

## A HOME OF OUR OWN

The days were getting more anxious and the nights more sleepless. Less than two weeks now before I had to leave the family home. I had no idea where I was to live. A colleague, who also worked part-time for the Citizen's Advice Bureau, had looked at my situation and said I would probably end up in a bedsit about thirty miles away from my family. I hated that prospect. I had lived in a bedsit for a short time when I was a young man and it had been one of the loneliest periods of my life. Worse, it would mean I would be separated from my children. I had lived with them all their lives and instead of seeing them daily, as now, I would then be lucky to see them weekly. That was just so painful as to be almost unbearable. What could I do? Well, the prompts I was getting from my latihan seemed completely impracticable: I just kept feeling that I should "phone something like the local council." I knew from my CAB colleague that separated fathers like me would not get any help from the "local council" so that seemed hopeless. And I had no idea what "something like the local council" could be! But as the feeling stayed and got stronger if anything, I, finally, decided that, as unpractical as it seemed, I would have to test it.

So, at my next latihan my close friend and I tested what I should do about my situation. Clear as anything was the receiving: "Phone...the Area Education Office!" That was surprise enough but even more was to follow: I was not to do it; I was to ask my boss to make the call! I was both shocked and, initially, bemused by this. I just could not see what the point of either of us doing this would be. I knew that the Education Office no longer had an arrangement with the local council to attract new teachers to the county by offering them council property. That policy had stopped years ago. And anyway I had seen many new teachers come to the area since and not one of them had received any help in finding accommodation: it was something they were expected to sort out for themselves as a matter of course. But the receiving was so strong, and my situation so desperate, that I was prepared to try anything.

The next day, after lunch – and I remember this so well- my Head came jauntily into my classroom and said in a loud voice: "John, I think I have found you a home! Come and have a word as soon as school finishes." I could hardly believe what I had heard. Thankfully, it was soon confirmed. My Head had sympathised with my situation and had wanted to help so that, although he

could not see what good it would do to ring the Area Education Office, he did so. And “you will never guess,” he said “what happened. I spoke to JC (the Area Education Officer) and she told me that she had just been informed, a few days ago, that the family who lived in one of only two Schoolhouses that the County still owned wished to move out after living there for seven years! And guess where that Schoolhouse is? You will never believe this: it’s in -----” and he named the village where my family was presently living!! “Yes,” he said, “It’s true. JC says to tell you to arrange with the family to see the house and if you like it, it’s yours!”

This I quickly did. I could hardly believe my luck! It was a three-bedroom house, so my two children could have a room each; it was completely detached, surrounded by cornfields up to the horizon and the school on one side. I had dropped my son off at the school many times and never noticed the house at the end of the drive hidden by trees and well-established bushes. No-one I knew in the village knew there was a house there because it was so secluded! It was ideal for me and the children. So, they were able to live with me for half the week – how different from what would have happened if I had moved into a bedsit all those miles away! And even better it was the other side of the small village where my ex-wife lived so the children could easily walk between us as and when they wanted! Under the circumstances I saw this as the best that could have happened to us.

It took me awhile to appreciate what had happened here. Without testing I would never have thought of contacting the Area Education Office who did not normally help anyone any longer with accommodation. True, the County still owned two Schoolhouses which they had not been able to sell because they were on school grounds and there were access problems (the others they had once owned had been sold long ago). No teacher I knew had any knowledge of these two. *What, though, were the chances of one of only two of them being in the village where I- and my children- lived AND being vacant just at the time I needed it?!!*

But why did the testing say my Head should phone and not me? It took me awhile to see a possible reason for this. My school had just had a very successful HMI inspection and as a result my Head was in almost daily contact with the Area Education Office. For a time he was described as “the blue-eyed boy of the County” i.e. he was getting all the attention he wanted from the Education Office. He was working on various projects with the Area Office

which meant he was in almost daily contact with the Area Education Officer. There were daily phone calls between them now as a matter of course. When he rang them he always got through. Lesser minions, like myself, would probably be put in a queue or be dealt with by someone less important in the hierarchy. As it was, my Head had access to just about whoever he wanted! Did the latihan know that, then? It seems so! Anyway, it meant that he was able to phone the very person who had just been informed of the family moving out of the Schoolhouse! If he had spoken to anyone else, this news would probably not have filtered down to them. As it was he spoke to exactly the right person to offer the house to me! Amazingly lucky!

I lived in this house until my children were grown-up with their own homes and families. At first, it was a real refuge for the three of us. But it was not all easy. We had our ups and downs: our challenges. I remember the day I moved in. My close friend and Subud brother and a colleague's husband helped me with my things. As soon as I opened the front door my colleague's husband took one look into the dark, cold, empty, poorly decorated interior and turned round and ran- literally ran!- back to his own house. I knew he had a history of mental illness but I never expected the house to have such an effect! After he left, however, my close friend and I, as we were trying to lay a stair carpet on a particularly difficult twist in the stairs and *at exactly the same moment* felt this huge upsurge of latihan! It stayed with us as we carried stuff into the house and did what we had to do: it was a really strong latihan, making both of us feel inwardly so happy! The result was that I felt sure that this house was going to be a place of latihan for me and so it turned out. Many of these were shared with my friend and I particularly remember many latihan and more testing in this house with a beautiful log fire blazing away in the room!

It was a very cold house and I had just about every form of heating in it and still the pipes froze- twice! Oh dear, the horror of coming home from work with water dripping through the landing ceiling! But, oh how I loved the seclusion. With no neighbours it was ideal for some really loud latihan. And when the school was closed for holidays etc I absolutely loved the undisturbed quiet. Here I discovered the joys of Solitude and that has never left me. I am truly grateful for that as much as anything else. It was hard work decorating and furnishing the house from scratch (with some help from my friend) and being a part-time single parent with a full-time and demanding job. But it was worth it to see my children grow up into confident and independent adults and for

myself to grow so much in my Subud life from the unrestricted access to the latihan –and some more life-changing testing- that this house gave me. My gratitude to the latihan for its prompts and the testing that followed still moves me deeply even after so many years.