

# **My Journey of Transition**

from

## **“Warrior to Priest”**

by

**Reverend Je Kan Adler-Collins**

for

**Action Research Module 1**

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## **Table of Contents**

1.	The Assignment	
	Introduction	- page 3
	My Journey	- page 6
	Conclusion	- page 16
	Bibliography	- page 20
2.	Annex A - literature review	- page 22
3.	Annex B - autobiography	- page 33
4.	Annex C - training courses	- page 94

# **A Journey of Transition**

**from**

## **Warrior to Priest**

### **Introduction**

'Education is a social process ... Education is growth ... Education is, not a preparation for life; education is life itself.'  
John Dewey

**T**he purpose of this piece writing is to learn how to represent my educational development in my action research enquiry. I am thinking of my learning, my experiences as a soldier, my breakdown, my academic reading, my teaching in a School of Complementary Medical Studies and my loving relationships in my journey towards my ordination as a Buddhist Priest in Japan in December 1995.

My narrative can be seen as a claim to know my educational development and I am thus concerned with the issue of validity in legitimising a claim to knowledge. The two issues of representation and legitimation are taken by Denzin and Lincoln (1994) to be at the heart of the crisis of understanding the nature of qualitative and action research approaches to research.

To enable you to place my life and work in its historical, social and personal context I should say that my journey from warrior to priest has been profoundly influenced by various experiences. These are documented more fully as part of my journey in the autobiography of my learning.

In presenting my account I know that I will be being judged by my tutor in his interpretation of his statements in the following criteria:

### **CRITERIA OF ASSESSMENT - GRADES A - E**

#### **A. Work of distinguished quality which demonstrates synthesis and signs of originality and insight.**

**I**would expect to see some understanding of the problems of representation and legitimation in action research accounts and clear evidence. That you had found an appropriate way of representing your own learning and of communicating the standards of judgement you use to test the validity of your claims to educational knowledge. You would also have to context your work in relation to relevant literature. Because of the value-laden nature of educational action research I would expect to see some recognition of the need to justify the values which you use of constitute your enquiry as "educational".

**B. Clear evidence of independent enquiry and critical judgement in selecting, ordering and analysing arguments.**

I would expect to see an account which clearly showed your systematic action reflection cycle as you conducted your own independent enquiry. Where you make any claims to know something I would expect to see such claims justified in relation to evidence. I would expect to read your critical evaluation of some relevant ideas from the action research literature (see for example the journal Educational Action Research) as your account showed your attempts to improve your practice/learning and your understanding.

**C. Evidence of the student's ability to analyse concepts, to structure and organise thinking and to support arguments.**

**D. Work which shows recognition of the issues involved and an attempt to analyse them in relation to content.**

**E. Unsatisfactory. Poorly organised superficial description with little understanding of issues involved.**

I believe I understand what I must do to be awarded these grades. In achieving the highest grade, I must use an appropriate form for representing my learning, demonstrate my engagement with the relevant literature and justify my standards of judgement.

I have decided to represent my educational development as a story. I think this is consistent with the ideas of Lomax and Parker (1995) on accounting for ourselves in the problematic of representing action research.

In trying to capture of the essence of what we are doing, there is a sense in which we could destroy the thing which uniquely characterises the kind of work....

Story is another way of representing action research without constraining it within the traditional propositional form there is no necessary logic of connectedness in story....

Carter says that a story:

*" is a theory of something, what we tell and how we tell it is a revelation of what we believe.... (stories are) products of a fundamentally interpretative process that is shaped by the moralistic impulses of the author and by narrative forces or requirement."*  
(Carter, 1993, p.9)

(Lomax & Parker, p 304. 1995)

I have produced my story as an autobiography of my own learning and extracted from this auto-biography, in the journey below, those experiences from which I learnt something of fundamental significance for my life and work. I am primarily thinking of those human qualities in loving relationships and love for oneself which enabled me to transcend painful experiences of abuse, the violation of my integrity and mental breakdown. In presenting my story I also want to show that I have integrated insights from the literature on action research into my account in a way which contributed to my learning. I am hoping that my use of story enables me to show how my powers of synthesis enabled me to retain a sense of my own integrity and wholeness as a human being. Whilst at the same time acknowledging the value of being able to analyse my experience and draw insights from a variety of academic sources.

I am a little unsure of how to justify the value of love and loving relationships as a standard of judgement in my claims to know my own educational development. The English language has only one descriptor for Love, however I feel I can bear witness to the power of love in my own learning as an important

quality in helping me to transcend the painful experiences below. I can also use a cultural form of justification where there are many examples from religious (Skolimowski 1994) and humanistic texts (Fromm 1994) which acknowledge the value of love in improving the quality of human existence. Here then is my account of my own learning.

### ***My Journey***

In my journey I have transcended some of the darkest issues of humanity that we, as citizens, can experience directly or more vicariously through trials such as that of Rosemary West. This journey is my journey and my truth, where I have had to seek understanding and where at times the concepts and filters of my reality would allow me no such understanding, this resulted in fragmentation of my mind and belief systems. I should perhaps say at this point how I am using 'truth' in my story:

### **My meaning of '*Living Truth*'**

In a special issue of the Irish educational journal, Oideas, Andrew Burke (1992) analyses the knowledge base of teaching and has this to say about 'Living Truth':

*"Existentialists such as Gabriel Marcel (cf. Keen, 1966) distinguish between 'spectator' truth and 'living truth'. The former is generated by disciplines (e.g., experimental science, psychology, sociology) which rationalise reality and impose on it a framework which helps them to understand it but at the expense of oversimplifying it. Such general explanations can be achieved only by standing back from and 'spectating' the human condition from a distance, as it were, and by concentrating on generalities and ignoring particularities which do not fit the picture. Whilst such a process is very valuable, it is also very limited because it is one step removed from reality. The 'living' 'authentic' truth of a situation can be fully understood only from within the situation though the picture that emerges will never be as clear-cut as that provided by "spectator" truth.*

I wish to share my journey, not from a position of expert or of a gateholder of knowledge, but as one human being sharing with others. Communicating through a series of events and experiences, which have allowed me to progress from an angry, wounded individual, to one that holds a secure living truth that good does transcend evil. I am thinking of my journey from warrior to priest. I will try to communicate my living truth to you, as I travel my journey towards a completion of a cycle through transcending the shadow of pain and abuse through the gift of love.

The warrior in me no longer feels the tiredness of combat and conflict but feels it is a safe time to sheath the sword of anger. For after the battle has been won on one level another challenge commences but this time the weapons used will be the sword of understanding, the shield will be compassion and the cause will be love. For as I become ready to make my vows to God and enter the priest hood as a Buddhist priest, I do so knowing that mankind is good and that there is hope, love, generosity of spirit and that mankind will transcend to the higher levels of living and unite the spiritual in the practical world of living. For I believe that I do indeed create the world in which I live. I can be as rich or as poor as my heart allows. Heaven and Hell are attitudes of my mind which I inflict upon myself and project upon others.

*'Education makes people easy to lead, but difficult to drive; easy to govern, but impossible to enslave'*

I have mentioned a completion of a cycle of learning. This cycle of learning did not evolve overnight but slowly grew from a lifetime of experiences, some good, some not so good, which I have documented in the autobiography of my learning. I experienced abuse in several forms from the position of victim, survivor through to teacher. Therefore in order to understand this cycle I wish to use the mediums of reflection and research to find what the values actually are that I hold as public truths. In order to do this I wish to paint a picture in the form of a story whereby engaging with the concepts of action research and reflection, I can explore these concepts and by so doing, identify the areas of learning which have occurred along the path. In seeking the definition to my enquiry, I needed to ask myself, "How do I understand myself as a spiritual being?".

This concern is a constant element within the very fabric of my being as I move from warrior to priest. For through reflection, I have been able to use the frameworks of others, and in particular the ideas of Skolimowski (1992,1993,1994) as a springboard to my own understanding of my spiritual growth. I believe in my truth that I have explored through my own experiences of life and the circumstances that I have faced. A holistic approach to the learning process by which an individual, who is going through, or has experienced, fundamental changes in their life to the point of fragmentation and beyond, can actually heal themselves back into a new whole.

I claim originality in my concept through my own authority of being, for my spirituality, truth and the very cosmology that I live by, is a direct result of my own experience. Through this process, by critical reflection, I seek to identify key aspects and areas of learning which have occurred. Through the reflection in action process, I will compare and overlay models, theories and concepts of learning and action research as expounded by, Lewin, Dewey, Piaget, Pollard & Tann, Elliott, McNiff, Schön, Stenhouse, Whitehead, Kolb and Skolimowski. (*Engaging the literature Annex A page 22*). I also hope to show, through reflection, how I relate to particular models in the development of my own living truth in my spiritual being.

My living truth, I believe, is grounded in the practical running of a School of Complementary Medicine and a Health Clinic where theory has to be born out in practice on a daily basis by the very nature of my work. I deal with real pain, disease and suffering and even dying and have found ways to bring joy, hope, love and understanding not just on a spiritual level but through the very art of practice to both my clients and myself. I intend to address this claim in my future enquiry.

Within the telling of this story, I will draw upon extracts of my autobiography (Annex B) where issues of fundamental importance to me were raised or experienced and these issues, many of which have been transcended, will, I hope, give some understanding of the journey.

*Reflecting, a process of learning*

***'Learning without thought is labour lost' Confucius***

Reflecting for me is not always easy, and if applied honestly, can be painful. It has to be remembered that the end product of good reflection is positive action towards improvement. But where do I start? How do I reflect?

This question moves me to other questions. Do I, by mere existence, have the ability to reflect? Where does this ability come from? Who taught me? How can my reflections be guided in such a way as to produce a learning process or a cycle for change? These questions, indicate that I cannot continue this process from a position of isolation and by isolation I mean that I can be isolated from myself.

***Who am I? What am I?*** and what concepts of filters do I use to interact with my environment? What value basis do I hold and if I identify them, do they stand up to scrutiny? I turned to the action research literature to see if the ideas of others might help me in my inquiries.

However, engaging seriously with the literature in such a short piece of writing has been a difficult process for me and due to the limitation of four thousand words I have annexed my more detailed interactions with the literature in Annex A, page 22. This is to provide the evidence that I am not simply quoting a reference without understanding the content.

The action research cycle indicates a spiral of events from reflection, planning, action and observation, reflecting again, revision of plan and to new actions and new observations. Whitehead (1993) in his publication "The Growth of Educational Knowledge" introduces the concept of the "I" being central to this process. What does this mean? The "I"?

To me, this question of the "I" stopped me in my tracks, for in truth I did not really know who "I" was. This may seem a contradiction in terms and, indeed, it is and after several attempts at writing this assignment I was repeatedly brought back to the question of who "I" was? In a tutorial session I was asked to write my autobiography. I did not understand at the time the value of this exercise but I have come to look at the process as a journey of transition where I have re-visited the "I" and tried to make some sense of who and what has made me the person I am.

A lot of the literature talks of theories and frameworks and cycles but gives little direction into how you actually implement the process. In practical terms the living truth in which one finds oneself can indeed be a confusing mass of emotions and situations where one can easily find oneself adrift. In order to focus on the issues my autobiography, (Annex B, page 33), became a useful tool in the process of addressing my journey from Warrior to Priest.

In the work above I used the word 'truth', but what is truth? To me, truth is a fluid state of values which constantly changes through the interaction of the individual's spirituality and understanding with the environment and circumstances in which we find ourselves. I found the work of Skolimowski (1992,1993,1994), particularly useful in helping me to discuss my meaning of spirituality. For Skolimowski (1993) spirituality is, 'an articulated essence of the human condition at a given time' and he describes how different people articulated spirituality in different ways in Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Taoism.

Spirituality, I feel, can be compared to the process of making steel. You start with the raw material and melt it down, bash it about, strip out the impurities and through this process the raw material slowly but surely changes into another state. Once again the cycle of melting down and being subjected to fire and force changes again until at the end of the cycle the raw iron ore has become steel. This steel can then be shaped into the sword of service, and it is this analogy that I use to express my understanding of my process. I can clearly identify where in my life I have been subjected to fire and to force; my earliest recollection is indeed that of fire when I was rescued from a house fire at the age of three. Through a series of domestic situations I was placed into care and as a result was subjected to institutionalised abuse in the form of what I now know to be sexual abuse as the unwilling victim of a paedophile ring, (Annex B, Autobiography, pages 39 - 42). The patterning of this experience coloured my perception of women and love and over the ensuing years caused me to be dysfunctional as a giver and receiver of love; so I had therefore identified a very active, negative filter. The process related in the story of the formation of steel can easily be identified by the forces which were brought to bear of the formative years of my childhood. I came up against force and abuse of power in the form of religion and those in authority over me who were said to be responsible for my well being. The filter of parents and words such as "father" and "mother" were again ones which caused me considerable pain and disease (Annex B, Autobiography, pages 44 - 46).

My school years were full of violence, abuse and rejection, of anger and humiliation; as time after time I was subjected to situation after situation which was part, I believe, of my learning process. In joining the Army, I had to my mind, found a new home where I had good clothes, good food, and money in my pocket. In reality I had exchanged one institution and form of abuse to another institution and in some ways, a different form of abuse. I believe that there exists within us a spark of universal truth and goodness and despite what the physical reality of our lives can present us with, in my case I was always searching for good, for hope and for love. I can clearly see from the autobiography that perhaps some of the concepts and filters that were active in my understanding, were indeed dysfunctional, but I was driven by the one undermining principle that I would succeed.

I became a compulsive over achiever; nothing I did was ever good enough; my intrinsic values of value and self-worth were practically non-existent. So how then could I change? This process of change, I believe, has to occur through understanding, but the question has to be "How does understanding actually occur?" Skolomowski, in his book "The Participatory Mind", tells of the yoga of transformation. In the form I identify as action reflection cycles, (Annex A, page 16). I believe that understanding is indeed transformation. It is where one can move from negative values and experiences using filters of love, forgiveness and compassion and in doing so, can release you from the prison of pain to the fullness and richness of true understanding. My transition occurred through several major incidents in my life where concepts and filters, which I had active and were the fabric of my reality, were challenged to the point of breaking and at one stage they did, indeed, break. (Annex B, Autobiography pages 81 - 84).

There is no greater teacher than personal experience, for it is in the doing that we actually retain learning. Theories, concepts and models are great as structures of thinking but prove incredibly difficult to implement in the act of doing. I look upon the breakdown of my mind not as a bad experience, but as the removal of a series of dysfunctional philosophies, ideology and experiences; it actually freed my mind to seek new foundations on which to build a new understanding.

I came to the realisation that there was more to me than pain and a physical body; the spark of goodness that I referred to was, for me the spark of my God, yet I also believe that:

*"...we can uphold the unity of life while celebrating a variety of spirituality's, a variety of concepts of God, a variety of religions. Life flourishes in different forms; and so does spiritual life".*  
Skolimowski, p. 65, 1993.

Allowing for a God to be in your life is not an easy process, for if you acknowledge that the God represents all that is good in man you soon find that you are in a state of conflict with the theory and the actual living practice. In seeking my living practice I commenced a journey of discovery where, much to my surprise, I found good people, good values and love. I cannot get away from the word "love", for it is now a fundamental framework on which the whole cosmology of my life exists. Love to me previously meant manipulation and abuse but through my process I made the personal vow that I would never violate the integrity of another human being or my own personal truth. Holding these values meant that I looked at my world through different eyes, I was no longer blinded by my sight and could see beauty and peace whereas before I only saw suffering and pain. I was no longer deaf through hearing, but by no hearing I could feel the vibration that the words carried. My reality consists of beauty, light, colour and love and the transition was implemented through my finding the love of my wife. Through this love the angry individual was no longer valid or acceptable; the filters of judgement could no longer be sustained and I learnt the valuable lesson of discernment. Judgement indicates a personal attachment to the outcome, discernment allows that all has reason and value and it is perhaps our misunderstanding that forces us into the error of judgement.

To my understanding human beings need to find some justification for their being; for me this justification is my very existence. I see myself as a vessel which has been shaped like the steel through forces on and in my life and I live by the belief that it is not the vessel that is important, but the space that it creates. Once the space has been created God can fill that space with love and I have been allowed through my own experiences to heal myself through the gift of healing others. As a teacher I believe that I have a responsibility in service not just to teach but in my own way use myself as a living instrument of truth that good, courage and love can transcend. I seek to transfer through my teaching some of the understandings and values that I hold dear. The Army taught me discipline, my religion teaches me faith and my life allows me to live my value of love.

This is a journey that never ends; each day is filled with almost a childlike wonder of the uniqueness of humanity. The decision to become a priest in the Buddhist faith is easier than some may imagine for I am, indeed, blessed with the opportunity of living a living truth embraced by a universe of such complexity and wonder. I have become a good housewife and through the catharsis of writing my autobiography I have laid many ghosts to rest. The literature review of action research gives me an exciting framework in which to explore.

I do, however, hold one reservation and that is action research in its present format seems to be in a state of crises where if it is not careful in its attempts to seek validation, it can become guilty of constricting itself through too rigid definitions and concepts. I would like to see action research embrace the practicalities of real living and the problems associated with the classroom situation. The intrinsic spark of the "I" in the question is the uniqueness of action research which is essential to nurture and protect.

As Wexler (1995) concludes his recent text:

*"...it is the collectively creative in gathering of the fragmentary, holy sparks from their current exile and dispersion. What that entails at every level - from the body that is not docile but enlivened, through a reformed re cultured structure of discipline of being, to the possibility of an institutional collective life that is vital and creative - is what we shall now begin to address".*

Having said that I recognise that I am presenting my account as an assignment for the M.A. Module, Action Research 1. I believe that I have shown a way of representing a complex story, within the word limitation of this assignment, by referring to the evidence to substantiate my assertions, in separate texts. I have also provided the evidence of my engagement with relevant literature and perhaps most importantly presented a statement of spiritual commitment to the value of love in my service to education to which I and others can hold me accountable.

