person I had met on my very first evening at College some years ago!) I was obviously in a terrible state because I then became aware of half waking up to my wife shouting at me “What is it? What’s wrong? Shall I call the doctor?!” and the desperation in her voice alarmed me even more. Then I had the idea that I was going under the water for the third time and that would mean I would drown (I had been told that you would drown if you went under three times when I was a child. I have no idea if that is true!) Anyway with a sense of urgency I shouted out into the darkness: “I am getting all these crazy ideas about you and \_\_\_\_\_”( the name of our “friend”). And then I went on to tell her some of the things I had been “dreaming”. Immediately, everything changed. My wife let go of me, I became more conscious, she went as pale as the moon. “It’s true!” she said, “it’s all true!” At that point all the craziness left me. I became fully awake and, amazingly again, I felt grateful to her for admitting it. I felt sure that had she chosen to deny it I would have gone mad with what I considered to be the crazy absurdity of it all! I quickly realised that she could so easily have denied it all (after all

I had absolutely no proof). I was convinced that if she had denied it I would have been in real trouble. I felt, in fact, that she had saved my sanity and maybe worse by admitting it and that is why I was overwhelmed with gratitude. I still believe this today and I still feel this gratitude all these years later. The truth was now out-at last and it brought a huge relief: I was not going mad and I was not going to drown either!

The morning after this experience I remained in something of a “super-charged” state, so that when the phone rang I “knew” immediately who it was: it was my wife’s lover. I got to the phone before she did and before he had a chance to speak I found myself telling him that I knew what was going on and that it was him on the phone, that I had no alternative but to accept him as a “father” to my children, I did not want that, that things would not go as easily as he thought, that my daughter would accept him easily but that my son never would...” I understand now that the shock was so great that he went off somewhere for a couple of days and got completely out of the way!

### *Valuable Inner Guidance*

The days that followed were perhaps the most peculiar of my life. I was living with someone who was making preparations to leave me; who simply could not bear being with me. Many times I thought that she would rather see me dead than carry on living with me! All contact with her now was “like the turning of a knife inside me”. My early morning advice was convincingly true, even for the critic in me: “You have the children for only a short while now; make them happy in the last days they have with their Dad. If you are not careful the children can be badly damaged by all this, not just by what their mother is doing, but also by YOUR reaction to it. Don’t think about your wife now: think of the children.” This I did as much as I could and I think it gave me a means to get through this awful time as well I hope as helping the children. I was also “advised” in the same way to keep busy: “No matter how terrible you feel, DO something. Every time you do something, however small, you will receive “legions” of help.” Again, I tried hard to get up and do things: making something look better, even if it was only washing some paintwork down, DID make me feel a little better for a short time. I also kept going at school where my boss had already been told what was happening (!) and he made sure he was around to help out where he could. I went to see my doctor who gave me her phone number to call any time “day or night”. She also gave me some sleeping tablets; I took one that night and had a horrendous experience of dreaming that I was on a battlefield and there were bombs exploding all around me. I knew I had to



run to safety but my body simply would not move! I felt fully alert but I could not get my body to move! What a panic!! I did not take any more sleeping tablets after that.

### *Bad Things Never Come Singly: How Do I Cope?*

As if all this was not enough it so happened that my work life presented me with a huge challenge at the same time as all this was going on. Of all the bad luck for me, my school was one of the very few at that time to be chosen for an Inspection by a team of Her Majesty's Inspectors! Nowadays inspections by Ofsted inspectors are commonplace for all schools; in those days it was very rare for a school to be inspected like this. In fact, many teachers could go all through their teaching careers without seeing see an inspector for more than a part of a day; our inspection meant a team of inspectors would be in school for the best part of a week. I was really in no condition to stand up to the depth of scrutiny of my work that this inspection entailed. Physically I was exhausted through lack of sleep, if nothing else; psychologically, I was "hyped up", in a state of high alertness, waiting for the next "bomb to explode". I suppose there was a little bit of a plus: such "big" things were going on in my life that there were times when even an inspection seemed trivial in comparison. However, there is no doubt that by the time the inspectors arrived in the school, I was something of a nervous wreck.

