

## SCHOOLHOUSE LIFE

When I first went to look at the Schoolhouse, I had to ask instructions because, although I had lived some years in this small village, I had no idea where it could be. The house was, in fact, situated right on the end of the school drive. The reason I had not seen it on all those many occasions when I dropped my children off at the school- just a few yards away!- was because it was partly hidden by some trees and well-established bushes. My first sight of it took my breath away: it was a large, detached, well-built, red brick house, surrounded by fields and farms on all but one side where there were the tennis courts and the school. I first saw it after school one afternoon when all the children had long since left and the quiet was enchanting! It looked absolutely ideal---for me it had real Solitude, peace and quiet and for the children it was ideally placed: when they stayed with me they just had to walk across the drive into school ( it took less than a couple of minutes) and when they were with their mum they had less than a ten minute walk to see me if they wished (as they often did).

Inside, the house had two good-sized bedrooms and one small but cosy bedroom; a big, although narrow, kitchen; a small dining room (my study!); and a comfortably sized lounge. Yes, it would more than do! Outside the views were of fields up to the horizon at the back with an established back garden full of all sorts of bushes (some I recognised as fruit bushes!) and a rather unkempt and long-grassed lawn. At the front was a cornfield to the left and directly in front there was a long lawn, leading down to the school and the school car park. The immediate problem was the inside state of the house. The wallpaper in every room had at least one huge, meandering tear from ceiling to floor where the electricians had put in new wiring. Every room needed cleaning thoroughly (sweeping, vacuuming, washing and scrubbing two or three times!) and re-decorating urgently. What a job! Obviously, I could not afford professional help so there was no alternative but to do it all myself. It took ages for me to do it: after the cleaning, I decorated one room every school holiday until the whole place was done. My new lady friend was the only help I had and she was a godsend with the wallpapering!

Eventually it was all done. My daughter had a pretty blue room with everything co-ordinated blue. She and I chose it all together- carpet, curtains, bedcover etc. all matching. My son's room became orange, largely to match the dark orange carpet I had got cheaply. His was a big room so we had to make do a bit but it still looked attractive- a light orange wall, co-ordinated curtains, a darker carpet with a white , with an orange and light brown design in the middle of it, bedcover which we had been given. I was very pleased with it, although my son was disappointed that I had not painted a large Union Flag on the ceiling! The rest of the house was a mixture of colours, largely determined by the colour of the carpets that I was kindly given by friends and colleagues. The worst rooms were the hall and stairs, which were covered in dark brown wallpaper when I moved in. They had pictures of pagodas and fat-bellied men all over and to make it even less attractive the wallpaper, instead of laying flat, had huge bubbles in it every few inches or so!

And then there was the heating! By the end of the first Winter, I was using just about every form of heating I could! There was a log and coal fire in the lounge, an ancient smokeless coal-fed boiler in the kitchen, an electric storage heater in the dining room and lounge (lovely and warm about 2 o'clock in the morning and only slightly warm during most of the day and the evening!); in the bathroom there was a paraffin heater which, although small, just about fitted in; in the bedrooms I had calor gas heaters- no-one told me these made condensation so that when I left them on low during the coldest nights I woke up with my face and my bedding soaking wet, literally drenched and so uncomfortable. Yes, the house was exceptionally cold. In fact, twice in that first winter I came home with a steady drip of water coming through the ceiling! I also had to get used to ice appearing on the inside of the windows on the coldest nights- what an effort it would be then for me to get out of bed on those mornings but, of course, it was down to me to get up and get all the heaters on. Sometimes the place looked like a scene from the film "Dr. Zhivago!" It was very beautiful but...

The children came to me Mondays and Thursdays after school and alternate weekends at least. On cold days I tried to get home as early as I could to get the fires alight and the place warmed up- that took a while because there was no-one in the house all day. In those days, too, the shops shut by 5:30pm, so I had to make sure I got everything I needed for the week at the weekend. If I forgot anything or needed anything special, I would have to rush like mad from school to try to get to

the nearest food shop in time. The worst was when my daughter suddenly announced that she needed something exotic and unusual, which I did not have in the cupboard, for her “cooking” at school- panic! panic! panic!

I was amazed that the children kept coming here for so long (all their childhood, in fact!) It was so often cold and it was isolated. At their mum’s they had a centrally-heated house that was always warm and where there was always someone at home. But keep coming they did and I was always glad to see them. I can see now that because of everything that I had to do, I no longer had as much time left over to play games and so on as we used to. Nevertheless, I do have many happy memories of these times: of long summer bike rides with my son, playing “frisbies” over and over with my daughter; there were weekends playing monopoly or darts, laughing, talking and singing our heads off, warm, close times... Then there was that memorable time when my son brought, I think it was his first, girlfriend up to the house and she looked at me in absolute shock: she had been in my class a few years previously! I had been her teacher... What a laugh we all had!!

I enjoyed decorating the house for Christmases and birthdays as well---like that time I arranged a disco for my daughter out of Christmas tree lights: a memorable because pathetic attempt on my part! It was taken in good part by all concerned, however! Then there was the day I bought my son a new bike and my daughter...a dwarf Dutch rabbit that we could leave running free in the back garden all day and then I could whistle him and he would come running out of his cover and we could put him back in his hutch for the night...I suppose looking back it gives me a lot of satisfaction to think that we kept our relationships going in this way for so long, even if we did lose some of the intimacy of our early years together.

I still remember vividly my worst moment in the house. It was one cold, spring night when I was awoken by my son complaining that he “felt funny,” whereupon he was promptly sick all over me and my bed! So I had to get up in the middle of the night and clean him, myself and the bed and the floor. I put the bedding straight into the washing machine, turned it on and went back to bed... When I came down in the morning, the washing machine had gone wrong and leaked this horrible, sickly mess all over the kitchen, hall and dining room floors! Unfortunately, I was decorating the hall and stairs at the time so I had ladders and a plank set up across the lot with the walls half stripped with this wet distemper- mixed up with paint

mess all over the walls (hence the bubbles and lumps in the wallpaper- there were 2 or 3 layers of wallpaper stuck over each other on an ill-prepared wall!!) So there was this horrible wet mess all over the walls with a different but equally horrible wet mess over the downstairs floors! The place was freezing cold and all the fires and heaters needed sorting out while my poor old son was upstairs feeling terrible! I thought Hell had come to the Schoolhouse!

There were so many times of “heaven” there, too. Many Thursday evenings I would come home and the house was unusually invitingly warm and there was a wonderful smell of food filling the house. My lady friend had got over early, lit all the fires and cooked us all a meal! Wonderful...Thank you! Thank you! Thank you! There were many happy times with the children when the three of us would snuggle up together on the sofa in front of a blazing log fire and watch T.V, or talk to each other about what was going on in our lives, or simply, just have a good laugh. There were good times on my own, too. I had a Quiet Time in my study every day now and more than one during holidays and weekends. The best times were when I had caught up with the jobs, the place was tidy, clean and organised and I could concentrate entirely on the Inner. Then I could latihan as noisily as I liked and almost whenever I needed to. These were often times of real joy for me when everything seemed to shout out happiness to me. I remember one such occasion when I was completely alone and it was a bright, mild day and as I watched the clouds passing by outside the window, I was overcome with joy and I remember thing: “Separation from my wife is something to be grateful for if it means being as happy as this!” Who would have thought it?!

When my close friend and Subud brother had first stepped into this house we had both felt it to be filled with the latihan. And so it continued to be. The two of us met often here for latihan together. The latihan was with me just about every day. They were often beautiful, inspiring and uplifting. They gave me both the guidance and the strength *to live through whatever these days brought!*