### **Conclusion**

The value of action research and the reflective models outlined in the literature review (Annex A) depends on the usage envisaged for each 'tool' as perceived by the user (Kolb 1984). Each model has strengths and weaknesses, and each has been written to develop or espouse the theory/rationale of the writer. But theory is indeed just theory, it takes people, courage, perseverance and open-mindedness to turn theory into living fact.

*Kolb (1984) quotes "We are all psychologists, historians and atomic physicists, it is just that some of our theories are more crude and incorrect than others".*

Each model as a tool to understand the process of reflection and research lends another aspect of possible interpretation of a very complex subjective issue. I think that the models themselves are not just framework to educate one to reflect and research, but are actual reflections of a larger political, social 'mirror'. To me the value of the work of others is being able to use their work as a model as a temporary active concept or filter, and observe, analyse my feelings. I find it exciting to identify the impact of the different models on sociological metamorphosis around education at the time the model was written and I can identify my own enquiry with Wexler's (1995) work on the development of a new age social theory in education.

One of the most exciting aspects of this journey is the new learning that I am achieving with understanding. Reflecting on the different models, theories, I can clearly identify key issues, questions and points in my own development. Fourteen years of my professional development were in the Army. In hindsight, I can clearly see from an altered perception, the teaching strategies and methods which were used. I recognise the dichotomy in me from an early age, and the over-riding feeling was one of rage and anger. The Army took this anger and used it. I willingly imitated my role models of '*tradition, honour and routine*', as stated by John Dewey (1933). The training was dictatorial, accommodating and totally autocratic, undermined by fear and held up and supported by the use of competition and reward.

I can clearly see how, using Piaget's (1960) model of learning and Kolb's 'The Process of Experimental Learning' how I have evolved through cycles of tension between both accommodating and assimilation. I can also see why soldiers are not encouraged to think. They respond, which helps me to understand some of the actions I have seen. Reflection was not encouraged, in fact, it was actively discouraged. You were moulded to respond within a very narrow field.

The positive side of this accommodation education is that I learnt to analyse quickly and break down into component points, issues. I also learnt discipline and taking risks. The negative side was that this was at the price of my 'play' side. Emotions and feelings were never developed. A large part of my mind was not engaged, and a feeling of unbalance was always niggling at the subconscious. This unbalance was addressed through the later stages of my development as previously outlined, by working in the assimilation areas of learning, dealing with abstract and unconventional theory and through Complementary Medicine and spiritual growth.

Through this process, I can have fun with the different models, and recognise where I have used Lewinian or Dewian. I can even see elements of Piaget's model and relate deeply to Argyris and Schön's 1974 theories in use within myself.

The actual models are, to my mind, incomplete, but they allow a safe scaffolding for me to explore and enter into myself in order to complete my integration and understanding towards wholeness. Learning is a need for me, and through examining the different methods/model/techniques, healing can occur. Concepts, filters and opinions can be examined, reflected upon, and where possible, integrated to the new whole.

This piece of writing does however raise the issue of who is actually teaching the teachers the skills which have been identified for good reflective research by professionals and against what criteria?

The value of reflection and research to me, has been more than just becoming a better teacher. Reflection and research has allowed the shackles to be removed from my mind. It has allowed me to see all the experiences as learning, and to see a bit clearer, the limits of both accommodation and assimilation. Reflection allows the practitioner to achieve balance and a holistic over view, research allows the validation of the individuals reflection so that actions towards improvement may be more effective. My professional development continues daily with new instruction from the university of life with new ideas and direction. My life is a constant flux of changing perceptions and perspectives. The pain, anger and darkness are being replaced with understanding, richness, fun and love.

To give some idea of where my action enquiries may be leading I have included details of my work in the Laurel Farm Clinic and School of Complementary Medical Studies. When I return in the New Year of 1996 I intend to make my teaching in the School of Complementary Medical Studies, and our process of academic accreditation through Sheffield University the focus of my enquiry.

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## Annex A - Literature Review

Reflecting and engaging the literature

*'Learning without thought is labour lost'*  
*Confucius*

**R**eflection for me as a professional is not always easy, and if applied honestly, can be painful. It has to be remembered that the end product of good reflection is positive action to improvement. But where do I start? How do I as the professional reflect?

To address this question, I examined the characteristics of reflective action as laid out by Pollard and Tann (1987).

- 1) *The professional needs an active concern with aims and consequences, as well as means and technical efficiency.*
- 2) *The professional needs to combine skills of enquiry and implementation with attitudes of open mindedness, responsibility and whole-heartedness.*
- 3) *The professional would apply a cyclical process in which teachers continually monitor, evaluate and revise their own practice.*
- 4) *Is based on teacher judgements, informed by self-reflection, and insights from education disciplines (research).*

In order for the professional to reflect, there is an assumption that teachers are concerned with:

(Pollard & Tann)

AIMS  
VALUES  
REFLECTION  
SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES  
FORMULATION OF POLICY

**I**t is essential that the reflective professional practitioner has and is competent with the following skill areas:

- 1) *Empirical Skills: Collection of data, and describing process*
- 2) *Analytical Skills: Interpreting data within a framework*
- 3) *Evaluation Skills: Making judgements about educational consequences*
- 4) *Strategic Skills: Planning for action, and anticipating implementation*
- 5) *Practical Skills: Linking analysis and practice*
- 6) *Communication Skills: Discuss ideas and communicate*

(Pollard & Tann 1987)

It is therefore fair to suggest that constructive reflection is a high order skill which encompasses a complex range of academic, psychological and social skills, and I would also suggest spiritual skills and understanding need to be included. The individual practitioner will bring their unique filters of perception to the process of reflection and research. This, by default, would make the reflection process subjective, and would not lend itself to easy cognitive interpretation.

My question would be:

***'Who actually trains the teacher in these skills? Or do we just hope or assume that teachers have, by default of position and presumed experience, competent skills in the area of constructive reflection and research?'***

This, I feel, is an important question, for John Elliott, at the first world congress on Action Research and Process Management, as part of his argument, tabled the view that

***"Competence based teacher education was in effect applying pressure on school teachers who disliked the idea of appraisal on the basis that teaching cannot be defined, it has indefinable qualities, however, may be intuitively discerned by experienced and trusted peers".***

***Elliott J Action Research Practical Competence and Professional Knowledge. (p.26)***

The above statement actually eludes to the position of crisis that exists within Action Research and Reflection and that crisis is of the trying to define the paradigm, the concept of the theory and practice, with a valid value base of judgement. Whose values are they?, and who actually validates them? My values as a Priest are an integral part of my being and they are completely different values to those I held as a soldier. I therefore suggest that we have to exercise caution in the process of judgement of values. For is it not safe to say that truth is fluid and in a constant state of flux as new values are considered and either integrated into a new whole as a truth or rejected? If truth stands still it then is no longer a truth but a teaching of dogma and Education has mountains of evidence of dogmas in the form of accepted educational theory!!

The action research cycle is based on a concept of action, observation, reflection, plan, leading on to revised plan, action, observation and reflection. It would, therefore, seem that reflected practice as described by Pollard and Tann, is indeed a different process to action research. For the crucial factor missing in Pollard and Tann (1994) is the concept of revised plan leading on to new action implying new observations, giving rise to new reflections. Pollard and Tann's model of the reflective practitioner places reflection in the middle of its cycle..

Action research places the "I" as the fundamental cog grounded in the individual's personal practice within the wheel of the research and reflection cycles. This can, and often does, create tension in the practitioner and suggests that action research and reflection in practice are a unique balance between the indefinable skills and qualities of feeling, integrity, truth and intent, combined with models of aims, values, policies and social consequences.

The action researcher, while following a course of reflection may well find themselves out of step not only with their peers and masters, but also with themselves. An interesting question that begs to be asked at this point is.... "What mechanisms or frame works of teaching or support are available to both the teacher as an individual and/or the environment in which the teacher is engaged e.g. heads of departments, managers, to process this change? For action research is not about standing still in vacuum and the theory of cause and effect does apply?

The work of John Dewey (1933) champions the theory that action is based on reflection, and action that is impulsive is blind. He emphasises the need to develop certain attitudes of open-mindedness and skills of thinking and reasoning in order to reflect.

### ***OPEN-MINDEDNESS***

**D**ewey (1933) quotes open mindedness as an '*active desire to listen to more sides than one, to give heed to the facts from whatever source they come, to give full attention to alternative possibilities, to recognise the possibility of error, even in beliefs which are dearest to us*'. This concept of open-mindedness is essential to the action researcher, for more often than not the motivation for the action research is something that we feel strongly about and have identified as a problem. If we have identified it as a personal issue we can then be in danger of losing objectivity and our very enquiry blinds us to input from others. How do others react to our open mindedness?

### ***RESPONSIBILITY***

Dewey (1933) implies that there are consequences to our reflection and I quote 'to consider the consequences of a projected step; it means being able to adopt these consequences when they follow reasonably'.

I have yet to find evidence of the value base judgement Dewey uses to evidence the meaning of his use of the word reasonably? Does not action research by its very nature put us sometimes in direct confrontation with others and we may seem to be acting unreasonably but entirely correctly to our truth?

### **WHOLE-HEARTEDNESS**

'A genuine enthusiasm is an attitude that operates as an intellectual force when a person is absorbed. The subject carries him on'. Dewey 1933. Once again Dewey fails to mention that enthusiasm albeit whole heartedness, can indeed carry the researcher on, but is it manageable and in the right direction?

Through Dewey and the notes from Pollard & Tann, it appears that the skills of the reflective professional are subjective and the use of the word skills suggests a process of specialist knowledge transfer. My understanding of teaching a skill, be it formal or informal, has always been that to transfer a skill you use the model/framework of:

### ***Explanation, Demonstration, Imitation, Practice and Test, Reflect on Outcome***

I can clearly identify where, in my military training, this model has been used to very good effect. I have, on reflection, found worryingly little evidence that the above model of teaching and assessing of skills transfer in my teaching experience to date. A rather worrying thought!

Lawrence Stenhouse (1975) states that a teacher acts as a researcher to his own practice and develops the curriculum through practical enquiry through reflective techniques. This cycle of plan, make provisions, act, collect data, evaluate and reflect, leads us to the paradigm of action research.

Other models are:

Carr and Kemmis 1986  
Elliott 1991  
McNiff 1992

The schema of all of the above imply that there are key issues and these key issues are applied cyclically.

Schön (1983) contrasted scientific professional work (1) such as laboratory research with caring professional work (2)

1. ***High Hard Ground:*** ***Qualitative and objective evidence***
2. ***Swampy Lowlands:*** ***Caring professional  
Interpersonal areas  
Qualitative issues***

This requires rigorous analysis, because they draw on a type of knowledge in action, knowledge that is inherent in professional action such as spontaneous & intuitive actions, tact and the intangible, yet it works!

Donald Schön (1983) argued the theory of reflection in terms of action where adjustments are made through direct experience. He also used the notion of reflection-in-action. The idea that the professionals engaged in reflective conversations with practical situations where they constantly frame and re frame a problem as they work on it, testing out interpretations and solutions. Is he not also describing action research.

When someone reflects-in-action, he becomes a researcher in the practice context of the moment. He is not dependent on the categories of established theory and technique, but constructs a new theory of the unique case. This enquiry is not limited to a deliberation about means which depends on prior agreement about ends. He does not keep means and ends separate, but defines them interactively as he frames a problematic situation. He does not separate thinking from action (Schön, 1983: p68).

The above model is one with which I totally concur as a concept but I can find once again little evidence of how Schön implements this theory in practical application of a delivered teaching package in the class room.

The FEU model includes reflection as part of the structure of learning.

***Experience: Both existing and that extended by the college, company or other agency. This gives the material for:***

***Reflection: Guided by the tutor. Usually serving to consolidate, interpret and pattern development concepts, as well as values. This indicates the need for:***

***Specific Learning: Skills and knowledge varying from individual to individual.***

(Experience) -- Reflection -- (Specific Learning) = Experience 1

This appears to be a simplistic model of experimental learning, as first expounded by Dewey (1938:69)

Dewey implied in 1938 that the reflective practitioner is, in fact, his own researcher and as previously stated Schön (1983) reflected again as the practitioner or the "I" being the researcher of the moment. It is necessary to look at some of the background of action research between those dates in order to ascertain what processes occurred from the original outlines of Dewey moving through and past Schön into the moment of the writings by Skolimowski, Whitehead, Lomax and McNiff.

In the 1940's the history of action research started in the United States of America. Through sociological studies on a scientific methodology of human behaviour and practice with the work of Collier (1933-45). Collier was convinced that the administrator and the layman must participate creatively in research "impelled as it is from their own area of need". This theme is not far removed from the theories of reflective practice presented by Dewey also around 1933 whereby he tells of the reflective practitioner reflecting in the moment on areas of concern. To my understanding Collier & Dewey are actually laying the foundation stones of the concepts of action research and that research and reflection are the corner stones of a process not divergent at all in concept but fit comfortable together as an emerging model. This theory is given more credence as Corey (1953) in his writing "Action research to Improve School Practices" engages with the theory that teachers, supervisors and administrators would make better decisions and engage in more effective practices if they were able and willing to conduct research as a basis of these decisions". Corey also stated through his comparison of traditional research in education and action research they are both alike in that each is difficult to do well!!

There seems to be a lull in material relating to action research from the 1950's to the early 70's which I have yet to fathom out why this occurred. Competency Based taught Education arrived on the education scene in the early 70's and became the buzz word of the period. Elliot (1990) refers to this period and the influence of Lawrence Stenhouse, in his paper Action Research, Practical Competence and Professional Knowledge which he presented at the 1st World Congress on Action Research in 1990. Therefore in order to track the action research movement I turned to the writings and work of Lawrence Stenhouse.

Stenhouse (1975) in his book An Introduction to Curriculum Research and Development is a fascinating read and his opinions on "The Teacher as a Researcher" give rise to some of the underpinning methodology of action research today.

***"If we get general acceptance of the proposition that all teachers should be learners and create a public research methodology and accepted professional ethic covering this situation, we would have a basis for observing the teaching of colleagues which greatly reduced element of threat in the situation". (106)***

In moving forward through the published material there seems to be a thread of confusion and a Je Kan Adler-Collins RGN REMT PGCE(FE)  
Opening Draft "Warrior to Priest"

polarisation on attitudes as to what action research is and who validates it on the one side and a more entrenched position from the gatekeepers of knowledge in the positions of power, within institutionalised education on the other. This is clearly reflected in the papers published during the Brisbane Symposium (1984) Change, Action Research For Development. The collection of papers in this book make exciting reading and state that research is not just for boffins but for real people on the ground at the cutting edge of their profession. In terms of real people with real issues the field of Action Research has moved from theory to actual practice. There are now publications which reflect the work of researchers in the modern context of practice.

Publication such as Critical Times for Action Research (Gibson 1985), Breaking the grip of Print in Curriculum Research (Walker 1986), Action Research and the Politics of Educational Knowledge (Whitehead and Lomax 1986) Action Research: Principles and Practice (McNiff 1988) The growth of Educational Knowledge, Creating Your Own Living Education Theory (Whitehead 1993).

This hands on approach in practical understandable terms by the above writers is refreshing and challenging and excites me as a student researcher. For as well as the above publications there is a series of books by the writer Henryk Skolimowski (1992, 1993, 1994) where in his book The Participatory Mind, he engages with a set of theories which I hold to be of great value. He lists ten principles of the Yoga of Transformation, which he believes constitutes an individual spiral of understanding.

The list given below contains action reflection cycles of expressing concerns, imagining action plans, acting, gathering evidence and evaluating and modification of concerns, plans and actions based on evaluations.

1. ***Become aware of your conditioning***
2. ***Become aware of deep assumption which you are subconsciously holding***
3. ***Become aware of the most important values that underlie the basic structure of your being, and of your thinking***
4. ***Become aware of how these assumptions and values guide and manipulate your behaviour, action, thinking.***
5. ***Become aware which of these assumptions and values are desirable because they dwarf your horizons or arrest growth in one way or another***
6. ***Watch and observe the instances of your actions and behaviour while they are manipulated by the undesirable assumptions/values. Identify the causes and effects.***
7. ***Articulate alternative assumptions and values by which you like to be guided and inspired.***
8. ***Imagine the forms of behaviour, actions and thinking that would follow from alternative assumptions/values***

- 9.. *Deliberately try to bring about forms of behaviour, thinking and action expressing the new assumptions/values. Implement your new assumptions in your daily life. Watch the progress. Repeat the process. Practice is important.*
10. *Reconstruct your being in the image of these assumptions; which is to say restructure your spiral of understanding.(P204-241)*

The above is not dissimilar to the teachings of Buddha and are indeed an interesting model for life!

### Annex B - Autobiography

When I was asked to write an autobiography on my life I was slightly confused, for to my mind, my life has little or no importance to anyone else other than me. The cosmology of my existence is mine. How can my experiences be of use to others? I also felt very vulnerable and vulnerability is something that I am not comfortable with, but I recognise that the question is given by my mentor and tutor and therefore there must be some reason and logic that perhaps I, at this moment in time cannot perceive. Perhaps my mentor and tutor is further down the same road or perhaps he is down a different one. However, I have never even attempted to put the words down that I am about to. They will not be edited, what you get is what you read. What you read, is me. I claim me, and I claim me through my own authority, all I ask is that when you read these words you do so with the open mindedness and the love that I am trying to find as I write them.

Love and its conception, both controlling and the dichotomy of tension that exists between the filters of love is not an easy word for me, it is a very new word in fact. It is a word that I am starting to explore very gently. For love had no place in my life. It is difficult to know where to start so I suppose, the best place would be at the beginning. I crave that the reader will indulge me if I sound somewhat confused or disjointed or even if I claim contradiction in terms, for memory is relative. It is also highly selective and in trying to be open and honest one can often take the abscess and lance it; perhaps without being actually ready for the cure. There are no clever words in this narrative, there are no large words, high English words, because that is not me. In honesty and in my truth, I am still searching for me and it is a journey that has begun with enlightenment, even more so in these last three years. So if I can ask you to come on this journey with me there will be times that you will not like what I am seeing or what I am saying. For I wish to paint a picture, for I believe the pictures can tell far more than mere words. I make no judgements and I seek no judgements. I hope that through this journey I might be able to find some of the keys to unlocking yet more understanding.