### *A Life-Changing Moment*

The first day went by O.K. The inspectors were in and out of my room, watching me teach and looking at the children's work etc. but they were not there the whole time, so I had some respite and I coped alright. The second day completely caught me out. The inspectors were in and out of my room the whole time. Sometimes I had two inspectors in the room at the same time and all the while I was being asked questions while I was teaching! It was like being interviewed on the job. By the end of the day I was on the verge of a nervous collapse. I could not understand why I had been given this treatment: I imagined it was because the inspectors had found something wrong with my teaching and were unhappy with what they had seen. Oh, dear! That was the final straw. I decided I would not be able to take another three days of this, so I felt I had no option but to give up the attempt and instead I would go and stay with my mother and father and opt out of all that was going on for awhile. As I drove away from school, in something of a shell-shocked state, I realised it was my latihan night, so I had a choice in front of me: I could either go straight to my folks as I had just intended or I could wait until after the latihan and

maybe do some testing about it first. I had about five minutes to decide because then I would come to a crossroads where I had to turn left if I was to go to my folk's house and right if I was to stay until after the latihan. The horror of the day was still so strong that I felt like turning left and having done with it all... Soon the crossroads were in sight. How rarely does the rest of one's life hang on such a split second and last minute decision... As I slowed down, I left it until the last moment before putting on the indicators to turn... RIGHT. I would defer my decision until after I had done some testing about it later that night! When I think how close I was to leaving everything-especially my job and my children- I shudder even now. How different my life might then have been. Why, all that was to happen in my future- and so much of it so good- could have so easily been lost! Of course, I could not know all that then; I was simply very unhappy and at my wits end to know how to cope and what to do about it all. It had all become too hard, too much.

### *Invaluable, Life-Saving Testing*

I went to the latihan exhausted and dazed. The latihan was its usual strong and convincing experience which left me energised and somewhat enlivened. But, as yet, I had no answers as to what to do, so I went into the testing wondering how it could possibly help with something that had turned out to be so horrible and too difficult for me. Within a few minutes my entire attitude to the inspection changed! I had clearly misunderstood what was going on: there was nothing wrong with my teaching and- surprise! surprise!- the inspectors were basically on my side. I felt that they were not these impersonal, hypercritical beings out to get me as I had been convinced they were. In fact, they were much gentler and more sympathetic than I had thought. Surprisingly now as I look back on this, I accepted this completely, perhaps because of the strength of feeling it had. Anyway, the next day was a particularly challenging day for me because it was my turn to do the assembly. I was usually a bit nervous about assemblies because so many people were observing me but today there were all the usual people there plus a row of suited inspectors at the back also. However, I was still on a bit of a high after last night's testing and I remembered it had told me to enjoy telling my assembly story and to do it loudly and with marked variations in my voice. I did this and the assembly went beautifully. Afterwards the lead inspector came over to me and said: "I cannot wait until tomorrow... These assemblies get better every day." I felt twelve feet tall!

The rest of that day was much more relaxed, much easier than the previous one- and so was the rest of the inspection. Different teachers got

the “third degree” on subsequent days and so I was then left alone more. It turned out that part of the plan for the inspection was to give each teacher an intense day in turn. Mine had been on the Tuesday! I wish I had been told that beforehand: it would have saved a lot of distress. But then I would have probably missed that wonderful testing which single-handedly kept my life together. I am sure that without the latihan and testing that night, I would have turned left and changed the whole course of my life. I am now so glad that I didn't!!

### *More Testing; My Children*

I also did plenty of testing about my situation outside of school. I asked: “What should be my attitude to my situation in life at this present time?” and received that I should see my situation as I would view a strong latihan i.e. I should go along with it and not resist it. Further, I felt what I should try and resist was the pressure “downwards” and, although I had been nearly knocked over I should stand up by my own efforts with the help of the latihan. My own latihan at this time were remarkable for the feelings of beauty and “cleanliness” they gave me, a kind of inner cleanliness and purity. Over and over again, I would come to the latihan in despair at what was going on and feeling my life to be dark and hard and nearly every time there came these lovely feelings of purity and beauty and an uplifting “cleanness”. I can only think they were a helpful compensation to the experiences my ordinary life was bringing at the time. I tested what my attitude to my wife was at this time and received how ineffectual, weak and defeated I was: I should instead be a tower of light, strong and even relaxed. I found this such a tall order that I had to test it again in a slightly different way: “How am I towards my wife at this time?” and this time I received that I was trying to attract her attention by saying “I don't want your attention!” I was, in fact, disturbing her, bothering her by trying to attract her attention all the time. I saw this was right and I felt ashamed of it. Then I tested: “How should I be with her?” and I received a type of yoga asana, which was elegant, strongly balanced, with my palms above my head in a stretch and a delightful feeling with it of inner poise. I tested how I should be with the children: with my daughter I should be comforting and loving; with my son it was more complicated: I should have my arms wide open to him, be open, receptive and loving, waiting for him to come to me and I should receive not only his love but also his aggression: it was as if I was giving him my face to slap and he was hitting me so hard as to make me flinch! I was so surprised by this that I then tested whether I should talk to his mother about him and I received she did not want to hear it: it would be like I was giving her an earache!

