

Christmas
2012

The Knowle Farm Newsletter

2012 has not been a good year for the Derbyshire branch of the Chisman family. It started well enough with Terry going off skiing with Mike and Sally but then, as the main story, right, tells, it all went a bit pear shaped.

So not a good year for us, but we hope for a *Merry Christmas*, and a happy and prosperous New Year for ourselves, and for all our readers.

Things I have Learned

Washing.

I have learned to use the washing machine, and the most interesting aspect of this new skill is that when Liz is in hospital, my weekly wash consists of 7 pairs of socks, 2 pairs of pants, 1 shirt, 1 towel, and 1 set of bedding. With Liz out of hospital however it varies but seems to be 67 pairs of knickers, 5 tee shirts, 2 pairs of trousers, 16 towels, 5 nightshirts etc., etc., etc. PLUS all my stuff.

Notelets.

"Can you get me some more notelets" Liz asked. Simple answer no - where does a bloke buy notelets? Not the paper shop, not the card shop, not the supermarket. Where do you ladies buy notelets?

How to help Liz up the stairs.

Stand behind her and help her up with a gentle wedge.

Water.

At times Liz has been neutropenic that is, she has very low or no white cells and is very prone to infection. Among the advice given to people in this state is "Drink ONLY tap water". I.e. stay away from bottled water, it is too dangerous for you to drink in that state. Interesting, as most people fondly believe it to be better for you.

Cooking.

I learned to cook, and inevitably, I use a spreadsheet. No surprises there.

Liz's Year

Many of you will have followed Liz's year through her on-line diary, but for any of you who haven't here is an outline—(for the full, 32,000 word, version go to www.chisman.co.uk and click on "For Liz's Diary Click Here")

Liz has myeloma—cancer of the bone marrow. We knew some years ago that she was going to get it, and at the start of 2012 the consultant said that treatment would start "sometime this year". A couple of weeks later we went off to Lanzarote for two weeks of sunshine and quiet only for Liz to start suffering dreadful back pains. We cut the holiday short and came home where, about 6 days later, she was admitted to hospital suffering from pancreatitis caused by a much faster onset of the myeloma than anyone had expected.

Myeloma tends to leech calcium from bones, and the low point of the year was undoubtedly when one of the vertebrae in her spine collapsed and we faced the possibility of her being paralysed from the waist down. The worst effects of this were avoided by the quite staggeringly fast response from the spinal team at the Royal Derby. We pointed out to the nurse at about 3 o'clock that Liz couldn't move her leg, and by 7 o'clock that same night I walked with her as she went to the operating theatre for spinal surgery. At midnight the surgeon came to tell me that the surgery had gone as well as he could have hoped, but we wouldn't know until the next day whether it had worked. I came home at that point, but by 4 o'clock I still hadn't gone to sleep, so I got up and went back to the hospital to sit by Liz's bedside until she awoke about 7. She moved her leg and I burst into tears.

One of the saddest aspects of this whole episode was that Liz was completely out of things on morphine. She had been in so much pain that she was on a morphine pump, and didn't know quite what was going on. This left me to make the decision on my own, which wasn't too bad, but it was the thought that Liz was aware enough to know that something important was going on, but couldn't work out what. That thought makes me sad even now.

After the surgery, she had to learn how to control the muscles in her lower body again, which was a slow process, and the left leg was definitely worse than the right. At the time "Strictly Come Dancing" was on the TV (When isn't it???) so the right leg was Darcey Bussell, and the left Russell Grant. Her left leg is still weaker than her right even now, but she can walk more or less normally for which we are extremely grateful.

She recovered slowly from the pancreatitis, and the surgery and eventually started the chemo treatment for the myeloma. This progressed with ups and downs until mid October when she went into Nottingham for a stem cell transplant. This is the process by which, having reduced the myeloma to more or less nothing by chemotherapy, (which had the upsetting side effect of making all her hair fall out), they stimulated her bone marrow to produce stem cells, which they harvested. Once a suitable number of stem cells had been collected (between 2 and 5 million!) she became an in-patient and they gave her a large dose of a horrible chemical which killed off all her remaining bone marrow. This was followed by the re-introduction of

her own stem cells, which over a period of a week or so, stimulate the production of new bone marrow.

An amazing process, the middle week of which is utterly dreadful. The chemo has some horrible side effects but fortunately, Liz is now through all that and back home, although still very weak.

We both have to say that, throughout the last nine months, the N.H.S. has been nothing short of wonderful. The new hospital in Derby seems to have addressed just about every complaint you ever hear levelled at hospitals. The nursing staff, from care assistants to consultants have been attentive, sensitive and caring. In Nottingham (a different health authority) the experience was similar. The whole experience was positive, and a real eye opener.