My earliest recollection is a fire and of flames and of smoke and of terror of not knowing what is going on but knowing something terrible was happening. The panic of those moments often catches me when I am unaware for I was three years old and I can, in all honesty, not remember anything beyond those dates. A fire had happened in the building in which I was living; I had no recollection of parents, brothers, sisters or anything; my only recollection was that the room was full of flames. A dark figure crashed into my reality as the window shattered and a deep voice muttered non-understandable words. As I was grabbed not too gently and pulled out of the burning room, rescued by the fire brigade, events surrounding this were confused. In later years I learnt that it was a domestic dispute that had resulted in the fire. However, I seek not to analyse what I am saying for I am sure that will come later with my peers.

I remember being in this brightly lit hospital with lots of strange people running around. There was noise and confusion, there were bangs of trolleys, there was loud clashing, there were people crying and screaming; the trauma of this in a quiet moment will still catch me unaware.

There is a faint, distant, but haunting memory of what I presume must have been a better time, for I can clearly see myself standing by a brook and this brook has bubbling water and I was looking for small fish that live under rocks. The overriding sound that links me even to this day, is the sound of the trees and the wind speaking through the trees. I felt that this was a special day and it was important as I do have my first recollection of the two individuals whom I now call my brother and sister.

Mr brother is called Clive and is younger than me, and my sister who is the youngest of all three of us, playing in this brook with this strange shadowy lady. I cannot see her face but she is warm and she says

nice things and there is a warmth inside my stomach that I was not familiar with. But I do know that it was a special day.

My next memory is quite clearly when I was three years old. This was a horrible day. This was a day of darkness when a shadow came over my life; I felt lonely and scared for there was nothing in my life that I knew. This was the day when I was placed in a children's home; I was three years old and anybody who says that a three year old cannot remember is lying, for I remember. I remember seeing this strange woman who said to call her auntie. I remember the hugeness of the place, the strangeness of the place. I remember being shown into a vast dormitory of beds and being shown that this was where I would be living.

I remember being shown a bed with a mattress that rolled in the middle with white sheets that had three blue lines down them and blankets that had arrows on. I remember; and I remember that all the things I owned were important to me, which was not very much really. In fact, all I had was a badge, a beautiful silver badge that had wings and with these wings I could fly anywhere. It was a very special badge for me and I treasured it dearly. These were empty times, these were strange times and for most of the time I felt frightened. I was in a children's home, my brother at that time, was not with me; my sister being the youngest and a girl was fostered out because people like young baby girls. They're not that keen on three year old boys. I will try and describe the home, certain parts of it I recollect with an intensity that burns down to my soul. These places were the coal bunker, the locker room and the dark cupboards. These were the places in which I was locked when I didn't conform or I'd done something wrong. Or at that stage because I was a Catholic I wasn't the same as the other boys and because my Mother had committed the original sin, I, as the product of that sin, was to be punished.

There cried out in me at those times, anguish that I can hardly put into words. I found the only safety was inside, inside was warm, nobody could touch me inside; inside was safe. Inside was knowingness, I was in care from the age of three to the age of sixteen and a half when I was released under licence to college and then I joined the army, but I supersede myself.

The home that I was in, to my recollection through my truth, was were I was the only boy, and there were lots of girls and we all shared the same dormitory. I knew the girls were different because at bath time we were all bathed together, more often than not in the yard. There was always the smell of sulphur, of chemicals in the air; it was only later that I realised that Concert was an industrial town with an iron foundry and coal fields. And more often than not we were washed with this grey soap that had grit in it and had the most terrible smell. I hated that smell. I used to dread Fridays, for Friday was wash day or bath day would be more the truth. I would be lined up, my head would be shaved; I would have this gluey stuff put on my scalp which I was told was for my own good. I would have bright purple liquid painted around the sores of my head and ears and the most vile smelling talcum powder puffed all over me. The reader may well have realised that I was lousy, but I had no conception of lousiness, I had no conception of being infested, I had no conception of dirt. I have a great deal of conception of being the last to go into a cold tub of water full of grease and scum and being washed and scrubbed with scrubbing brushes and bars of soap that made you bleed. I can remember the food, and to this day I still carry the filters of this food and certain smells and certain foods throw me back into such trauma and pain that I want to be sick.

There were rays of sunshine in this darkness that I can remember. One is that there was a goat nearby and an old man with a very funny smell. He used to suck fire and I was absolutely certain he was the devil. He would come and talk to this goat and give me nice things to eat, like carrots and sweet things. After a while this man didn't seem so frightening and every now and again I would find that there was something left for me as well as the goat. The goat and I became firm friends. I used to talk to this goat, I talked about many things. I asked the goat did he have a father, did he have a mother, he was always on his own this goat, he was tied up and chained on a piece of scrub land. He became very important to me, this goat, and then one day he was gone. I remember my terror, my horror for my friend had gone. I cried hot liquid tears that were like acid, burning as I ran searching for my friend. I never found him, I have never forgotten him.

They were tough times and there are many events that shape a human soul on its journey but there are also events that are so special and so wonderful that when you look back you feel special and wonderful. I can remember one such day. These are days when I say I take a picture with my heart and when I'm up to my ass in alligators I can go to my heart and look at my photo album of my pictures and my internal

world becomes OK again.

I can remember very vividly being ill, lying in bed, being very unhappy and very sad. I couldn't understand what the priests were saying and what the nuns were saying, I couldn't understand what the sisters meant by that I was full of sin and I was a product of sin, and I had to be grateful for the things that God had given to me. I couldn't understand on the one breath the words were about love and the next breath came a whip or a cuff or a slap. I couldn't understand. God was important to me when I was a child, God to me is still important but I couldn't understand why this man who was so full of love was hanging from a tree. I couldn't understand why they made me go to a service where they ate his body and drank his blood. I felt absolute terror that these people who were hitting me would drink my blood and eat my body because they kept telling me that the body was of Christ. So I was confused and I lay in my bed crying but I wouldn't let them see me cry and then I looked out of the window, watching the clouds paint pictures and then, as God is my witness, I swear, I saw this figure appear in the window. The strange thing about it was that I was lying on my left side looking out of the window and this figure appeared in the horizontal. I remember distinctly that there were six panes of glass in that window and the figure went up through the middle panes of glass and I swear in my truth in that moment was the first time that I saw Christ. You may find throughout this narrative that my use of the word Christ, a God, may differ, but one thing never will and that is the belief that in that moment I knew that I had somebody special who cared for me. I was filled with a warmth and nurturing and I felt that I had been wrapped up in blankets and more importantly I wasn't hungry any more. Imagine in my excitement my sore throat and illness or whatever it was I was lying in bed with was forgotten and I rushed downstairs to see the sister and said "Sister, sister please come, come, come and see what I can see". They couldn't see, I was so upset and I told them what I'd saw. Big mistake. One of the things I learnt at three and a half years old was don't speak your truth, for your truth may not be received by those you speak it to with anything like the innocence in which you speak it.

When we transgressed which we always seemed to be doing, we were punished; the girls would get something done to them but if we were really naughty we were locked up in the coal bunker and left there in darkness. A friend of mine, a girl called Joy, and I were locked in this coal bunker quite often. It was a huge place which you opened a big door to and then the coal was put behind big slats of wood. Joy was hysterical, for she couldn't stand spiders and of course the hole, as we called it, was full of spiders. I think one of my proudest moments was when I sneaked in a battery and a light, two pieces of wires, it was a light bulb actually, two pieces of wire and I hid them inside the coal bunker for I knew that we would go back in there again. The next time that Joy and I were thrown in the coal bunker was really quite wonderful because we had the light. I have no wish to bore whoever reads this narrative but they were desperately unhappy days. They were grey days, dark days, we were always hungry, our shoes, well they weren't shoes they were boots, always hurt and pinched the feet. Never seemed warm and the violence was quite extraordinary.

My next memories on moving on from that first home, was when I was put into another home. This disturbed me, at least I knew the last one but this other one, this new one was strange. I was five, maybe five and a half, I don't remember exactly, and I was put in a big red brick building, it seemed to me huge, it was a Victorian building. It had foreboding rooms, dark cupboards of which I got to know very well. It was a sad place, full of orphans and deserted children but we would play games and imagine what our mother would be or what our father would be; we would fantasise and the one thing we had was loyalty to each other for we were treated harshly. I can remember so clearly being hungry, always hungry even at these early years. The school was not a good place. In this particular children's home we were sent to the local school. I then began to experience the laying down of patterns that would follow me all through my childhood and adolescence. Whenever something was stolen it was always we orphans who were brought to the fore front of the class. It was always us that had to empty our pockets out and make sure that we didn't have anything that had gone missing and it was always us from the home that had desks opened up first. I can remember the outrage and the injustice that sank into my heart from those days and is with me still, for I know now that I will never step down from an injustice.

If I perceive and believe that something is right then death alone is all that will remove me from that position. That may sound dramatic, or melodramatic, but it is my truth and it is a fact and I have gone to the wall for justice on more than one occasion.

The interesting thing about the behaviour of children is that if one child is different to the rest then that child will become the object of the group's bullying. I can remember from these early memories until far, far into my twenties, when I have had to fight physically and mentally and emotionally for everything, not that I am complaining, for you have to fight in this life. I could cite a number of occasions, numerous occasions when there would be groups of people who would come and pick on me for my hair and the purple patches that I still had and the skin that I had. The disjointed lankiness of me and the fact that all the clothes that we wore were donated to charity and usually had seen far, far better days. So I learnt to fight and I received beating after beating after beating, but one thing became very clear at that early age to people who beat me, in particular within the school. They could never walk around with their eyes shut because I might be beaten by three of four boys at school but I made absolutely certain that I got every single one of those boys on their own at some time and returned, with severe interest, the beatings that they gave out. It doesn't give me any pleasure to expose that shadow side of me, but I found a great elation in hurting those who hurt me.

I found a power in seeing blood, in particular if it was someone else's. So I soon developed what I felt was quite unwarranted, a reputation of being out of control, a hard nut, incorrigible, irrepressible. It was at this time, probably when I was six, six and a half, that I met my first form of physical abuse. There will be a lot about abuse in this narrative for I have lived a life of abuse and I claim that experience not from the high point of victim but from the position of teacher. You may not understand the meaning of these words set in this stage of this autobiography but I do so hope that you understand them when it's over.

There was a man who was a teacher who was fat, bald with just a little bit of grey hair and funny bits growing out of his nose. And life was hard in that school, constantly the butt of jokes, the searches, nothing was yours, the fights, and I was always scrapped first because, of course, I had to start the fight because I was from the orphanage. This man, this teacher, befriended me, he had a soft voice, and soft hands. One thing I wanted more than anything else was to be accepted as part of the team, to be accepted as an equal and to this day this need, this desire to be seen as an equal has quite often coloured my actions. And all that I wanted from those early days was to be in the football team. And this was a bit difficult as I had no football kit and just as many times in my life I have met the gatekeepers, the gatekeeper of the rule, the gatekeeper who will not let you into the club. There were rules even at this early stage that you couldn't do your PE unless you had the khaki shorts or knickers, white top, white plimsolls and football boots for the boys who were playing football. I desperately wanted to play football. I was fed up of sitting around outside in the cold and everybody was seeming to have such great fun. So this man, my teacher, he gave me a football top, and he gave me a pair of football boots, they were huge! They were ginormous! I didn't care, they were mine and I stuffed them full of paper and I found dubbing and I dubbed these boots and used to imagine I would be a great footballer. This man said that to be a footballer you have to have good muscles, and he said that I had good muscles and used to show me that massage was important to these muscles, to make them better and make them strong. Not only that but while he was massaging I could have a sweet or something. I never really knew there was anything wrong for I would lay on my back and he would massage. He used to pull my Percy a lot but I couldn't understand what his interest in that was because you must remember I lived in a home full of girls and I always used to think that I was different and somehow not right. He had one similar to me except he was bigger of course, not that I paid much attention to it. And he used to just massage and pull mine until he was sick, or his thing was sick. You must remember that I had no conception at this stage of what this man was doing, except at a later stage when he tried to hurt me. He tried to bugger me on several occasions but I believe that I was well looked after and well protected and he never succeeded. I don't know what psychologists would say about the understanding of sex and sexuality; of who and what you are as individuals, but at around this time of being six or six and a half, all the girls in the children's home would get new dresses. Because the majority was girls they would get lots of clothes donated and being a boy there wasn't much donated there and then one day another boy came to the children's home. I always remember him, I think his name was Johnny, I'm dreadful with names, he was a nice chap, he was smaller than me anyway so I could sort him out if I had to. Johnny and I were a bit confused about this, we were a bit resentful actually.

The girls would always get these new clothes and we would have these very undesirable clothes. The girls would get a choice of food, choice of the television; the girls would get the choice of the games that they wanted to play. When I say choice of television, that's not exactly true, it wasn't a television it was a something, what was it called? I can't remember what it was called, anyway, it was a big thing, gramophone type thing. It looked like a television, it wasn't, you know, it lit up at the front, it was huge and the girls would play records and things because the age group of the girls in that home were from my age up through to eleven and twelve year olds, in that particular home, I think.

So Johnny and I realised that something was different and we went and said, you know, we want to be girls, why should the girls get the best, we want to be girls as well; for are we girls. And I can remember with stunning clarity what happened next. The reader may not accept; the reader may not choose to believe but I swear to you it is the truth. Johnny had the next bed next to me, he didn't like the football teacher either but we both found a new pet and that was a chicken, but I digress. One morning we woke up and every night before you go to bed you have to fold your clothes up very, very neatly and put them on your locker. The next day, as I said, when we woke up and went to get out our clothes and there were no clothes there. There was just a vest, a pair of knickers and a girl's dress. I can remember thinking of being so happy, I was allowed to be a girl, I was going to be the same as the others. Johnny and I got dressed, put our dresses on, rushed downstairs to breakfast and first of all there was silence, then there was the first titter and snigger. I couldn't understand, why had they allowed me to become part of the group and be as them and now they were laughing. What did they find so funny? What was wrong? Very quickly we realised something was wrong; very quickly realised! So Johnny and I said we wanted our clothes back and the sisters and the aunties said that you wanted to be girls so you can be girls, see if you are capable.

They then took us to school and to this day I do not understand how or why the teachers at that school allowed what happened to happen. I cannot in my soul of searching and asking and trying to rationalise some of the horrendous things that had been in my life. I cannot understand. So we went to school and we were in school all day in dresses, dressed as girls. I never had to fight so much, so hard, so often. I was tired, I was hurt, we had our dresses pulled out, we were thrown down on the ground, we had boys doing all sorts of things. We had the girls shouting at us, we were chased and mercilessly persecuted throughout that day. I fought, I fought, and I fought until I had no strength to fight. Not one teacher came to our assistance. This went on for a week, five days of fighting, of abuse; now whether they were trying some perverted sense of aversion therapy I have got no idea but they were horrendous days. This trauma of those days lives on. It is unfinished business, it is something that I still have yet to resolve. Thinking about it now, on reflection, meant that I could deal with it. Who is kidding whom? Being dressed in woman's clothing obviously stimulated the people that we lived with. For though I didn't know it at that time, and only found out when doing my nurse training in the army, I had no idea what a lesbian was. All that I knew that life became almost bearable if we licked things, and played with things and let them play with our percival. The abuse was institutional. I thought it was quite normal behaviour to get down between a girl's legs and just licking until she moaned and moaned and sort of stopped. Unfortunately, it wasn't just the girls, but it was the people who were in control. So we were systematically raped, sometimes more often than not daily; and this rape consisted of games, playing of licking and poking and being licked and poked and being jumped on. Of having women's bits in your face, several women sometimes. Of being part of the group, of being dressed up like a living doll.

The revulsion and the sickness that I feel about those days can't be washed away and doesn't go away. It is only later that I learnt that I needed to claim my shadow for these experiences of me, are me.

There is little that I can find to say that is good about those times, and then I was moved to another children's home where I met somebody, who I was told was my brother. He had apparently been fostered out with a family. I didn't really understand what the term fostering meant, and I have experienced it. I was fostered out on about four occasions to families that couldn't have children. It was amazing, I was like some form of fertility. For after I had been there a while and was starting to think well, this is different, it's much better than the home, they'd get pregnant and of course when they got pregnant they didn't want something that wasn't theirs, so I would be sent back.

We moved to several homes, my brother and I. I used to look out for him, he was a terrible rogue, always in trouble and consequently I would get into trouble because if someone picked a fight on my brother, then I had to go and fight with him. And the same scenarios that I've discussed earlier, applied to him as well as me. And the same abuse that I met, he met.

The next home we were moved into decided for some reason that I hadn't yet found out, that we were Catholic. Now this must have had something to do with our Mother, this word Mother is still a word that causes me pain. We were forced both Clive and I, to go to catechism and once again I was totally confused by the teachings that I was subjected to through Catholicism and there so-called good people, these good Catholic's. I couldn't match in my head the meaning of words and the actions that I was seeing through living and still today I find very few people that will live their words or mean what they say. The catechism lessons were not particularly wonderful, they were quite tough actually. We had to learn Hail Mary, we had to learn about this woman that had given birth through divine intervention, from angels, I just couldn't understand this. We had to learn that we were all sinners, and I was so distressed when every time I had to go to confession. I had to sit in this dark hole and hear the rasping of this person breathing behind a screen and I had to say to this person, bless me Father for I have sinned. I've done nothing wrong, what do you mean I have sinned? I haven't done anything wrong and then you weren't allowed out until at least you'd made up a few sins. Like I had bad thoughts, Father, and didn't know what the bad thought were but you know, I shouted at my brother or I swore at my brother, and I found myself in the ludicrous position of having to think about things that being bad about. If I couldn't find anything the priest would tell me that I had original sin, whatever that was, and this original sin would cost me six Hail Marys and a few other prayers that I have forgotten, or twice round the rosary or something. So I would come out of confession totally confused and I would say to the sisters, "Oh, sister I've got twice round the rosary and four hail Mary's" and she would say, "Oh, you .... boy" and wallop! "You're evil, dirty, horrible" you know and I couldn't understand what they were trying to do, and what actually was going on.