My wife was getting more and more detached, and more uncaring of me and the “family home”, as the day for her moving out got closer and closer. I felt her psychological rejection of me had become TOTAL. Inside myself it felt as if my insides had been badly damaged and I was in what felt like physical pain all the time now. Emotionally, she seemed unbelievably hard to me (I think she had to be: how else would she have been able to find the strength to move out?) 15 years of marriage; 11 of fatherhood--- and now this! The awfulness of the whole situation was relieved for me by the latihan, helped enormously by testing, which often gave me other perspectives on what was happening and even some understanding, and, still, by my early morning- almost middle of the night- experiences. Out of these came what I thought was some understanding of my wife’s new partner’s character: I felt strongly that his easy-going exterior belied an obstinate and selfish “inside”; that he, too, had been badly hurt by a woman in the past and was determined not to be so again and that by aligning with him my wife was putting herself in the way of an eventual “emotional desertion”. I felt all this but I could not know for sure if it were true. I told my wife this and she listened and said “it was a chance she had to take.”

My Quiet Times helped me to continue to focus on the children: I realised they would always be MY son and daughter and I must always be available to them: they must always know where to find me, no matter what happened. When I first came back from the Congress, I had a somewhat unusual experience as I gave my children the little gifts I had bought them. I bought all the family some little pottery gifts and for the two children I brought home a little pottery owl each. They had caught my eye as there were just two of them and, as I saw them, they just happened to remind me of the two of them, so I bought them. As I presented them, all three of us were sitting on the sofa and I found myself talking to them at length about the owls--- about how they often stood for wisdom in stories, how they would always be a link between the two of them and me so that if ever they needed help and I was not around all they had to do was to look at the owl and tell what was bothering them and I would know! I remember going on about life always having separations in it and some separations we would not want but even they could turn out for the best in the end and so on...I was totally surprised by all this and I could see my wife was too. As I went into the kitchen she was looking very serious and obviously surprised. “What on earth was all that about?” I remarked. “That was very odd.” She said nothing. I guess something in me knew what was going on in more depth perhaps than I would allow myself to be conscious of. I hope even now that it was all

some help to the children. My daughter now has quite a collection of owls, a hobby which I started off for her. I notice, too, that she has her brother's along with her own---perhaps he gave his away in disgust. Perhaps he feels his owl did not help him at all and I suspect he might feel let down by it all...

### *A Bonfire Night I Will Never Forget*

At last came the night before my wife was due to move out: it was bonfire night! We had got into a routine of sharing a bonfire, fireworks and refreshments etc. with our next door neighbours and this was no exception. The evening was extremely muted, of course, as everyone except the children knew all too well what was about to happen. In fact the whole evening became almost surreal as fireworks were lit, hot potatoes eaten and everyone tried hard to put on a brave face. There had been so many happy nights around the bonfire; I was all too conscious that there would not be one quite like this ever again. Towards the end of the evening, we took the children to see the big bonfire in the next village along from us and it was there that the feelings between us seemed to change. They became more accepting; I felt all was completely out of my hands: these moments were to be our last together and I simply had to accept them as such. These feelings grew as the evening came to an end with the two of us sitting on the sofa, together, for the last time: not a word passed between us and for once the silence was completely comfortable. It was as if it was all done; everything was played out; there was nothing more to be said or done. And in that there was relief, some relaxation and even some comfortable feelings. We sat aware of this for as long as we could until tiredness took over. It was as if our final goodbye to each other was deeper than words; in the silence of that evening I accepted, too, that it was to be the only time we could comfortably share anything again.