For now, the general medical consensus is that it will take three to six months for Liz to recover fully, and then we can start thinking about holidays again. And, boy, do we need one.

By way of a final paragraph, can we both say a huge thank you to everyone who has helped and supported us during these difficult months. To those who put meals in our freezer, those who supported when times were difficult, those who fed me, those who sat and listened, those who prayed for Liz. To all of you - a massive thank you.



Terry's new Office

You may recall that we planned to fill a rather unsightly hole at the back of the house with a new office for Terry.

The construction part of the work is now complete, and you can see (or those of you who know the house can see) that the architect and builders have made a splendid job of joining the new bit to the old bit pretty seamlessly.

The inside is now decorated, and an IKEA desk has been fitted at one end, all the internet and network cabling is complete, but the move from the old office is still a very long way from finished, owing to other events this year. Perhaps next year will

see Terry operating from his new abode.

As part of the project, we have had a little light landscaping done in the area. A stone wall was removed with great gusto by my school friends last year, and a local landscaper has used the existing stone and slabs to give us some new steps allowing us much better access to the back garden, something that we have long needed.

It also gives Liz somewhere to put a washing line after 15 years without one, and the greenhouse she has wanted for some time. All this without losing the vegetable patch.

It now looks as if we actually planned it.



Comings and Goings.

Actually, this should just be called "Goings" this year, because, as you have read, it wasn't a very good year for me health-wise and it wasn't a very good year for the cats either.

In March, one of Heidi's kittens was run over and killed. I was very sad but I have to admit that Terry wasn't as Gerald (or Bad Cat as Terry called him) spent more time by the back than rat catching. His brother, Hubert (or Good Cat) is a much better ratter.

Rocky, aged 17, wasn't very well at the start of the year but then perked up, but by August, he was going downhill again and the vet diagnosed a stomach tumour, giving him only a fortnight to live. Despite this, he survived another eight weeks, being fed twice a day (as he - Rocky - told us he needed building up), on expensive Whiskas pouches (as he had few teeth), and given pain killers every night. But, sadly, at the end of September we had to have him put to sleep. Terry sat with him as he went and he is now buried with the others in the "orchard".

We had inherited him from a friend and he had been a wonderful farm cat regularly catching all manner of vermin. His long black fur made him hard to photograph. All you could see in the mass of black was two green eyes, narrowly appraising you. He was a very chatty cat, walking across the courtyard and through the barns meowing away as if to say 'Hello!', to which one was expected to reply 'Hello Rocky'. He wasn't too keen on the young whippersnappers who came to live here and would occasionally cuff the kittens smartly around the ear, but he was head cat and loved and respected by all. We will miss him.

Our tenants in the Cottage, Tim and Rachel have been a great help during this year, looking after chickens and ducks and cats while Terry came to visit me in hospital. They wanted to keep some chickens of their own and so we decided that, for now, we would hand over responsibility for all poultry to them. They have added to the chicken flock and now sell the eggs to passing trade.

Our most ancient hen Wilma, is still going at about 12 we think. Not exactly much of an egg producer but she rules the roost with great majesty.

The Journey to - pause - Matlock

This is the end of a story that started in the 2010 newsletter. You may recall that we had inadvertently raised a family of pigeons in our chicken shed. Much though Liz loved them, they had to go because a) they were eating huge amounts of expensive chicken food, b) they were always getting stuck in the chicken feeder which had to be dismantled to get them out, c) there were four of them now but who knew how many they would be by the end of the following year and d) they spread red mite, a chicken pest. So - they had to go, but how to do it?

We caught them all one night and popped them into one of the

cat transporters and the next day I set off to Asda, the other side of Derby and about 10 miles away. I released them in the car park and guess whether or not they beat me home again.

A few weeks later we were going down to visit Vicki in Chesham so we caught them again and set off on the 120 odd miles to Buckinghamshire. The girls loved letting them out and watching them fly away and, good news, we got home and they weren't there. They appeared the next day.

We discussed the problem with the gardeners, and Roy suggested that he would take them to - pause - Matlock. We all nodded sagely and they were duly caught and taken to - pause - Matlock (a journey of only 12 miles) from whence they never returned.



So just going to Matlock is not the same thing in our house as going to - pause - Matlock which has altogether more serious overtones.

The Greening of Knowle Farm

As you may know I am a keen Green (yeah—right!).

Be that as it may, for mostly mercenary reasons we did two things this year, both of which reduce our carbon footprint.

Greening 1

Firstly, in January (a good month for bargain prices) we installed a log burning stove in the sun room. This is a lovely room when the sun is shining but can get chilly at its extremities in the winter. The new log burner solves that problem, and keeps the core of the house warm too.