The women in charge of the home were lesbians, they had their own agenda and all the children's homes that I was in as a youngster mounted up to abuse because at least one or two of the staff that we were with moved with us when we moved homes. It was almost in retrospect that we were being passed around a group of people. Now I know that the person who did the things that she did to me has now been investigated, probably has now been sorted out. Later on I will tell of how I tried to heal myself by confronting these scenarios and finding the people that did what they did, but again I am going ahead of myself.

When you are an orphan, the words father and mother are very precious words to you, but they are words that at times of loneliness give you great strength. You can visualise you father and mother and they are doing good things for you and saying nice things and giving you lovely things to eat, presents and hugs and kisses. The flip side of the words mother and father is the pain that they cause, for I had no mother and no father. I, in my own infantile way of surviving the process, could cope with not having because that's a fact of life, so I'm an orphan. But then one day that changed, one day I was called into this room and all the care assistants in the home were there, the adults. They were talking, and there was this man sat on this chair. I didn't think anything of it, why should I? I thought it was going to be another one of the parties where I was going to be dressed up and would have to perform. This meeting took a different course and the man was introduced to me as my father. It is difficult to explain the reality of that simple statement and its impact on my emotional understanding. I remember a hollow empty feeling where I'd been stripped of even my illusions where the father-figure who could be anything to me, in any situation, was now flesh and blood and of course a total stranger. The only other clear memory I have is that his skin was rough and he smelt of tobacco. There were no explanations just large empty silences and thankfully the meeting did not last long. My brother was not introduced to his father. The man left and life continued in the same vein as though nothing had changed but, of course it had. We did not see this man again for several years.

The next event that I recall is that once again the reality that I had adjusted to was fragmented when one day a new girl arrived in the home. This girl was called Fiona and she had come from a foster family and she was introduced to me as my younger sister. I found this incredibly difficult to understand. I had no idea who or what I was; where I belonged or what my roots were, but now I had a family of sorts, a brother and a sister.

We were all moved to a new home, this move was exciting for the boys, my brother and I had our own bedroom and to a degree a small amount of private space. The comings and goings of children in and out of the home included young people who were broken by circumstances and events. Most were placed in care due to abuse, be it institutional or incest or child prostitution. My normality was discussions of tricks, sexual activities and many times all the children had were each other and in a rough and tumble sort of way we accepted, without question, each individual.

We were extremely loyal to each other, us against the system. This was tried and tested daily at school where other children from normal backgrounds with real parents would often pick upon a child from the children's home. We went to a new school and life developed a rhythm. We were still the first to be questioned and brought out in front of the class when something had gone wrong or something had been stolen. There were moments of joy which I can remember. These related to being in the woods and speaking to my invisible friends, my invisible friends were of great support to me. They were fairies and angels and we would fight the goblins and the wicked witches. I was close to nature and loved animals. Incidents stand out from this time, usually associated with events previously discussed.

My next memory is still traumatic and disjointed for one day the man called my father turned up with a woman who he instructed my brother, sister and I to call "mother". Two weeks later he turned up again with a van and our few possessions were loaded and we were dispatched to our new home with our father and his new wife.

The memories of these days evolve around the conflict of trying to equate my ideas of family, parents, motherhood, the role of a mother and the role of a father, for the reality of the situation could not be matched against any previous experience. My father was a paratrooper. My main memory was of this huge, strong man with his red beret and uniform. We were living in Army accommodation in Aldershot. My father was still serving. He had several problems, the main one being that he had no idea how to communicate or deal with children. The methodology he chose was that of a drill sergeant, which he was, and we were his recruits and he enforced upon us a totalitarian regime of discipline. If we misbehaved or fought amongst ourselves we were often sent to our rooms without supper and memories of those first summers were spent locked in our room. The only time our father showed any affection was when he had been drinking, which he did a lot unfortunately, his drinking led to episodes of violence. The principal target was my brother who my father insisted was not his son. The complexity of my family background was starting to unfold, my real mother shot my father with a .22 rifle. She wounded him badly and as a result we were placed in care and he had custody of the children. Being a soldier he could not look after us and this resulted in our spending most of our childhood as previously described. My brother and I started a new school and I loved it. I started, because of my record and past, in the lowest technical stream. Within two years I was in the highest class and coming first in most subjects with the exception of Maths and English.

The maths teacher was old school and to this day I can remember the format that Wednesday morning would take. Maths was the first period and it was a double period. We were given 20 arithmetic questions to do and you were caned for every wrong answer, so without fail I would have at least 10 to 15 strokes because I'm terrible at maths and still am. To make matters worse the English teacher was of the same mould except he didn't cane you he used a strap, so Wednesdays were not a good day!! The happiest memories of these times at school were being introduced to the subjects of biology, chemistry and physics. I adored them and found them fascinating and relatively easy. In some small way I gained approval from my peers and often extra sandwiches for doing their homework. I worked in the biology lab as a monitor and was responsible for feeding and looking after the animals from snakes, rats to gerbils and African frogs. I was introduced to the game of rugby which became a passion for I was quite big and aggressive, a natural prop forward.

An incident which affected me for many years occurred when, as part of a biology experiment, we did the incubation of chicken eggs and hatched 30 chickens. One of these chickens had the claws of its feet deformed and stuck together. I unstuck the feet by cutting the web and used matches as splints and thread as binding and this chicken's feet started to heal. It became very tame and we became firm friends. The school summer holidays approached and I asked to take the chicken home to look after it. My father spent a lot of time away on exercises, jumping here or there.

On returning home with my chicken he was there. He took one look at the chicken and asked me what I was doing, I explained that this chicken hadn't been well and that I had mended its feet and that it was getting better. My father told me to stop being such a sissy and pulled its head off in front of me. The sickness I feel now is just as acute as I felt then as probably the only thing on the planet that I really cared for was killed.

The relationship between my stepmother and the children was not good. None of us could call her mother. I am certain that there are issues around these times of which I am not aware and have discovered only much later in life. But she was often the person we blamed. There was little money in our house due to our father drinking. We were always hungry and my stepmother had two dogs. My brother and I found out that dog biscuits and dog food was quite tasty and often supplemented our hunger by raiding the dog food. We were obviously punished. My brother, at this time, was showing marked behavioural problems. It became harder to cover for him for the boys at school were often bigger than us and we were frequently getting hidings as my brother was light-fingered and often pinched things. He was like a Magpie and couldn't equate that he shouldn't do the things he did. This resulted in our father resorting to more physical forms of control and one incident where my brother was beaten in this case, unrightly and unjustly, caused something to snap inside of me. I confronted my stepmother, who was often the instigator of our father's discipline, that if she did not leave him alone I would kill her. These were words spoken in anger; she raised her hand and hit me. I was quite a strong 12 year old, I picked up a kitchen knife and told her that if she ever tried that again or hurt any of us she'd had it.

On my return from school my father was waiting. He took a washing stick which was used for the boiler, and thrashed me so hard that I bled from the beating. I could not walk for a week. This then set a new pattern of disintegration within the family. I found life to be incredibly painful, the only joy was school.

My father left the Army after his full service which was up about this time and we left Aldershot to move to our new home in Dorset. Life in this new home was terrible. My father could not cope with civilian life, he could not let go of the Army and his drinking and violence became worse. My brother at this stage, was frequently in trouble and we started a new school. The old patterns represented themselves and the cycle continued except this time the police and the social services became involved. Life became so bad that I felt I could no longer protect my brother and sister, I became so miserable and fed up of the violence that all I wanted to do was end it all. I set about my suicide with a sense of purpose I had never felt. I planned everything and when I was ready I went to the woods and using one of my father's razor blades I slashed my wrist 15 times. There was no pain, just peace. I remember that the blood was warm but it belonged to someone else. Unfortunately I didn't die because it was quite cold and the blood clotted. So I went home really depressed that I couldn't even do that right.

I bandaged my hands and decided to get on with things. Two days later my wound was infected. My parents hadn't noticed. Then in the evening some blood dripped onto the carpet and my father asked what was the matter. He grabbed my arm and pulled the dressing off, he then set about telling me if I wanted to die he could fucking oblige me. He broke my nose, blackened my eyes, damaged my jaw and I had a beating which to this day has never been repeated and in that moment any love and affection which I may have had, died with that beating. My brother saw this and ran away. He was picked up by social services and placed in another children's home. The social services came to visit and would not believe what happened. My sister, at this stage, was terrified and decided to run away as well. She could not go on her own so I went with her. We were on the run for several days, helped by a family who asked no questions but knew of our circumstances. Fiona finally surrendered herself but I couldn't. I was in a place called Portland Bill and was living rough on rabbits and scraps. I left Portland and walked along the Chesil Beach to Abbotsbury and for a 14 year old that was a huge journey. I stole a boat and sailed across a stretch of waster, walked to Bridport and from Bridport to Dorset and Dorset to Weymouth where I called at the house of a friend. On seeing me my friend phoned the police and once again I was placed in a secure assessment home.

The principals of this home were two of the most wonderful people I had ever met. They were called Mr and Mrs Sellings. If ever there were angels in human form these were two. Mr Sellings treated me with a respect which I had never encountered. Mrs Sellings, who was German, was everything I expected from a mother. She was loving but firm, gentle and kind. She introduced me to cooking for I was always hungry!

Mr and Mrs Sellings had a tough job for the broken remnants of distressed children were their daily task, I owe them a great deal. Life in this home was still fraught and had a high degree of explosive situations, for the children came from all backgrounds of abuse from rent boys to child prostitutes. Victims of domestic violence and broken homes. One incident took place that still carries a great sadness, a new boy had arrived, I cannot remember his age but he took a shine to me and I cared for him.

He was very sad and upset. One particular day he seemed particularly distressed and I talked to him at length before going to school and he had a temper tantrum and my last words to him were "for goodness sake, in this life we have to take responsibility for ourselves, no one else really cares, so grow up". While I was at school he hung himself on the swing in the children's home. I never knew if it was my words that prompted this action and once again something I cared about was taken.

Some sort of selection process and tests took place within this assessment centre, you normally only stayed a few weeks but I stayed for over a year. They gave me my first home. The family had fragmented totally, Clive was in a children's home in Poole, Fiona joined him, I stayed in Dorchester. I would travel to school daily. School was difficult due to the publicity around the events and once again I found myself fighting just to be left alone but Mr Sellings encouraged me to join the Air Training Corps which I did and I found another home. I became a marksman and worked my way through Duke of Edinburgh award, silver. I learnt to fly and became a glider pilot. The ATC taught me self discipline and being responsible for others, it also stimulated my sense of adventure and I led two Ten Tors Exhibition across Dartmoor, my team set new records. We had great fun and went on camps on RAF bases where we were treated very well. I flew in many aircraft and loved flying. Needless to say I wanted to be a fighter pilot. This wish lasted right up until I went to the RAF recruiting officer and sat the tests.

The recruiting sergeant laughed so hard that he cried when I told him I wanted to fly jets. He said with my knowledge of maths I wouldn't be able to calculate the flight path of a broomstick! So I was rejected for an apprenticeship in RAF Horton. The social services must have decided that I had some trainability and I was placed in college to study City & Guilds in catering. So once again security I had gained was lost and I found myself in lodgings under the care of the social services. The lodgings were a doss house and all the abuse patterning was repeated except this time I was big enough and strong enough to look after myself. At this time in order to pay my way through college despite having only a small grant I needed to work so I worked in the coal yards of the railway station. I was known as a "hopper boy". This meant that the wagons would come in full of coal and I would unload them by hand and shovel the coal into a huge shute. Once the shute was full I would hop onto a plate and fill bags with 100cwt of coal: hence the name "hopper boy".

The coal merchant was an honourable man and taught me much about the company of men. He taught me that rough voices, brusque conversation and a ready hand did not mean that the person didn't care. I had tremendous fun and on more than one occasion when delivering several tons of coal to a site I would forget the knack of letting go of the top of the sack and gripping the bottom and disappeared head first down the bunker which usually meant I had to be rescued! These were hard days of physical work and college study, I obtained a credit pass in catering and hotel management and worked in the hotels and steak houses of Weymouth as a comi-chef and waiter. I had no friends and certainly no girl friends. I kept my own company and council. There is a race held in Weymouth where you swim from Weymouth to Lulworth cove which is about 10 miles, I enjoyed that race. My social worker, at this time, was only it seemed a few years older than me. If ever I wanted to do anything I had to ask for an appointment with her. They were quite controlling to the extent of oppressive and one day I wanted some clothes and she refused. So I had had enough.

Feeling sorry for myself I stood on the bridge at Weymouth and a soldier came out of the recruiting office and we started talking about shooting, flying and sport. I had by this stage represented Devon and Dorset in rugby trials and played for the ATC and won full colours in rugby. This soldier seemed impressed and told me that if I joined the Army I would travel and have plenty of opportunity for sport. So I went in, sat the tests and passed. However, I was too young and needed consent from the social services to join. After a period and my social worker was constantly trying to stop me joining the Army, I was allowed to join up on my 17th birthday.

I took to the army like a duck to water, I loved it! The discipline in basic training was firm but nothing like I was used to. My experience in the ATC as a drill sergeant meant I knew the drill, rifle drill, weapon training, could shoot and generally turn myself out in a squared away manner. I was also able to help my fellow recruits who had come from all walks of life. The junior NCOs would shout and scream as junior NCOs do and we would be marched around at double speed with packed drills and clothes changing, exercises, kit inspections, hygiene inspections, it was great!

One issue that came to a head within me at this time was one of the training sergeants was an ex para. I had joined the Catering Corps because my catering qualification, or so I was told, would equate me to what was then known as an A1 chef. Needless to say I found that what was promised by the recruiting sergeant bore no resemblance to the actuality of life in the Army. I have this thing about injustice and have often gone to the wall in its defence. So as a soldier I was fine but when we entered technical training my troubles with the Army started.

The Army has a very effective way of training recruits and craftsmen. It is called "the Army way". The Army way is not the way you are taught in college and this produced a conflict between myself and the instructors when I could not understand why they were doing things which could be done better a different way. I was, in fact, a college educated twit who had too big opinions of himself. My hero was the Galloping Gourmet who I thought was a brilliant chef and I thought, as I had been promised, that I would be cooking for officers and could specialise in the areas of my skill which was sauces and cold meats. Needless to say the Army had a different opinion which was frequently expressed by my NCOs who had no catering qualification. I was good at what I did and I knew it! And as a consequence learnt a very valuable lesson of not showing how good you are to people who would not appreciate it. The Army has a wonderful way of bringing discipline to the whole by making sure that the group is responsible for the actions of all individuals. I think it is fair to say that I was arrogant and cocky, I was handy with my fists and kept ahead of the game. This type of soldier, I know, is not a good team player. Action was taken by my squad and company NCOs to correct the error of my judgement and my attitude problem. I had the shit kicked out of me on corrective interviews!!

But still the more they pressured me the more stubborn I became until finally I was placed in the boxing ring with the company champion and I was hammered, legally!! The good thing about pain is that it focuses the mind on survival. I quickly realised that I was doing things wrong and started to toe the Army line. At the same time I was studying at night in the barrack room for an English O Level. I taught myself the syllabus and asked the army education officer if I could take an English O Level. This was arranged and I passed. At this stage I really had made up my mind that I enjoyed the Army but didn't like cooking. As a result of a fight my nose was badly shattered and I was in hospital. During this time I spoke to several medics and decided that this would be a really good job. I therefore on my release from hospital, applied to transfer from the Army Catering Corps to the Medical Corps. This decision was one of the best I had ever made despite my peer group within the ACC trying to discourage me. I had plenty of time to reflect on this decision as I was once again back in hospital recovering from another corrective interview where my recently reconstructed nose had gone walkabout around my face. To this day I bear no malice towards that process, for it is one that I accepted as part of military life. It is a hard, masculine environment. It's not the boy scouts.

I have a system within me where I take pictures with my heart and when I'm up to my ass in alligators these pictures can deaden the pain of the bites! One such picture was the day that I had to go before my selection board for transferring from the Army Catering Corps to the Medical Corps. I wanted to be a nurse, not any nurse but a State Registered Nurse. The competition from within the Medical Corps was intense and my prospects of changing from another corps were very low.

At this interview I met a woman whom I hold in tremendous respect, she was called Major Wisdom. She was a nurse tutor and I spoke with her before my selection board. I remember little about the board except one Colonel asking me why I chose to leave a trade in which I was already qualified and seek to enter one for which I was only marginally qualified. My answer to her was "Well, Ma'am, it's all a matter of onions." She asked me to enlighten her by what I meant and I explained that I had been taught to cut an onion professionally one way and in the Army they do it a different way, so if you know your onions you're in conflict, and that was it.

Needless to say I was successful and my transfer from the Army Catering Corps to the Medical Corps was processed. To my disgust I had to do a basic training again as a transfer in. And once again I enjoyed the process. The barrack room was old Victorian billets with wooden floors and large dormitories. It was at this time that I was introduced to another form of rough justice which was that of the squad. A squad of men trained together and the discipline externally was exercised by the NCO's; internal discipline within the squad was exercised by the soldiers. If there was a soldier in your squad who was idle or dirty or whose kit wasn't right the whole squad was punished. This was to ensure that the squad would work together as a team and at most times this worked.

You might smack the guy around the ear and tell him to sort his boots out or his bed space but more often than not you would help him with the basic kit just so the squad could go out on pass or have Naafi rights. Occasionally there were individuals who just were square pegs in round holes or who felt that they could do what they wanted. These individuals were not treated well. Examples being people who wouldn't wash, so they were washed by the squad with broomsticks, brasso and boot polish. The only serious squad punishment that I ever witnessed was that of a fellow squad member stealing your equipment. This was not tolerated. You could nick what you liked from other squads who were daft enough to leave their kit lying around and, in fact, it was expected. But the kit of you mates within your squad was sacred and you looked out for each other. If somebody was caught stealing then their hands were put in the window and the window frame dropped on it. It was a very effective deterrent.

