

SCHOOLHOUSE DAYS

As the years passed, life at the Schoolhouse got easier. My children got older and, naturally-and helpfully! - became more independent. I could leave a (healthy!) snack ready for them on those nights when they were staying with me and this would tied them over until I arrived home about 5:30. I could usually arrange my later nights around them and, if that was impossible, then arrangements were flexible enough for our evenings to be changed round. So we got into a routine that was to last in a quite settled way until the children grew up, really, and my daughter went off to College and my son went off to live with a partner and then off backpacking to Australia for a year! So, in spite of my initial fears I was to see my children grow up and I was to be closely involved in this.

One of the most immediate pleasures of the Schoolhouse was the Solitude it gave me and, as time went on, those awful feelings of loneliness and rejection were relieved more and more by feelings of real happiness. I can remember even at the beginning experiencing times of real “psychological freedom.” For example, there was that time when I drove back from seeing some friends of mine on a clear, bright, and big-mooned evening and, for once, instead of dreading coming home to an empty, lonely house I was just so relieved not to have the moodiness and silent aggression of my ex-wife to welcome me! The absence of tension in the house was a novel and welcome experience (I was reminded-if I really needed a reminder-of just how bad things had got between my ex-wife and me) I often appreciated the remoteness of the Schoolhouse: I could sit in my back garden hidden completely by bushes and trees, so that even when my friends came past, to go swimming or to play tennis on the courts next to me, they would not know I was there. I especially enjoyed doing my exercises in the warm, summer sunshine wearing only my boxer shorts (shh! don't tell anyone!)

I remember many particular moments of real uplifting beauty during my time at the Schoolhouse. It was truly situated in a lovely part of the world so that I had many enchanting walks through the different, but all so equally beautiful, seasons. There were summers when my house would be surrounded by ripening, furry-headed barley fields that would sway like a huge, green sea in the wind; or by a

landscape completely transformed by the startlingly brilliant yellow fields of rape stretching as far as the eyes could see. The views from my windows were always wide and expansive. In the winter the frosts and snow were particularly impressive. On one occasion, I wrote in my journal:

“I am over-wrapped on a bitterly cold morning but it is so beautiful that I cannot mind. The sky is large and light blue and the shiny white frost is so sharp that it comes right up to, and inside, the house: there is ice on the insides of my windows, just above the storage heater! There is a tremendous, huge, bright copper sun glowing through the stiff black trees...I watch fascinated as a white, moving mist forms in a hollow amongst the distant fields...”

Another time, I was completely alone in the house while outside there was a snowstorm so bad that I could not see the end of the drive! I felt like a hermit in some bleak mountain retreat; I felt stranded, so completely alone it was a little scary! Yet when the snowstorm stopped the whole world outside my home was completely transformed into a sparkling, pure white desert. For days the snow was undisturbed as the schools were all closed. The only footsteps in the world seemed to be mine...

Spring and Autumn were equally beautiful. Bursts of Spring sunshine seemed to bring inner bursts of sunshine as well. After living for so long with so many dark, rainy and cold days, it was real joy to see and feel the Spring coming. Being so much in the heart of the country, I noticed these changes and the effects of the seasons far more than when I lived in the town. They never ceased to fascinate me.

So often the Schoolhouse seemed to be a real Retreat for me; a place where I could concentrate on my Quiet Times and my latihan. As the children grew, so my Solitude grew and, as my Solitude grew, so I was refreshed and inspired to make the best of my life. I wrote at the time:

“Solitude gives me the feeling of contact with Something within me that is felt and not seen and that gives me confidence and, very often, contentment, too. Honestly, I feel I learn more from this Solitude than from most people I see.”

“The stillness of the Schoolhouse welcomes me like a long-lost friend! My thoughts and feelings trickle along now like pleasant mountain streams-all I have to do is simply to watch them!”

“How often I experience morning inspirations! I can wake up almost overwhelmed by the darkness of life...I sit quietly for awhile and experience a shower of positive feelings...the beauty of early morning quiet comes first. Then I feel surprised by feeling loved! I am quite shocked by it; it is such a good feeling! I need this because I have been so negative about myself, full of inadequacy and feeling so unlovable.”

Often these times would continue to give specific advice:

“Early morning Quiet can revolutionize my feelings! It has happened again so that instead of being depressed about going back to school after this holiday, I suddenly think of a completely new plan for this coming week and this makes me feel excited and positive about going back: I am really looking forward to it now!”

By now it was the most natural thing in the world to take my problems and difficulties to the latihan and in this way my life found its way forward. There were always demands and worries about my work but these were often solved at this time through my Quiet Times and, if not, I would simply bring them to testing. My life clearly went well when I had enough time for my Inner life- ie enough time for “Quiet” and the good sense to test things I was not sure of. I was to make some huge omissions with this later but at this time I was at my most sensible. I tested about the value of this Solitude for me, eg: not to not to encourage this side of my life would be “like having my mouth firmly shut with nothing of value to say.” My neighbor received that it would be like having a paralysed right arm! To continue without it would lead to my inner life deteriorating and my feelings becoming chaotic. I was, therefore, not to give it up but rather it was to become a priority for me. My neighbor received that I should make some sort of declaration about this and I received that this would be like my hoisting a flag on my castle! Each time I tested around these issues, I was left feeling inwardly lighter and more sure of myself.

I often felt relaxed, peaceful and even content after latihan now so that I could write:

“ I am now unmistakably happy. I am alone and grateful – grateful for the peace and comfort of my home now, for the unmistakable gift of this Schoolhouse, for my having survived the complete upheaval of my divorce, for my health, my job and even for my 15 years of marriage and 13 of fatherhood. Now I am grateful for my freedom and for the chance to be more myself! There is an inner sunshine as well as an outer one.”