We have a good annual crop of fallen tree branches and should, under most circumstances, be self sufficient in wood. This year was not typical though, and I have been buying logs, which is not as cheap as you may think, as they need to be well seasoned. (Poorly seasoned logs, with too high a water content is the reason for smoking up the glass at the front of these stoves).

I recently went through my first £70 worth, and although that sounds a lot, £70 doesn't buy much oil - about 140 litres and my tank holds 3,500 litres.

So - we are undoubtedly saving oil even when I buy the logs, and feeling warmer too. Whether we will ever justify the installation cost though is doubtful.

We've got a Moog Hoard.

At least I think they what she called it.

Liz's and my experience of interior design is not good. Those things which we have got right (well, *we* think we've got right) have tended to be coincidence, or just lucky happenstance. Where we have tried to plan, it has rarely worked, and nowhere more so than our front room. Even we

Greening 2—the Knowle Farm Array

The second thing we did was to fit solar panels on the roof of the garage. These are the electricity generating sort, and under the government Feed In Tariff scheme (FIT) I get paid 16p for every unit the 4Kw array produces. So far so good, but I also get an additional 4p for each unit that I feed back into the grid.

Unfortunately, there is a flaw with this payment that the mandarins of Whitehall didn't foresee - there is no way of measuring how much arrays such as this feed back into the grid, as the standard electricity meter won't go backwards. So, the only way they can make this payment is to assume that I use half of what I produce and feed the other half to the grid. So, in effect I receive not 16p per unit but 18p.

You may also see a game that can be played here. How much can I use? Every unit that I use is a unit off my electricity bill - another 10p saved!

When I started to explore this aspect with the installer he warned me "not to

can see it's a disaster, but after a couple of expensive attempts at correction, it is no better.

What to do about it? Well, in conversation with Julia one evening (almost certainly involving copious quantities of wine) we asked if she knew any interior designers who could help. We are a little wary on the interior designer front after getting one in from Laura Ashley who sold us some very expensive curtains that don't hang properly, and of which the man who has done all our other, immaculate, curtains (but has since retired) said "I would have refused to take them".

get too anal about it". As if. Me.

The first change we noticed is how we hear the weather forecasts. For "A sunny day" we hear "a 3Kw day - continuous", for "sunny with showery intervals" we hear "a 1.5kw day - intermittent", and for "Rain" or "Mainly cloudy" we hear "200 watts if you're lucky.

The second change is how we react to these "weather forecasts". "A 3Kw day - continuous" means "put the washing machine on, and tumble dry it all for free". "A 1.5kw day - intermittent" is difficult to do anything with but we only make tea when the sun is shining. Worst though is "200 watts if you're lucky" - we can't do anything except leave a couple of lights on.

It's a good game, and we get a return of between 5% and 8%.



So, we needed a personal recommendation, which Julia (no mean shakes at interiors herself) came up with. So, some weeks ago, when Liz wasn't in hospital Julia and Jackie came round to observe the war zone that is our front room, and to advise on what to do with it.

There are certain additional problems with this room in that as well as being a normal front room in most circumstances, it occasionally has to double as a recording studio for the band. This involves erecting a mountain of amplifying equipment and making quite a lot of noise - not all of it unpleasant.

A Surprise Result

What are the five dirtiest things in your house? A survey earlier this year revealed results at which you may be surprised.

In fifth place are light switches. Fourth is your toilet seat, third your computer keyboard, second any cash you have to hand, and number one, the dirtiest, most disgusting, germ laden thing in your house is—the kitchen sponge.

Two tips went along with these results, you can microwave said sponge on full power for a couple of minutes, which should kill off most things, and put steel scourers through the dish washer when doing a hot wash.

What, you may be asking, came out of all this. The answer is the above mentioned Moog Hoard - a piece of cardboard with bits of material, wallpaper and other "textiles" on, plus pictures of chairs and sofas.

What to do with it? That is a very good question to which, I will be honest, I have no answer. However, new experiences at 69 are few (if you ignore the obvious prostate problems and incontinence issues) so I am thoroughly enjoying be the proud owner of such a thing, and if I ever find its purpose, I will get back to you.

Every Cloud...

Every cloud has a silver lining. Earlier this year, I decided that we needed to replace our old glass screen TV with a new one. We had the usual problem—why do women prefer a tiny TV to one you can actually see? Anyway, while Liz was in hospital, I snuck a 37" flat screen into the front room. My chances of getting away with that under normal conditions are about zero. Result!