In basic training there is a system of hierarchy where the trades people such as radiographers, nurses, dispensers and the field rats such as combat medical assistants, field ambulances, field hospitals. More often than not the trades people would have qualifications or college education whereas the field medics' education would have been via a different route. So there was friction within the squad which in most cases was harmless and a not so harmless friction from NCOs who were combat medics towards trades people. This I believe resulted from the pay scales which a technician received against that of a combat medic. Being a male nurse in the Army can be a contradiction in terms, when asked what I did and I said I was a nurse the comments of "Mm get you ducky! Who's the lucky one?" or "give us a kiss, where's your handbag?" were standard for the course.

I passed out of basic training and was posted as a student nurse to the Cambridge Military Hospital to commence my nurse training. Our barracks were wooden nissan huts that had been condemned as unfit for habitation probably after the Boer War! But still it was home. Student nurse training at this time was well structured and the academics were of a high standard. The bane of our life, at this period, was the nurse tutors, in particular Major Wisdom. She was a tremendous woman, a hard task master, but extremely motivating. I had realised, at this stage, that I had a problem with words, it's a form of dyslexia. For I adored reading, but I could not spell to save my life. She encouraged me to self study and because I was so scared of failing my course I embarked on a correspondence course of nurse training through a correspondence school at the same time as doing my training in the Army. The first major hurdle that all student nurses had to pass was the class 2 trade exams, or second year student exams. These exams decided who would stay as a student nurse or who would be streamed as a State Enrolled Nurse. The competition to remain a student nurse was rightly intense. The exams came and I was fortunate for most of the questions I had done on my correspondence course and I passed. On interview with Major Wisdom she congratulated me and very quietly passed me a copy of the Oxford English Dictionary and said to me that this was to be my bible. I was 19 years old and having good pay and enjoying my training and the hospital work.

Things were going well, then I met and fell in love with a fellow student and life became just a little bit confusing. My understanding of love was dysfunctional to say the least, naive at most, but probably totally insupportable. So on my 20th birthday I married and moved into married quarters. My wife was an intelligent woman from Liverpool but for a multitude of reasons the relationship failed, in fact, it lasted 6 weeks. So I found myself extremely confused and a coldness set in to me which was to be my constant companion for many years.

My brother and I had kept in contact, albeit not regularly, for we were not that type of people. My sister had gone to another home and we lost track of her for a while and each led their own independent life. My brother stole a car after being involved in a drug episode and I was told he crashed this car at the Chiswick flyover and it resulted in him breaking his neck. He was paralysed from the neck downwards and spent over a year in Stoke Manderville. He gained the use of his arms but his breathing was always a problem, he had such courage my brother and a strength of spirit that transcended all difficulties that he encountered. He became a punk rocker and changed his name to Tommy and I used to visit him in Weymouth where he was surrounded by his punk rocker friends. These people looked after Tommy and gave him such love and affection that he had never found anywhere. He had taken up the guitar and was really pleased with his progress. Life continued and I went down to find Tommy only to find that he had died. I could not believe it for my father had claimed his body, cremated him and not told anybody. None of Tommy's friends were invited to the funeral and I wasn't even told. To this day I have no idea where his ashes are.

There was a rumour that Tommy had died as the result of drugs and his lifestyle but I received a letter which I cherish from the coroner who wrote of the high esteem Tommy was held by friends and in the local community and the only drugs found within Tommy were those that were prescribed for his breathing. He had, in fact, died from Hyperstatic pneumonia which is often the complication of his condition. As a result of these circumstances I made frantic efforts to find my sister, but to no avail. I understand that she had had a child when she was 14 or 15 and this child was offered up for adoption and that she had had another child when she was 16 and as a result of this had been sterilised. Fiona had the most amazing gift, she could sing like an angel and bring tears to a listener's eyes. She had been a victim and had spiralled down the social order to working in pubs and clubs in Weymouth all before she was 18. She then met a Dutch merchant man here on his national service, went to Holland and disappeared.

While the chaos of my family was causing me concern, the harsh realities of the world intruded into my life. I can't remember the exact day, for there are parts of this that my memory still will not access, but the IRA blew up the pubs in Guildford. The ambulance raced to the scene which was like a slaughter house when the second pub blew and chaos descended into hell. The initial trauma is such that I'm sure that most emergency services personnel, when faced with high trauma, lock it away and get on with the job. The hospital was very busy for a long time after those terrible incidents and there was every conceivable traumatic injury.

The State Final exams were looming and my correspondence course was requiring me to produce five essays a week. This meant that I spent most of my time in my own company, totally focused on that one objective of passing. The exam came and when I turned the paper over, of the eight questions on the paper I had in some format already done seven of them as part of the correspondence course. I was totally confident that I had passed my State exams. We then sat our hospital finals and once again I was confident that I had passed, the only remaining hurdle was the D Assessment which was ward management and shift management. My assessor was an individual who did not see eye to eye with my understanding of ward management and felt it was a necessary duty of all potential staff nurses to keep the officers in fresh coffee. On the day of the assessment sparks flew and I was hauled up on orders charged with insubordination to a superior officer. When you are charged in the Army you can elect to accept the award of the Commanding Officer or opt for court martial. In most cases it is normal to accept the award and take the punishment but I was so incensed by the injustice and prejudice that this officer had taken that I was not under any circumstances going to accept a punishment for acting as a professional not a kitchen maid. The RSM at the time, cautioned me that my whole career could be placed in jeopardy and strongly advised me to rethink. I could not change my viewpoint, we were trained to be professional nurses and making coffee did not come into that category. The situation could have got out of hand but I then went on Colonel's orders and stated my case.

The Colonel deemed that I was correct in my attitude and assessment but wrong in its implementation and disobeying the orders of my superior. He awarded me extra duties and the case was dismissed. I had made my first serious error of judgement where I thought that justice applied equally to all ranks under military law. It was my first contact with the truth of power and the victim being the power of truth.

After this episode I was on leave in Weymouth and went diving in the Harbour, as a result I caught Meningitis and was rather sick. I made a good recovery and the only residual effect being that my eyes were sensitive to light and I had to wear glasses.

During my training we often had to be ambulance orderlies on night shifts which would cover accident and emergency cases, road traffic accidents etc. I can remember some amusing incident which occurred; one being the ambulance being called out on a blue light to the soldiers' married quarters block in Aldershot. It was about 3.30 am in the morning and the message given was that the mother had gone into labour. I had, at this time, completed my modules in training on shock and the loss of body circulating fluid, the treatment being direct pressure, elevation, treat for shock. We arrived at the block of flats with the lift not working and the mother on the third floor which meant we had to take a chair lift to bring her down. She was, to my mind, in desperate pain, huffing and puffing and squealing so I was obviously concerned. When we got her down to the ambulance she started saying "it's coming, it's coming". I didn't really know what was coming, I hadn't done that module yet!! Needless to say true to the motto of my corps "In arduous fidelus" I felt I could cope. The difficult part was asking her if she had her knickers on. This took most of my courage, the rest of my courage was needed to actually look at the naughty bits and upon doing so imagine my shock when this fluid and blood burst out. I quickly thought that I must do something and of course my training on how to treat shock came to the front. I took out the abdominal shell dressings that were kept in the ambulance, placed it over the offending article and pressed tightly. The poor woman at this stage was quite concerned and asked me did I know what I was doing and like the true professional I professed to be I said of course and promptly took out another shell dressing and tied it around her legs. By the time we arrived at the maternity ward there was a series of shell dressing wrapped around the offending parts of this poor woman. When the midwife opened the back of the ambulance there was a moment of stunned silence and the crash maternity team surveyed the masterly work of myself. Then the laughter. It is said that it was the first recorded time that a baby had been born clutching a shell dressing! Another super woman heard of this because it became common knowledge for one of the beautiful things about the Army is that if you funk up everybody know about it very quickly. She was called Colonel Anderson and was the head of midwifery in the Louise Margaret and she suggested that I came and attended emergency childbirth lessons, and in fact this was what I did, and as a result assisted in the delivery of several children.

Being an ambulance orderly, seemed to me, to be fraught with mine fields of events that tended to go out of my control very quickly. Another instance of being called out a four in the morning to take a patient who had died to the mortuary. It was winter and snowing, the mortuary is at the back of the hospital down a hill which runs at approximately 45 degrees.

The ambulance drivers were civilian drivers, some were quite senior, as in old, and this shout had a very old asthmatic driver. He grumbled and carped about the time and the weather and we loaded the body into the ambulance and proceeded to the morgue. At the morgue I collected the trolley and pushed it to the back of the ambulance, the ambulance driver took the feet of the stretcher and I the head and we went to lift the body out of the ambulance. Unfortunately the driver slipped on the ice and the body shot off the mattress, down the road and disappeared. The reason for its disappearing was that it was wrapped in a white sheet and we were in the middle of a snowstorm. This would normally not be so much of a problem except that the relatives were viewing the body in about 15 minutes and we had lost it! We had to wake up the barracks, call out the guard, and search the snow drifts until we had found our missing stiff. Needless to say all ended well but because he was frozen it was difficult to put in his teeth!

There were less amusing incidents which were all part of training, attending RTAs, sudden deaths, overdoses and other accidents.

The life of a junior staff nurse is varied and the matron had a policy of rotating junior staff nurses every three months to different wards to gain experience and to cover for sick personnel. One of the duties of a staff nurse is the training, albeit in house, of student nurses and I realised that I really enjoyed this work. But perhaps I had yet to become proficient in communication skills for my understanding of a given task was not always what the student understood that task to be. Some examples of this was when I was the Staff Nurse on the coronary care unit and a patient was admitted with a myocardial infarction (Heart attack) and was pretty poorly. The doctors required a stool sample from this patient and I allocated this task to one of the students on the ward. A stool sample is taken with a bedpan and is collected in a small plastic container with a shovel like protuberance from the lid. Normally one allowed the specimen to be passed in a bedpan and then using the spoon put the faeces in the container. The student pulled the screens and I was watching the monitors when all of a sudden the ecg trace became very erratic, I rushed into the cubicle and was greeted by the sight of a bedpan trolley which had been placed on the bed, the patient sat on the bedpan trolley and the student nurse was studiously sticking the spoon up the patient's backside in a totally failed attempt to collect the sample. The patient by this stage had gone rather white and sickly and I was more concerned with him passing away than passing a stool. Needless to say this episode did not bode brightly for my prospects as a nursing officer.

Fate it seems can be extremely fickle and as fortune would have it this student nurse was on shift with me again, this time because of the breathlessness of the client the doctor ordered some suppositories to be given and abdominal x-ray. The suppositories were checked out and given to the student nurse. I checked with the student nurse that he knew what he was doing, that the patient was placed on the left side, the knees drawn up as comfortable as possible. KY jelly was applied to the suppository and inserted using gloves. No problems.

I went back to my work and the client went to x-ray. Imagine my shock when I was called to x-ray to explain why these two silver lumps were in the middle of the screen. It transpired that the student nurse had forgotten to take them out of the silver paper. Someone in a high position obviously thought that I was destined for great things and decided that I should be promoted and sent out into the big wide world of the Regular Army, and I was posted to an island called St Kilda.

St Kilda is the further most piece of Britain before America, go north of Scotland and turn left. It is a tiny uninhabited island with a small detachment of gunners and technicians and a lot, an awful lot of sheep. In St Kilda, on getting up, one would look out of the window. If it was brown and streaky, low down it wasn't a bad day. If it was brown and streaky high up the window, it was a bad day for the brown objects were the sheep. If the wind was normal they flew past the window at a low level, if it was high they would sail past at the height of the window! I spent six weeks on this island, honing my communication skills. On my return I was faced with a slight problem of hormones. It shouldn't strike odd that I was attracted to fellow nurses (female). The problem being that most female SRNs were officers and Lance Corporals are not allowed to go out with officers. Needless to say hormones took their natural course and being a gentleman I was escorting a young Lieutenant back to her accommodation in the officers mess for she was slightly worse for wear in the alcoholic sense. I safely poured her into her room and let out a huge sigh of relief that I had managed to get her to her room without being caught.

Being the perfect gentleman I decided that I had pushed my luck and turned to leave, upon sneaking out as inconspicuously as possible I turned the corner to bump headlong into an apparition dressed in red and black saffron nightie, curlers and a head cover, clutching a water bottle and a half empty cup of cocoa, having spilt the other half all over me. This perhaps wouldn't have been such a problem if it hadn't been the Matron. The Matron being a Colonel, uttered one sentence with a sweet voice that tolled my doom, "I'll see you in the morning".

I was marched in on orders and expected to get hung out to dry. The Colonel was very pleasant, she made no reference to the previous night but asked me if I would supply her with the name of the officer who I had been seeing. I of course said that this was not possible, she advised me to reconsider and an impasse ensued. I expected to be warned for orders instead she instructed me to go and see the chief clerk. At a total loss I saluted and left, went down to see the chief clerk who closely resembled and orgasmic shark, smiling sickly across his face as he handed me my posting orders to Belize, South America leaving the next day. The lady of my heart promised to wait for me, true and faithful and write and I shipped out to Belize.

Belize for me in the first instance was exciting, new and foreign. True, there were supposed to be somebody shooting at somebody somewhere and that Guatemala was threatening to invade British

Honduras. But for me it was sheer excitement, the flight was a trooping flight, long, boring and uncomfortable. The first memory was stepping off the aeroplane and not being able to breathe, having gone from central air conditioning to total humidity. Sweat sprang out instantly and it became very uncomfortable and miserable pretty quickly. The in-country processing was carried out effectively and I was ensconced in the Medial Centre at the Staff Nurse attached to the Primary Health Care Team which was part of a field hospital set up. The team consisted of a doctor, and anaesthetist, a dentist, a senior theatre technician and an ODA (operating department assistant), myself, a venereal technician (pox doctor) and a laboratory technician as well as medical assistants and regimental medical assistants. The British Army has a routing and that is to run you about and about and just to make sure about again. We soon settled in, working with the RAF Rescue Service which would helicopter in casualties from all different parts of Belize. I soon became bored with the base life and volunteered to go on jungle secondment to the forward regiments' observation areas.

The nearest I'd been to a jungle was a few potted plants in the local park, I had no conception or idea of the conditions I would find. I quickly realised that I was inadequately trained and once again volunteered for a jungle survival course. This jungle survival course was run in the jungle training school and was possibly my first experience of what hell could be. Everything that moved stung you, if it didn't move it stabbed you or poisoned you, if you put your mess tin down and looked around your mess tin would be walking along the jungle floor carried by some incredibly aggressive ants.

We were taught how to survive, even the basic skills of keeping clean preventing crutch rot, foot rot, ear rot, tummy rot or just sheer bloody rot was a task in itself. I really came to admire the instructors. Bush medicine became an interest of mine for there was a fly that would bite you and lay an egg under your skin, the maggot would grow and form an abscess. Western medicine would have to incise the abscess which would create a very deep wound that would not heal easily. Wounds didn't heat well in those conditions. While doing hearts and minds with the natives I watched a native chew up some raw tobacco and place it over the bite and wrap it with a banana leaf. Sure enough the next morning the maggot would be in the leaf, apparently it was the nicotine that irritated the maggot forcing it to abandon its host. I really identified with the native melting pot of tribes and found great pleasure in just doing the simple things like re-hydrating a child using salt and sugar and showing the mothers how to stop their children dying, for child mortality was high. The standard of living in Belize for the Belizians was appalling, the main road out of downtown Belize city was nothing more, at that time, than a tarmac shell hole.

On entering Belize city the first thing was the smell, open sewers were everywhere, there were still buildings that had remained damaged from the hurricane which was in the late 1960's. We obviously made contact with the local hospital and there were sights that are etched into my memory. In our high tech, throw away society, the one which trained me, I had no comprehension of how people could cope in the reality of true poverty. An open sewer ran through the wards, the theatre was a filthy room, theatre gloves were washed by hand in a bucket of water. The conditions were primitive and drugs, in particular antibiotics, were in short supply.

We tried our best to bring anything that was out of date for the hospital and on days off I would work there. In general terms the Belizian people are a generous people whose population reflects through its inhabitants and the left-behind seed of the conquerors of that land. Spanish, British, French, Portuguese, Jamaican all mixed but there was a very noticeable undercurrent of tension. British soldiers were often being mugged, so much so that this became a regular feature and certain regiments took action in protecting their men which would result in conflict with a certain element of the population. Part of my duties was working with the venereal technician because I had trained in Whitechapel as a venereal nurse and I was introduced to the complex business of human behaviour when motivated by sex. If you take X number of thousand men, put them in a strange country where the price of chicken and chips is higher than that of a woman you have a tremendous problem.

The venereal disease rate was high and a soldier who had a blobby knob or an itchy crutch is less likely to be concentrating on his rapier sight or harrier hide. The command structure on the ground took a very sensible course of action, a certain number of girls were cleaned up and removed from circulation to the general public. They would work in a brothel which the Army would come each week to check the girls, each girl was given a card and registration details taken which enabled us to trace infected girls. Soldiers were told not to use the brothel or the big C, they were told not to have unprotected sex, which they of course promptly ignored. Checking the girls weekly with smears, cultures etc. opened up a whole new way of viewing life. The women, through their prostitution, were often sending money home to their families in Mexico, Guatemala, so sex was a business, a big business and along with sex came the problems of drugs and alcohol. I went out often with the special investigation branch searching for drug pushers in the places where soldiers went. The brothels were the obvious meeting points and we of course would be under cover, as under cover as you can be being white in a black bar, with a shirt and tie on!

One incident that I recall, there had been a situation where drugs had been put into soldiers drinks in order to find out where the harrier hides were or where the armoured vehicle were. This was reported and an under cover operation planned. A sergeant and I made up a team backed up by military police and regimental police and we entered a well reknown brothel. At this time both the sergeant and I smoked pipes and I noticed one of the girls, who I knew to be stamped as infected, soliciting for business. So we went across to speak with her, sort it out and came back to our table. Marihuana, or hash, has a distinctive smell, however after a few of the local barcardi rums everything smells and tastes the same, so the sergeant and I lit our pipes and sat there contemplating the futility of the exercise. I kept pointing out that I was certain that we would do a bust because I could smell it. The sergeant smiled and said he could smell it; and we both smiled and quietly continued to smoke our pipes.

Trying to stand up at the end of the evening, which was not a success from the point of view of catching these drug pushers, was not easy; for the girls had replaced the pipe tobacco that we were smoking with marihuana. The down side of this being I am allergic to marihuana and I spent the next two days being as sick as a dog.

There was a serious side to Belize, an incident that stood out in my mind was when a young soldier was attacked with a machete and disembowelled. The efforts of the team in saving that soldier's life were tremendous. He survived surgery and I was nursing him post op and he arrested four times during the night. He survived and was evacuated by Leer Jet. I doubt if the soldier even remembers, but then that's part of the satisfaction of knowing we did a good job. During my tour at periodic intervals a group of soldiers would come into the Medical Centre for treatment of strange ulcers which the British Army was just finding out about. These were caused by sandflies and they ate away the tissue. The treatment for this condition was UK based. Another group of soldiers would turn up and draw quantities of morphine, shell dressings and packs, one was not encouraged to talk to these men, however I found them to be extremely professional soldiers and had a long term professional relationship with several.

My tour of duty in Belize was coming to an end and I had kept up a faithful correspondence with my true love and was looking forward to seeing her. She had in the meantime been posted to Northern Ireland and unbeknown to me met a rather dashing RAF pilot and I ceased to be flavour of the month. Still such is the pains of young love, so I arrived back in my unit in the middle of winter with a suntan and on reporting in to the RSM he said don't bother unpacking Matron wants to see you. I marched in, saluted and sure enough recognised the very same Matron. She enquired on whether I enjoyed my tour and very sweetly asked me to go and see the chief clerk. Upon doing so I was presented with another set of orders to St Kilda and once again renewed my acquaintance with the sheep.

This tour proved far more eventful, St Kilda is an international first aid station and we were often called upon to treat fishermen from all nations who had lost fingers, cut themselves or broken their legs and the time passed swiftly.

One of the things I love so much about the Army is the dark sense of humour that soldiers have. An example springs to mind where only through an act of God two soldiers avoided being killed. The winds on St Kilda can at times be deadly and the landrover was going up from the base camp to the radar station when a gust of wind picked the landrover up and threw it over the raving; luckily on the inward island side.

The two soldiers were badly shaken, had a few bruises but all in all had born charmed lives. Later that evening in the time honoured tradition the sergeant's mess adjourned to the Puffin Bar where with great ceremony the officer commanding deemed it necessary for good order and behaviour to court martial these two soldiers for damaging Army property. With due decorum the prosecution council was chosen which just happened to be the RSM and I was elected as defence council. The whole unit was present for the court martial and I defended myself gallantly against all the charges levelled at my men such as driving without due care and attention, going out in bad weather, having a brain, being human etc. Between each allegation there had to be the obligatory round of liquid sustenance in order to oil the wheels of justice. However, on the final charge I had no defence and my clients were found guilty and it was entered on the record that soldier A and soldier B while in Her Majesty's service on the sovereign island of St Kilda did illegally fly a landrover without filing a flight plan to Benbekula Airport, and resulted in damage to Crown property and upsetting the local inhabitants by causing stress to the local sheep population. One of the chief witnesses for the prosecution was a local ram of sour temper and was totally incomprehensible in presenting his evidence (this could be due to the amount of beer he had drunk). I thought that I had defended the men well and that would be the end of it but that was not to be the case and I was court martialled for being a QA with bollocks! Needless to say I was found guilty, a costly fine ensued.

This time on my return I had time to reflect on where I wanted to go with my career and the episodes of getting into trouble dating women of my own age with qualification who were officers caused me to think that perhaps I should be an officer. I applied to be considered for an Officer Cadet and much to my surprise, everybody agreed that this was a very sound course of action. My first hurdle was pre-selection with the Royal Corps of Transport Officer Training Wing and this involved a weekend of all sorts of test, both aptitude, educational and physical.

I became an avid reader of the Times, Time Magazine and The Guardian, current affairs were an important area, one which I enjoyed and I found great satisfaction in the debates relating to foreign policy and global policy both military and civilian. The bane of my life, however, still proved to be my spelling and maths. I passed all of the selection with just two remaining tasks to be completed, the first in map reading exercise over the Brecon Beacons and the second a team assault course on the para assault course. By this stage my map reading was pretty good and I had no problems with running over the Beacons. Several of the group were not so fortunate as they were school boys fresh out of A levels and I must admit that I became frustrated with their inability to focus on the task at hand. The first stage of the team assault course was running and I fell off a rope, caught it again and then smacked into a brick wall, fracturing the big toe of my left foot. The pain was intense and the fracture was confirmed in my own casualty. The officer in charge of this particular aspect of the selection insisted that in order to be considered as a pass it was obligatory for me to do the team assault course on the next day. A fractured big toe is such an injury that every step reminds you that it's there and the only way that I was going to be able to complete that course was not to be able to feel the toe. So I applied a ring block anaesthetic which would dull the pain for approximately thirty minutes. We won that team exercise despite the fact that the officer had placed in the team most of the young men that I had had such difficulty with in Brecon. The only way to win was the team way and at times I was throwing men over the wall and being pulled up by my colleagues. The grading of the course was an "A" fit for immediate regular commissions board selection, a "B" needs grooming for regular commissions board, "C" come back later and "D" don't call us we'll call you. I was awarded a "B". I was so excited that I had actually achieved something that to me was important.

Being a potential officer cadet means that you have white tabs on your shoulder which marks you out as a POC. These white tabs seemed to act as red rags to a bull for NCOs who seemed to take a malicious delight and satisfaction at making the life of a POC as miserable as possible. Perhaps this is an essential part of an officer's selection and process but my peers back at the hospital were not impressed at all, in fact, people who I had assumed were friends turned their backs.

This taught me the lesson that in reality you are on your own and you answer to yourself and as long as you do your best with the intent in your heart then you can do no better. The POC course was great fun and extremely character building. We were given lessons on etiquette and the behaviour expected of young gentlemen. I would be curled up inside with amusement that somebody was calling me a gentleman, it seemed so unreal. The RCB (Regular Commission Board) interview dates loomed and one by one we were given out ravel warrant for the Board. I arrived at the RCB slightly overawed, very nervous but in my own quite way confident that I would do well.

We were accommodated in an officer's mess and this threw me immediately. I had never been for real and not clandestine in an officers' mess and was really thankful for those lessons in etiquette. The days passed well and I enjoyed the selection tasks and discussion. I found it quite easy to solve the physical aptitude tests set to our group until my number was called and I was given my obstacle. To this day I have never found out how to solve it and I blew it big time. I had the personality that would lock on to an object and achieve, I could not cope with an in-solvable problem and failure, but I didn't have the foresight to realise that that was the lesson, not solving the task.

One of the aspects of command that I learnt that day, that it's lonely, the buck stops with you and under no circumstances get involved in the hands on for you quickly lose overall command and control and objectivity. So I was left holding a piece of rope with my squad at each other's throats each with their own ideas of how to solve my problem, so I failed. Once again I bear no malice for failing the POC, I just didn't have the qualities that they were looking for at that stage. I was soon introduced to the cost of failure, it seems that it's okay to try as long as you win, but try and fail and you carry a stigma with you. On my return to the unit I once again faced the truth of power and a new Matron called me in for interview and she implied that my commitment to nursing was not what she expected from one of her staff nurses and my attempting an RCB route confirmed that to her. She felt that I had no place in the hospital environment and that a future in the field would be more suiting. Once again I was not prepared to accept an injustice just because it came from an officer and I applied for a redress of grievance which to my surprise was upheld. However, victory can be short term but memories of those in power is definitely long term. I became the Matron's fire brigade, every shit posting, assignment or anything that required a male SRN sure enough would have my name on it.

The good thing about this was that I learnt a wide variety of skills. For example, nobody wanted to clean the weapons, I was detailed as weapons NCO, I had no idea other than the basic concept of how to look after or fire weapons, but thanks to the Matron's insistence that I do this task which by the way was unheard of, ... that a nurse was cleaning sub-machine guns, rifles and pistols.

About this time I was on night duty and Princess Anne was due to visit the hospital the next day. Security was always an issue and all ranks were very security conscious. I heard a noise outside the ward and told the student nurse on duty with me that I was going to check it out, it was not unusual for prowlers to sneak about the hospital at night. I went outside and from the darkness a form rushed at me and I felt a sting in my chest. I picked myself up off the ground and started after the prowler. Realising that this was not a good idea, I ran back to the ward and reported the incident. It was only then that I realised that I had been stabbed, 2 inches from the heart. The wound ran along my rib, so I was lucky. It was sutured but a few days later while on leave in Weymouth I collapsed with an abscess in my chest wall which made me rather sick for a while.

When fit I went on a course and learnt, by being attached to the garrison armoury and, of course, the corps' armoury, all about the SMG, (sub-machine gun) SLR, (Self-loading rifle 7.62), 9mm pistol, fragmentation grenades, phosphorous grenades and other explosive goodies. I actually really enjoyed the task and had the opportunity to shoot extensively and became a very good shot. It was then decided that the unit needed an instructor, so I was dispatched to the Army Education School at Beckinsfield and did the Army's equivalent of the Further Adult Education Teaching Certificate, Stage 1. I loved this course, the concept of teaching and knowledge lit a fire in me which was to burn stronger and stronger as the years progressed, however, at that time I was introduced to the Army's concept of learning. The transference of skills, facts lessons, curriculum development. I achieved a good grade and on return to my unit was made an instructor. The problem being nobody wanted to be an instructor as it was an extra mural duty. The Matron found out that there was a need for a first aid instructor and I was duly sent off on a first aid instructor's course.

I found it ironic that as a qualified nurse working in casualty that I had to sit through a series of lectures of people telling me what blood was. Still I had become something of an expert at surviving the course

experience and to my surprise I really enjoyed it for knowledge can come at you from any level and you are always learning. I had a good pass on this course and returned to my unit. At this stage the unit was undergoing its annual examination for fitness. One of its weak points was health and hygiene and NBC (nuclear biological, chemical warfare). It goes without saying that I was soon deeply involved in a course of health and hygiene and soon followed by a course in nuclear, biological warfare. NBC opened a whole new area to me, one which both frightened and fascinated me. It is a highly technical course, teaching survival techniques against nuclear, biological and chemical attack. I loved it. I took to NBC like a duck to water, I even could get the maths right and returned to my unit once again ready to get back to my nursing.

The Army is great place for sports and I played a lot of rugby, did speed marching on the International Marches and took up tug of war. Tug of war is a great sport for focusing the mind. It is a very hard sport and looks easy but is in fact quite technical, as a member of the Hospital team we were Area Champions in our class which was a great achievement for "Base Rats" we even beat the Paras! Tug of war, and rugby are not sports that are compatible with nursing and the Matron did not like her nurses doing contact sports which could and did mess up the duty due to injuries.

My nursing had been continuing despite the courses for I worked as an agency nurse on my days off all around the local hospitals, more often than not in geriatrics. This moonlighting was not officially approved but on more than one occasion I found myself on shift with a nurse or nursing officer from the hospital which tended to complicate life. I then went on what the Army calls, a junior NCO course. I was particularly unimpressed with this course. It brought together all trades within the RAMC to teach us military law, discipline, map reading, shooting, NBC and the skills required for a junior NCO. I had a good pass on this course and as a result was put on another course which is Education Proficiency Certificate (EPC). I passed my EPC first time in all subjects and was promoted to full corporal. However, my life at the hospital was becoming more and more miserable as it seemed to be open warfare with "grey mafia".

This was the name given to QA officer in particular if they had the rank of major and above and I was certain that with the exception of a few tremendously graceful and generous women that in order to be Major they had to undergo a hysterectomy and stick their ovaries on their shoulders. For most were regular officers, old time army and there were amongst them some vicious women.

I have seen many people die in my career as a nurse and as a soldier and my understanding of death and dying has been refined from each experience. But the faces of the first people I saw to die always remain with me and I can remember several incidents that coloured my faith in the Army and in justice. In between courses I spent a period of time working on the coronary care unit (CCU). I enjoyed this work for it was both technical and demanding but at the same time required you to deal with people's fears of death and dying. The coronary care unit was a separate unit attached to the medical ward, the sister in charge of this ward was old school and, as God is my witness, one of the most incompetent, dangerous, uncaring person that I have ever met. Her idea of a good ward was hospital corners and beds in line for the main ward was a Nightingale ward. I remember so clearly a gentleman was admitted in a collapsed state, I did the admission and on my base line observations I noticed that the pupil reaction was unequal, in fact one was dilating out. The spasticity of one side of his body combined with these observations were obvious signs that some form of cerebral accident had taken place. I reported my findings to sister, her reply was "nonsense, this man is known and I think his symptoms are psycho-sematic" and he was to be left alone till he pulled himself together. Twenty minutes later the man died and I asked the sister was he psycho-sematically dead? Whether or not we could have saved or done anything is irrelevant, what incensed me was the injustice of the judgement.

Another incident occurred on the same ward where we had been given a new drug which was to be used in cardiac arrhythmia. The first time I saw this drug used on specified arrhythmia, within five minutes of the administration of this drug the patient died. This happened again on a second patient within a space of a few weeks. I noticed and recorded the arrhythmia and gave it to the sister saying that I believed that there was something not quite right with this drug being used with this particular arrhythmia. The very next day on night duty another patient was admitted, on recording his ECG I noticed the same arrhythmia. The house officer was a young lieutenant, fresh out of medical school and a total waste of rations.

He asked for a bolus dose of this drug and I pointed out to him that it hadn't been particularly successful and that perhaps he would consider using a more orthodox method such as lignicane. He chose to ignore me and administered the bolus dose, and the patient died. Two weeks later another patient was admitted, this time the physician in charge was on the ward and the patient was deteriorating and sure enough this arrhythmia was occurring. He asked for this drug and told me to administer it, I refused and pointed out that it had not been at all successful. The sister at this stage intervened and relieved me of the shift responsibilities, injected the bolus and the patient died. I was incensed at this abuse and the death of these patients, to my mind albeit I recognise that I had only been qualified for a few years, but I had a brain and I had read the literature that accompanied the drug and one of the contra indications for this drug was the arrhythmia that I had mentioned. I was angry, fed up and totally pissed off with QA's, I had the qualification of the officers and frequently a new officer would arrive who was junior in qualification by registration date and take over the ward. At this time I decided that I needed to get out and do something different and volunteered for the parachute regiment. The parachute regiment had always been something special to me for my father had started in the Welsh Guards Parachute Regiment, transferred to 1 Para and served his time in Suez, Aden and a multitude of places. There was I suppose a need to prove that I was as good a man as he was, so I set out to do this. Somebody with a sense of humour decided that it would be fun to have this nurse or QA with bollocks do his para training with one of the toughest units available which was 9 Para Royal Engineers.

The training was tough to say the least, anyone aspiring to get into the parachute regiment or be para trained had to be motivated above and beyond normal soldiering. Through all this training and it was very tough, there ran a esprit de corps which linked everybody from private through to officer. The instructors on the course were fit, motivated individuals and if you wanted to be a para you had to prove it to them that you were fucking good enough to be in their Army.

I honestly believe that they believed this and during the several corrective interviews that I had when I tried to explain what was allowed and not allowed in terms of military conduct and training, the true meaning of esprit de corps was introduced to my concept. And having got out of my own way I thoroughly enjoyed the training. At the end or pre-para there was a pre-test week where the unit would test you in a mock P company. I commenced my first pre-p company week at the height of physical fitness, the webbing burns, blister, pulled muscles were all forgotten as we were fired up to pass out and be allowed to attend an all arms P company. In the training area of Aldershot there exists terrain that is the joy of any instructor, for in a few miles you can encounter mud, wide open areas, hills, bush and in particular one hill known as Flagsaff Hill. At this stage the film, The Hill with Sean Connery comes to mind for this hill broke many a potential para.

The pre-selection week started with milling, which was where the biggest guy was matched against the smallest, strange methodology but effective. You basically punched the shit out of the person in front of you until the whistle blew. You were supposed to show aggression and control over anger. Closely following the milling was a ten mile full battle march with burgans weighing over fifty pounds, full water bottles and rifle. A battle march is an interesting experience between your calves burning and your lungs bursting. The technique used is called speed marching and a group of fit men can cover considerable distances with a large amount of kit. On completing the ten mile bash in the time allocated the next task was the stretcher race.

The stretcher race has gone down in history in many a Para's mind as being the epitome of pain. It requires you to carry a stretcher weighted with ammunition boxes to the weight of a fully grown man and six of you run with this stretcher for several miles at full pelt. As two front men get tired two others replace and if this seems hard as you are running across tank tracks full of mud, buried sometimes to your thighs, the NCOs would encourage you for greater effort if somebody from your team dropped out, tough, you carried on. The heart break was the hill. You had to man handle the stretcher up this hill and it was a killer. Grown men would weep and cry, there would be cursing, there would be other teams trying to get past. So all in all it was great fun.

Having recovered from the stretcher race you were quickly processed to the tri-nasium which was an assault course about fifty feet above the ground. This involved optical illusion exercises, of climbing to the top of the tower then to the top of two scaffolding poles, standing up, reciting your number and then walking along these scaffolding poles which had nuts in the middle which meant that you would have to lift your foot up to cross over and reach the other side. This was closely followed across an optical illusion jump, jumping out into nothing and punching a net which would allow you to get to the ground, you would then enter another series of obstacles above the ground which was testing for fear of heights and the ability to overcome the paralyses of fear. I was extremely confident on my first pre para that I would pass, I went into selection week fit and raring to go.