Gaff of the Year

For Liz's 60th I made her up a photo book. As many pictures as I could find of her early years, then later, one page for every year, with the occasional two page spread. I spent many hours on it, sifting photos, sorting them by year, picking the best, making sure all her friends and family were in there - a mammoth task, but completed with love.

It was printed beautifully, and presented to her on her birthday, where she sat and looked through it all with Vicki.

I wasn't until several days later that we realised that, despite all that love, attention, sifting etc., etc., I had absolutely no pictures of our wedding.

World NOT going to the dogs award.

A young woman Liz met in hospital needed a bone marrow transplant. A search through her family had revealed no suitable matches and she, her husband, and her two year old son, were looking at a very bleak future indeed when Liz last saw her.

We met her again a couple of months later in the hospital in Nottingham looking bright and breezy. She had had her transplant, and the bone marrow had come from a donor in America. America! There is no way that could have happened even 20 years ago.

Useful Tip

I have bought several items of disabled equipment this year, and I have discovered that there is virtually no second hand market for them. Bad news if you are selling, obviously, but that would normally be a problem for your executors not you! Good news of course if you are buying, and ebay is the first place to look.

When Liz first came out of hospital and was learning to walk again, I bought her a power chair to get her round the house. This looks a bit like an office chair with electric motors instead of wheels at the bottom and is controlled by a joy stick on the arm. (One friend, watching Liz whiz round the house on it was overheard to mutter "so that's what a Dalek looks like with the top off"). New, the man in the shop will be asking about £2,500 but I got Liz's on ebay for £150.

Similar story with her old person's rise and fall, stand you up, electric armchair. New price - anything from £300 to £1,200. I paid £50 on ebay, and if you are prepared to wait, you would pay even less.

It was the same story again when I bought the wheelchair and the electric scooter - a fraction of the price being asked for new stuff.

The other thing I learned was how to get stuff shipped. I bought the recliner chair from a seller in Redditch and I used a site called shiplly.com to find a man-with-a-van to transport it. Later on we needed to transport a large sofa bed from here in Hazelwood down to Vicki in Chesham and I found someone on anyvan.com.

Shiplly has all sorts of transport contractors, from light vans to huge lorries, and you can get pretty much anything shifted, no matter what size. Anyvan is more man-with-a-van stuff, so better suited to finding someone to move everyday size stuff. Two great sites if you ever need to move a load though.

Dangerous Discovery of the Year

I discovered a little known danger recently - playing Rossini overtures in the car. I defy you to listen to the William Tell overture, the Thieving Magpie overture, or the Barber of Seville overture for example and not conduct with both hands. Avoid. Can be dangerous.

Touching Realisation of the Year

I made Liz a photo book for her birthday (see Gaff of the year) and she sat and looked through it with Vicki (now the mother of two three-and-a-half year old twins). As they got to a photo of the pair of them the first time we took Vicki skiing (she was about 9) Vicki's face underwent a transformation. Calculation, puzzlement, wonderment. Then she said to Liz "Do you know, I have only just realised that by the time you were my age, you had been my step mum for 18 years". In that small part of a second she suddenly saw the whole vista of Liz's learning curve as a 25 year old step mother. A bit of a tear jerker.

Thoughts.

When asked to send Granny Liz lots of nice thoughts to make her better, what did the two granddaughters send - pancakes, honey and sunshine. Guaranteed to make anyone feel better.

Political Comment of the Year.

From The Times Saturday 17th November. Matthew Parris on the PCC elections and the state of our political system "No election that fails to return John Prescott can be entirely without merit".

Tricky Conversation of the Year

A friend (who shall remain anonymous, but who appears regularly in the newsletter, usually in connection with damaged cars) needed new underpants. He did what any gentleman of a certain age would do in the absence of a Marks and Spencer in the area - headed off to his nearest Tesco superstore.

He spotted a pack of three (how we men buy our underpants nowadays), paid for them, took them home and popped them in the chest of drawers for later use.

A week or two later he had need of a new pair from the pack and, on donning them, realised that the label was, unusually, at the front as he had managed to get them on back to front. Nothing to worry about, he just swapped them round, but he still had them on back to front. It took a little time to dawn, but he slowly realized that the real problem was - no hole at the front.

This wasn't going to work, so, off he set. Back to Tesco to be confronted with a very attractive, and very young, girl on the customer services desk, to whom he then tried to explain exactly why a gentleman needs a hole at the front of his underpants.

Disappointingly, it turns out that this is how gentlemen's underpants are now made. No hole at the front. I need to consult with younger members of my family to discover how to use this new underwear concept.

Wise Words of the Year

Middle class folk don't travel by Ryanair. Why not? Well, the pilots are certainly fine, and the planes are perfect, but, in the unlikely event of a crash, would you want to eat those people?