At the time I took my pre-para it was winter and Flagstaff Hill was treacherous with mud. I completed all the stretcher race, the optical illusion assault course and we were on the speed march back to the camp, going back over Flagstaff Hill. As I jumped over a ditch I landed in mud up to my thighs, my burgan and top half of my body continued forward, my knees and legs stayed in the mud. There was an audible crunching sound as I popped both knees. The agony was intense and I screamed and fell in the mud. Needless to say my para training days were over for a few weeks, however, I was committed to this course and took it again after I had recovered. The road back to physical fitness was a tough one and only achieved through the dedication of training partners and one or two bastards who said that a nurse would never make it. My second pre-para was successful and I attended P company all arms in Aldershot. The staff of P company were always extremely correct, they were tough but they were fair and I had a good P company. Test week arrived and I went into the milling, I was up against a Royal Marine Captain who was one of the biggest people I had ever seen. I was used to being hammered but this guy really stuffed me and I was plastered around that ring, if I picked myself up once I did it a dozen times and at the end amidst all the clapping and back slapping, I didn't know my ass from my elbow, in fact, I was quite seriously concussed.

We proceeded onto the battle march which I finished with no problems and were digging our over night trench when I started to lose focus and vomit. The doc who was going through P company at the same time as myself advised me to jack it in, but I would not consider it. The company sergeant major in charge of the selection was a superb individual who said that I was to get my head down for the night and see how I felt in the morning.

I felt terrible in the morning but there is this crazy macho thing about not letting yourself or the side down and the stretcher race started. How I completed that stretcher race I never knew, but I did, several of my colleagues didn't. By this stage I was vomiting regularly and had difficulty focusing my eyes. The next obstacle was the assault course and the aerial confidence test. I flew up the tower, across the poles, cited my name and number without any problems I then ran at the optical illusion jump and jumped into nothingness. I punched the air as I had been taught which should have resulted in my arm going through the netting, arresting my fall and allowing me to go to the ground. This netting was joined by wooden foot holds, as luck would have it my punch hit the wooden foot hole, so I was spun backwards and fell thirty feet. On hitting the ground I was a winded and distinctly unhappy teddy bear. The drill staff encouraged me to get on my feet and do it again, which I did. What I didn't know was that I had broken two ribs and re-fractured an old injury on my left big toe and given myself a second dose of concussion.

The selection continued, by this stage I was in my own private hell but I wouldn't give up. The steeple chase which was an exercise of charging full pelt around a series of water obstacles, was purgatory but I finished. That evening in the barracks I was a mess, logic stated that I should really give up but the only thing left to do was the South Downs battle march which was a series of hills called the Seven Sisters. The memory of that march is one of sheer pain and loneliness. Physically I was in no shape to even attempt it but I was damned if I was going to jack it, but very quickly I dropped behind the main squad and became the undivided attention of the tail drill NCOs. Every step was like a white hot knife going through my foot and every breath was torture. I didn't jack, I finished and to this day I am extremely proud that I did. However, the next morning when the results were given I had failed, it mattered not to me that I was injured and if I had been in my right mind would have come back when fit. To me all that had mattered was that I had failed and proved to my mind that I wasn't the man my father was.

On returning to my unit the Matron finally decided that she didn't want me in her hospital and I was to be posted as a sergeant to the Household Cavalry Division at Windsor as their charge nurse.

My posting was delayed, for I played a game of Rugby against the Met Police, my position was tight head prop. My opposite number was an ex Welsh Guard and he was creaming me. Our scrum was being pulled down on the blind side of the ref. I remember going down for a scrum then nothing. I awoke in my own ward with a suspected broken neck and had a series of weights on my head, a cut eye, concussion and was unable to move or feel my right arm.

Serious injury has a way of focusing the mind, you have a series of choices. Roll over or fight. I chose to fight and memories of my brother were with me always. Even in the depth of crisis there is always hope. Luck would have it that my neck was not broken, but I had damaged it and a blood clot was pressing on the spine in my neck. Being a patient tends to open your eyes to the simple things of life such as bowel actions or passing water. I was flat on my back at an angle of about 45 degrees and as a result went into retention. There is no pain quite like that of being unable to pass water, it starts as a dull ache and then you feel as though your kidneys are going to burst. I was then catheterised; what an experience! It was like a visit from Dynarod, to have a tube stuck up your penis is not fun!! I learned a valuable lesson that day and that was to let the lignocaine gel have time to work!! The relief was bliss!!! In the next bed to me was a para whose chute had not functioned correctly and he was paralysed from the neck down. We had many long conversations in the night and an event unfolded which once again proved my faith in the intrinsic goodness of the human soul, even in times of tragedy.

The Catheter was stimulating my prostate gland and I started to have an erection. Not normally a problem but as the erection grew it pulled on the tube which caused the erection to get bigger. This became a great joke on the ward but after 4 days I was in rather a lot of pain. The chap in the next bed said "What wouldn't I give for just an inch of that". The sister came and asked what was my problem, I pulled back the sheets and said this was my bloody problem. She sent a male nurse to talk to me and he went away laughing. Nobody took this situation seriously, and I was becoming distinctly fed up with it. Then with great ceremony this nurse came back followed by several of my own student nurses and uncovered the solution! It proved to be a pair of surgical gloves that had been filled with water and frozen in the correct position!! There were no shortage of volunteers to apply it! And it did the trick.

My arrival into the real Army in the form of the Household Cavalry was a unique experience. I was the charge nurse in a small medical centre and the regiment was in the role of a recci squadron. This involved armoured vehicles with armoured ambulances attached to each squadron under the control of the medical officer at headquarters squadron. The Guards have their own unique traditions and way of life. The learning curve in trying to navigate my way through strange rank systems and centuries of tradition was often an experience in which I came to grief. But on the whole it was a tremendous experience and serving with the Blues and Royals was for me one of my most enjoyable postings. I learnt responsibilities of commanding men in the field and trying to come to grips with a whole new language which involved radio procedures, weapons, tactics, camouflage and all normal duties associated with an Army sergeant. I taught first aid, health and hygiene and NBC. They even tried to teach me to ride but the best thing about a horse, in my opinion, is when it's covered with a pepper sauce.

One day, on arriving at work, there was a tangible buzz of excitement. Someone had invaded the Falkland Islands and most of us couldn't understand who and where someone had invaded in Scotland! Events picked up pace as the Falkland war started to unfold, first aid training was a priority within the Guards regiment. Practically everyone had volunteered for service, the Blues and Royals in their role of a recci squadron were tasked to play the enemy in an exercise called Welsh Falklands. The remit of this exercise was to have all elements of 5 Infantry Brigade working together in order to achieve battle readiness. Items of kit that were in short supply suddenly became available and the deployment of the regiment to Wales was achieved in admirable time. Acting as enemy even from my uninformed position, I could see that the Blues and Royals tore holes in 5 Infantry Brigade. The Scots Guards had been called from ceremonial duties and they were just not fit. From my role which was live casivac or no duff cover during the exercise, had our sections' ambulances hard at work with minor injuries. But it seemed like chaos, the most spectacular moment was the live firing exercise of the artillery and air strikes. We came back from that exercise in very sombre mood and in the course of time a squadron of the regiment was attached to 5 Infantry Brigade and served with distinction in the ensuing conflict.

At this time, after training for most of my career to fight as a nurse in a combat situation, I was unable to do so. For a while on duty in the barracks a stone from a lawn-mower shot out through my right calf muscle and spun around inside my leg. At the time I was not aware that this stone had caused so much damage but during the night I was in so much pain that I had to be admitted to hospital where an operation was performed to cut out the dead tissue. As a direct result I was unable to go to the Falklands and many of the men that I knew and had helped train, particularly in first aid, were subsequently lost. We followed the course of the war avidly, the seriousness of events started to register with the loss of ships and lives but perhaps the blackest day for the Household Regiment was when the Sir Galahad was hit with such tragic loss of life. Everybody was affected by this incident and also the night attack on Tumbledown Mountain by the Scots Guards which again resulted in considerable casualties. The Parachute Regiment along with the Marines wrote their own place by their exploits in their regiment's history.

I was a patient in the Cambridge Military Hospital and I was on a ward called 10A which was for dirty wounds and infections. This ward soon filled with the casualties that had been returned to the United Kingdom. The camaraderie between the soldiers was something I had never experienced, in fact, I felt something of a voyeur as they would relate the incidents and accounts of the battles, but one thing was clear that the Falklands war was a very close run thing. Some items of our equipment did not perform as expected, in particular, boots and the then standard rifle the SLR which proved to be very heavy when carried for long distances. Two cases come to mind during that period, one being a sergeant in the Parachute Regiment who, while attacking a position, dived behind a rock with only his leg exposed and as a result saw the cannon tracer round that actually took his leg off. He was a tremendous chap, fatalistic about his wound and determined to remain airborne. Another case was a young Gurkha who, while digging a trench, dug up an anti-personnel mine which exploded, peppering him with shrapnel. He bore his pain with such quiet courage that words alone could do him no justice.

The Sun and Daily Mirror provided packs of beer and colour televisions, cigarettes and mail which I know was greatly appreciated by the soldiers. However, one incident which stands out in my mind was when the Sergeant Major came round with the beer and goodies and went from bed to bed asking "Where were you hit soldier, how did it happen?" Famous names like Goose Green, Tumbledown, Bluff Cove were said, then he came to me and I said "Windsor Green, Windsor, Sir, in the leg". The Sergeant Major looked at me with complete incomprehension, turned smartly on his heel and took away my beer. Still there was more than enough to go round. It seemed that the night time was a bad time for these soldiers, and I unashamedly spent many hours holding the hands of a soldier as he cried through his grief. There was no glory on that ward, just gratitude to be alive and a sense that they had done the job asked, but few really understood the reasons why.

On my discharge from the hospital I was determined to get fit and continue with my career. My personal life had improved for I had met a wonderful young lady whose father I nurse, who unfortunately died from a brain tumour. We married and set up home in Aldershot and I commuted to work in Windsor. At this time I had decided that I would rejoin the Parachute Regiment and entered a serious training programme. During this training my Colonel asked me if I had considered volunteering for the SAS, I hadn't but quickly did. I then spent months running around with a burgan, up and down Flagstaff Hill and across the Brecon Beacons. I became determined to get fit and the injury to my calf continued to cause me problems. However, I was interviewed for the post of SRN attached to the SAS and was successful. In an interview with my Colonel he asked if there was anything that I was unsure of and I replied that my knowledge of dentistry, in particular infections and extraction's, was nil and he advised me to go to the Dental Corps Headquarters and ask if I could sit in on some training lectures. This I did and on my arrival at the Dental Corps I presented my case and was locked in a room with another sergeant while telephone calls were made. At that moment I had compromised my posting to Hereford which was duly cancelled and I was posted to BMH Rintel (Germany). This is probably the only time in my military career where I was really angry with the system, for in my truth I had only done as I was instructed. However, in some ways the system had indeed, in the great scheme of things, done me a favour.

BMH Rintel is a beautiful building surrounded by forest which has a backdrop of spectacular hills. The hospital itself was quite busy and I was the charge nurse on a medical ward doubling up for casualty. The unit was very tight knit, and had a great rugby team. I was soon back playing rugby and I had qualified as a tug-of-war coach and had moderate success with our hospital team. The unit RSM decided that it would be a good idea to have a senior NCO trained as a cell operator and controller for NBC and I was sent back to England.

My wife at this time was expecting and was particularly unimpressed, as the baby would be due on or about the time I completed my course. However, I attended the course and really enjoyed it, achieving a good pass. This level of training gave me insight to a whole darker side of warfare. We saw evidence of the effects of nerve gas, biological agents and chemicals. It was a pretty tough course and one of the most enjoyable parts was blowing things up and setting explosive training devices to simulate gas attacks. This culminated in letting of an ABS (atomic bomb simulator) which is a really impressive device! On my return to the unit, NBC became an obsession. I organised drills and training and took great delight in gassing the officers to see if their gas mask containers actually contained gas masks and not make-up, spare tights and ladies' sanitary towels. The frightening aspect of this was nobody took the threat seriously and even though we had some of the best NBC equipment, unless it fitted and had been tested, most of our command structure would have become casualties. To say the Army did a good job in training me can be evidenced by the following examples.

The warning for a gas attack or nuclear attack varied by location; a gas attack was identified by the banging of metal on metal and shouting "Gas, gas, gas". The warning of a possible nuclear attack was the wailing of a siren which would peak and fall away and repeat itself. Imagine then this scene: I was asleep in my quarters and not having been in Germany long, when in the middle of the night, the sirens went off. Split seconds after the first siren my wife was woken from her sleep by my sticking a gas mask on her head as I scrambled for my equipment which I always kept ready with my bug out kit. In record time I was in my suit and heading down the hill through a sleeping German village, convinced that we were under attack.

I arrived breathless in casualty to be confronted by a sleepy desk lance corporal wondering what this apparition was that had just appeared in front of him. "What's the drill", I said, the lance corporal looked at me and said "Are you okay sergeant?" "Of Course", he said "That's the local call out for the part-time fire brigade." It was a bit difficult to extract myself in full NBC combat kit without being noticed as I shamefacedly had to walk back to my quarters. Needless to say, I was not allowed to forget this incident for the rest of my career.

Alcohol was cheap in Germany and was the cause of several incidents, both on and off the camp. Young soldiers would often drink themselves into trouble and incident that marred my belief in justice, in particularly military justice, unfolded as follows. Late one night, while at home, a commotion was heard outside of the quarters. The quarters were situated in blocks of four, and one senior NCO was allocated to each block. On investigation there were two soldiers fighting on the floor below, a next-door neighbour and I went to investigate. The soldiers turned on us both and we had to restrain them. Having successfully done this, I went back in to my house, expecting the incident to be over. However, one of the soldiers, as drunks often do, decided that he would take matters further and kicked the door down to my house. In the ensuing brawl, my nose was broken and my wife struck. The soldier was eventually restrained after having gone berserk and was duly arrested by the Military Police. Three days later my wife went into premature labour and my son was born. At his delivery it was found that being premature his lungs were not functioning properly and he suffered from respiratory distress syndrome. It was touch and go whether he would survive, but thanks to the dedication and skill of the scabu unit (sick children and baby unit) he survived.

The case against the two soldiers was referred for court martial and written statements were taken and the military justice machine ground on. When the Colonel of the hospital reviewed the case he decided that there was no case to answer for court martial and that the soldiers had served sufficient time in jail. Both soldiers proceeded to taunt myself and my wife, in fact one was so unbalanced that it was necessary to request that the Army should do something. They did nothing, and one year after I was posted back this very same soldier murdered his wife.

At this time, fate once again took a hand and the wound in my right leg was really causing me problems. Despite continually trying to maintain my fitness, something just wasn't right. While playing a game of rugby, I wasn't quick enough and got hit by two players both going in different directions and my right knee popped. When the surgeon was examining for what he thought was a torn cartilage, he noticed that the scar on my leg was looking unhealthy and decided to do a scar revision. The operation was performed but unfortunately I developed a deep haematoma (blood clot) which became infected. This led to a sinus which discharged a lot of pus. The wound would close and I would develop a deep tissue abscess and at this time, due to the results of the incident previously mentioned, I was posted back to the Cambridge Military Hospital. Upon my return I once again met my old friend the Matron and once again started my travels by being posted directly as medical cover to the Greenham Common Cruise Missile Base.

At Greenham Common the Army had a thankless task of guarding a US base from our own people. The Americans provided little or no support and we lived in huts surrounded by mud and miles of fences. The women, who were demonstrating, had that right and a whole new face of human behaviour presented itself. After a period of time we became expert in predicting when trouble would occur, it was usually pre-empted by the arrival of International Greenpeace coaches and TV cameras. The chanting women who demonstrated normally could be understood but feelings ran high and the women would force entry by cutting the fence and our job was to stop them. A crowd turns into a mob at a very noticeable level of noise, the singing stops and a sort of primitive growl erupts and the mass surges forward. The defences in the wire were quite complex, yet somehow these women supposedly untrained, would cut S razor wire in a few seconds and storm the gap. I doubt if soldiers could have done it any better and I am certain that some of these women were not domestic housewives. However, I noticed that the soldiers were reluctant to touch the women and would move back, their NCOs and the Ministry of Defence police would push them forward to contain the women. The situation changed when we started to take casualties. Women sprayed mace, threw pepper and stuck us with knitting needles. Once the soldiers saw their comrades going down the situation deteriorated and indeed women started to fall. In one incident, I went to the assistance of a child who was caught in the wire, the next minute my face was a mass of blood as I was hit by a brick.

I was conscious that there were television cameras and removed my beret, in the next fifteen minutes or so that it took to regain control I fought with every ounce of my being just to avoid going under this mass of women. This set the pattern of confrontation, the women who lived by the fence would throw shit at us, tamales and abuse, the soldiers, bored, cold, fed up would taunt the women and so the cycle of violence continued. At the end of my tour I went back to the hospital and was called in by the Matron and asked about my experience. I said little and she said that she had something she wanted me to see. She played a video and there on the video was this soldier with a red cross on his arm thumping the daylight out of a bunch of women. Well, you can guess, I was posted directly back to St Kilda!!!!

This proved to be my final tour of St Kilda, but an extensive one and it presented me with both tragedy and comedy. The tragedy unfolded when one of the civilian workers came in to the Medical Centre complaining of a headache. His base line observations were normal and he was known as a bit of a drinker. However, I felt uneasy as part of his speech had the hint of a slur and decided to keep him on observation in the Medical Centre, checking him every fifteen minutes. After about an hour he started to show definite signs of cerebral vascular accident, in other words he presented as a bleed in his brain. I quickly alerted the emergency air sea rescue but as often is the case in St Kilda we had a severe storm and it was impossible to launch the helicopter. The helicopter finally arrived and he was evacuated off the island but died on the journey. The close knit community was devastated by this and I felt such feelings of helplessness.

This seemed to set the tone for my tour for another soldier, while working outside, had the wind blow a window open while he was using a screwdriver. The screwdriver entered his eye. This presented a meredith of problems, he had removed the screwdriver but there was no way of assessing the damage internally to the eye as it had entered by the tear duct. He was duly evacuated off the island and I'm glad to say made a full recovery.

One of the main problems on St Kilda is that there is little to do in terms of medicine except in cases of accident or air sea rescue. Some of the rich humour that can only occur in the Army occurred during this tour. St Kilda is a military sensitive area and we received a series of confused signals relating to a Russian nuclear submarine which had had a nuclear incident in its reactors. Rumour has it, or so the story goes that the officer commanding decided we would have a submarine watch just in case it surfaced in St Kilda. The irony of this situation was compounded when the next morning we awoke to find a Russian fishing vessel in the bay. The officer commanding, being a Marine, decided that the only course of action was to board this vessel and arrest the crew until the arrival of support units. Events unfolded where a boarding party left for the vessel and a general purpose machine gun was set up with the instructions from the officer commanding that if he didn't come to the bridge waving a handkerchief fifteen minutes after boarding the gunners were to open fire. This disturbed the peace loving RSM left to man the machine gun but the OC and the boarding party sped off in the Gemini. Ten minutes passed, then twenty and there was still no sign of the boarding party.

The conversation that ensued back on the beach went along the lines, "Well, you'd better open fire then," "\*\*\*\* \*\*\*, you open fire!", "No, you open fire", needless to say no-one did and finally the OC gave the all clear. What had transpired was that the fishing vessel had just stopped to pay a visit and the Captain, with Russian hospitality had offered copious amounts of vodka. The minor matter of communicating to the firing party had been overlooked during the celebrations. It turned out that this Russian submarine was in the China Sea!

Another amusing incident was when a bear, I believe the Hoftmeister bear, escaped on Benbekula. The OC decided it would probably be a safe precaution to have bear watches and true enough the bear guard detail spent several fruitless days watching the expanses of water. We in the mess decided that this definitely was not a case of "following the bear".

Humour aside, in order to contribute to the safe welfare of animals, it was often the case that oil soiled birds were brought into the Medical Centre to be cleaned, looked after and then released. We rescued many dozens of birds. However, one incident in particular was not a success, we often had shags, guillemot and puffins as casualties. Cleaning a bird which has been oil soiled is a specialist task for which the RSPB on the mainland had left quite precise instructions.

One day a fully grown guillemot was brought in and I instructed the medical assistant, who was new on the island, to clean the bird, which he did. My room was in the Medical Centre and during the night I could hear this squawking and clucking from the bird and in the morning I went in and was greeted by the sight of this fully grown guillemot without a single feather on its body. I was distinctly surprised and not a little bit upset and asked the medical orderly to show me what he had cleaned the bird with.

He then presented me with a tine of industrial paint stripper which was not conducive to a healthy recovery. Sadly the bird died and it was buried with full military honours followed by a wake in the Puffin Bar.

My skills with animals in retrospect needed refining but I applied all my knowledge and training to assisting distressed animals. Another incident related to a St Kilda sheep, which are a rare breed, specific to the island; one sheep was brought in with a broken leg which was in fact a compound fracture. I anaesthetised the sheep and did a superb job of resetting the leg and plastering it. Two weeks later, I re-applied a more permanent plaster and the sheep, who I had named Matron, was recovering very well. With the plaster still wet I asked the medical orderly to place it in a specially constructed pen which he did, however, he neglected to shut the door and the sheep legged it at a fast rate of knots up the cliff. The sheep obviously didn't realise that trying to go round corners with one leg in plaster altered its centre of gravity and as it scampered away we could only watch in horror as it sailed over the cliff. I was upset by this incident much to the amusement of my colleagues.

Severe storms often washed up North Atlantic seal which had been cut by debris and the men would bring them to the Medical Centre. I would clean the wounds and suture them, hold them for a few days in the bath and then release them. One day two men brought in a large adult Atlantic seal and on examining the seal I saw a gash on the abdomen. I spent about two hours cleaning and suturing the wound which was bleeding quite profusely. I was concerned about this animal and on the next helicopter re-supply trip, the vet and a member of the National Trust were flown out. When the helicopter arrived, mail was delivered and as the post NCO I was sorting the mail and directed the vet and his colleague to where the seal was kept. I was quite glad for this seal had been hissing and barking and generally getting more bad tempered with me during its stay. The next thing I heard was a snigger, followed by bursts of hysterical laughter, the vet came out with tears streaming down his face. The National Trust representative was crying so hard he could hardly stand. Obviously concerned that the seal had taken a turn for the worst, I asked what the problem was. The vet very kindly said between his tears, "Do you know the anatomy of a seal?", needless to say I didn't. And he gently asked me did I know where the working bits of female seal were, suddenly like a bolt from the blue I realised what he was implying and yes, I had sewn up the working bits of a menstruating seal. They were laughing so hard they were fit to burst and they promised me that on their life they wouldn't tell anybody and I promptly removed the sutures from a really pissed off seal. It was a natural mistake, for I assumed that the working bits of a seal would be between its flippers. The vet and his colleague assured me that on their life they would never mention my misfortune and I paid for their silence with copious amounts of alcohol, and thought that that would be the end of the matter. Imagine my dismay when on reading the gunners' magazine there was a full account of a new form of tampax for seals.

To say my life became awkward was an understatement, it seemed that from every part of the Army people were sending me sanitary packs, tampax and the like. And from that day whenever I had a group of soldiers together the matter of the seal was usually raised in the subtle form of the soldiers' oinking and clapping their hands like flippers.

My tour came to a sudden end when out running in order to maintain my fitness, I was hit in the face by a piece of metal and cut my nose off. The problem being it was still hanging on and when I put my hand up to my face I actually put my finger through my nostril. This presented very practical problems with talking, particularly when I had to give details to the air sea rescue for my own evacuation. I was duly case-vac by the same helicopter crew that I had come to know so well and arrived in Benbekula where, because there was no doctor I was without ceremony, given a couple of glasses of whisky and dispatched to the local vet! The local vet was off duty and had indulged in the pastime of Benbekula of participating in the consumption of malt and was rather three sheets to the wind when I arrived. He decided that there would be no problem in sewing my nose back on, and I must say he did a pretty amazing job.

When I arrived back at my unit my hair was long for there were no barbers on St Kilda and I had been there for over three months and I looked as though I had done ten rounds with Rocky Marciano. This proved to be the final straw for the Matron and she despaired that I was ever going to be her ideal of a nurse, and this time I was posted to the RAMC training depot as a clinical instructor in its training wing. A new phase of my career began.

Life in the training depot was exciting for being involved in the training of the technical skills required by combat medics from basic training through to para-medic was extremely rewarding. Having passed my

senior NCO course and advanced instructor's course, I enjoyed the work in the division tremendously. There was a degree of friction between the field rats and a hospital wallah as I was known. But the professionalism of these instructors is first rate and through the leadership of a new officer commanding, who was a female major, led us to have a very positive effect on training. At this time I continued my interest in NBC and I can remember that on one occasion I was due to address the full unit on the chemical threat. The Army has a doctrine and policy relating to possible threats, the theory at that time was that the main threat was posed by the Eastern Block alliance. I researched my presentation thoroughly and decided that perhaps there could be a new approach to the seriousness of NBC which in truth was not taken particularly seriously. And in front of the unit I gave the following scenario that at some day in the future British soldiers could be exposed to chemical or nuclear attack in the Middle East as part of a multi-disciplined reaction force trying to secure the world's oil supply. You must remember that it was 1989 and this concept was not part of acceptable Army doctrine, the presentation gave the scenario that a hostile force would have taken and seized the oil fields in either Arabia or Iran. The Iraq/Iran war was in progress and it was not inconceivable to me that this could easily spill over through the action of fundamentalism into neighbouring states. The presentation was not well received and I received a severe dressing down from my commander. I wonder it, during the Gulf War in 1991, he reflected on his conversation with me?

My leg wound was causing me considerable difficulties; I had the feeling that something was not right. The commanding officer had decided that all staff NCOs would commence physical training as part of the unit's fit for role assessment. I could not pass the simple basic fitness test which required me to run in a squad for one and a half miles and a free run of one and a half miles in ten minutes, followed by a combat casualty carry. As a result I was placed on remedial physical training which required us to do long runs across the training areas of Ash Vale. The pain in my leg grew steadily worse and I grew steadily sicker, I was certain something was severely wrong. On failing a retest, the commanding officer decided that he would make an example of malingerers, a category to which I was added. There was a public shame attached to a full sergeant not being able to pass a test which even the rawest recruit could achieve and once again I was placed on remedial training and clearly told that if I didn't pass I would no longer be considered as fit for role and all prospects of promotion would finish. There was no redress and despite the fact of seeing the doctor each day, it was suggested that I lacked moral fibre, my anger and shame at this accusation burned deeply and I was determined to pass this basic fitness test. The agony of the ensuing week was like a journey through hell, the pain was so intense I alternated between fever and vomiting, the physical training staff put this down to just not being fit, however, the test day arrived and I ran in a cloud of agony.

I passed, and on passing, collapsed. Later that evening my leg was operated on and I was cut from my knee to my ankle and one pint of pus was removed and at that stage I was diagnosed as having chronic osteomyelitis. To make matters worse, several of the tests showed that there was a suspicious growth in my bone which was thought to be an osteosarcoma. During the next months I had approximately five operations and my leg was broken during one of the operations and it was at this stage it was suggested that perhaps I might have to consider the fact I had a bone cancer.

My wife at this time had been through tremendous turmoil with my being posted continually away and this next episode caused her obvious concern. We discussed the possibility of my death at great length and decided that it would be nice to try for another child just in case the worse scenario was realised. We were incredibly lucky and she fell pregnant immediately. Her last pregnancy with our first son, James, was complicated, not only by circumstances and events but by the fact she had a problem with blood groups and blood pressure. Her second pregnancy must have been for her a personal nightmare for I was admitted to hospital with yet another series of deep tissue abscesses and was extremely ill. Our second son, Charles, was born and Elizabeth had an extremely rough time of things. She, however, bore all of the events with great fortitude. I was admitted again to hospital for bone biopsy of my right tibia and the results were inconclusive and it was felt that the prime diagnosis should be chronic osteomyelitis. Osteomyelitis is a condition best understood by comparing it with a sponge and the infection gets in the sponge, it is extremely hard to eradicate and quite high levels of toxic anti-biotics are required. At this time I notice a change in attitude from being a long term patient, one of the QA sisters implied that I was interfering with my wound.

This accusation was such and injustice that I demanded that I have a case review and a second opinion. I was duly transferred to another military hospital in London, this in turn applied tremendous pressures on my wife. It was while I was at this hospital that a condition set in where the nerves had been damaged in my leg and the scar tissue was such that I was unable to walk. This nerve damage set up a chronic pain for which no analgesia could dull. This pain was to be my companion for several years. The Army, at this stage, decided that the damage done to my calf and leg was such that I was no longer medically fit, I was given the choice of staying in the Army as a sergeant for the rest of my career or a medical discharge. The assessment board assessed my disability at 50% and at thirty years old I was discharged from the Army, sick both in body and mind and unable to walk.

The back-up from the Army was nil, I had a lump sum for my service and found myself in a totally alien environment with a wife and two children and, of course, mortgage. There was no help, advice or counselling, I was unable to continue in my profession as a nurse, I was in fact up the creek without the proverbial paddle. Crisis often focuses the mind and I had to evaluate what I could do against what I could not. One thing I could do was drive so I invested my money into a specialised tail life vehicle and started a transport company for the import and export of computers, high tech goods and medical equipment. My experience in this field was nil, however, I was certain that we could make a go of it. We started with one telephone and a tape recorder, I had recorded the background noise of an office and when the telephone rang I would play the tape. Little did people know that I was in the spare bedroom of my house. I read extensively on import and export law, documentation, rules and regulations of transport and very quickly started to be successful by providing an export service to small companies. Contract quickly followed and I drove all around Europe, quite often from Capital city to Capital city and due to the weight of my vehicle and its class I managed to pick up national traffic from English companies abroad. Our success was such that we quickly grew to having seven international vehicles, the neighbours started, quite justifiably, to get upset and at this stage we decided to seek external funding for a depot and warehouse. It was at this time that my old personnel officer, who had retired, came to see me. He worked for a company called Allied Dunbar, he was impressed with what he saw and the operation of the company and felt that he would be able to secure introductions to venture capital. A meeting was duly arranged with a senior Allied Dunbar representative in their headquarters in London where we were introduced to an individual who was presented to us as a representative of a merchant bank. His card said that he was an accredited official to Rothchilds bank. We could not believe our luck and over the coming year negotiations proceeded to a point where the Allied Dunbar executive and the merchant banker came up with a plan which involved a total rethink of the business plan.

They presented a case to us which stipulated that as a financial institution they had assets which had been secured from companies which had gone into liquidation, What they needed was a motivated individual to head this project and I fitted the bill, they assured me that with their backing and financial management the project would be a success.

As this story is written about facts, I make no reflection as to why thing occurred, I only chronicle the events. The financial advisers arranged a series of inter-linking contracts with a legal document called "a cross debenture". This meant that they owned 49% of all the satellite companies of which there were eleven and 51% of the holding company. A plausible business portfolio was put together and I wrote the business plans and forecasts along with the concepts for the eleven companies. The first stage of the plan was to hand considerable sums of money over to the financial managers as "consultancy fees" and secondly to make applications to the DTI (Dept of Trade & Industry) Regional Development Department for re-location grants for the various companies. The central pivot was the freight company, second to that there was an import and export company, closely linked to a wood importation firm which was set up in the free port area of Wales. The logic behind this was that we would only pay VAT on the finished wood. Linked to this was a company that specialised in providing windows, doors, roof joists, etc. for the building industry. Attached to this was a specialised wood company that built working models of cars for Harrods.

Another company was a period reclamation company closely linked with a demolition company, thus the basic framework was built to have a core business interlinking in the manufacturing industry to attract maximum DTI Regional Development assistance.

I worked practically 18 hours a day and loved it, I travelled extensively and succeeded in the implementation of the first stages and opened a factory in Wales. At the same time the transport company was due to move to Telford to make use of the new business parks as a potential source of the specialist services that we ran. All the DTI applications were duly lodged and we were informed that funds had been approved. All my employees were given the option of relocating to the new depot and those that chose to go were given an attractive relocation package which included mortgages arranged by the financial adviser.

At this stage my trust in ex personnel officer and the financial consultants was starting to become a little stretched. However it was reinforced when the financial advisor arranged a £10,000 facility to open a factory and the equipment started to arrive, not before I had paid outstanding bills for warehousing and recommissioning of the plant. We had supported this project totally from our own funds which were becoming distressingly short and my exposure due to the directors' guarantees and the debentures was great. We kept on being told that the DTI money was in the process of being finalised and that all mortgages had been agreed. I moved to Wales and established new contracts for the transport company and slept on the warehouse floor during the commissioning process. I had to run from site to site organising and solving problems on the spot and continually trying to maintain the forward momentum of the project. The whole of my extended family and employees, whom I had motivated and who believed in my truth and vision, committed wholeheartedly to this. Elizabeth, by this stage, had smelt a rat and I was caught between the devil and deep blue sea. The crunch came when we started having to pay off private bills for the financial adviser and the banker. They stopped turning up for meetings, the offices in London were empty, there was no reply to telephone requests or faxes. In desperation I called the DTI, gave them the references to be told that they had no record whatsoever of any of the applications. The whole thing was a complicated fraud involving relocation grants and mortgages. My world came tumbling down like a rotten deck of cards, I was left with employees without wages or homes, there was nowhere to turn. I called the police who put me in touch with the fraud squad and a sordid trail of deceit, lies and fraud began to unfold. The banker was an un-discharged bankrupt, a close friend of the senior Allied Dunbar executive. There was no redress, we had been well and truly fleeced.

Allied Dunbar denied all liability under the clause that they did not employ anyone, they only had self employed representatives working for them and were not liable for the actions of their staff. We commenced legal action and Allied Dunbar representatives, Sun Alliance kept me tangled in paper work and requests for details and more information until all funds ran out. As a limited company we were not entitled to legal aid, the fraud squad was powerless as it would take years to resolve and white collar fraud was not a violent crime. We chased the police frantically to try and find these individuals and the more we learnt the dirtier the pond became. It involved the Masons, the Old Boy network, underhand dealings from a high street bank and it showed the total corruption that exists within the financial sector. At any costs the financial institutions were not going to help and a trail of cover ups and payments finally led to the result of total and utter ruin for my wife and I and our employees.

I have always considered myself an honourable man with an inherent belief in justice and that right will win through in the end. My naivety was to cost me and my family dearly. The final blow came when our solicitor was struck off for misappropriation of the client's funds and we were left totally exposed. The law society refused to help, there was nothing left to do but face the barrage of broken hopes and the huge debts. Leasing companies have a policy which will be familiar to those who have been unable for whatever circumstances, not to be able to pay the lease. They repossessed our vehicles and sold them at auction for a fraction of their cost, we were not allowed to arrange private sales where we could have realised the intrinsic value of the asset. We were just left with the shortfall. Part of my nature is not to give up without a fight, I streamlined the business back to the freight company and made offers of payment to most of the creditors and worked practically all hours driving the one van and using the services of both my brother-in-laws as additional drivers. We were holding our own when a vehicle was stopped on a Department of Transport check and weighed, the vehicle was found to have an overweight back axle.

This was impossible for the computer programme my wife and I had designed listed the gross weight of all items and when the vehicle was stopped there was only one computer on board. I asked the Department of Transport to investigate because the vehicle should have been allowed to carry at least another ton, and on investigation they found that the tail lift, which had been fitted by the factory, was such a weight that the vehicle was overweight when empty. This was another fiddle carried out by the sales representative of the two companies which supplied our vehicles, it also meant that our vehicles would have to be upgraded and would require an operator's licence to run.

The rules for a legal freight company are strict and quite rightly so, In order to pass as fit for an operator's licence you need to have a certificate of professional competence for national work and a certificate of professional competence for European work. I then had to enrol on a course to study for these exams which I duly passed. However, in order to be granted an operator's licence by the licensing authority you need to fulfil a rigid criteria. The main on being able to prove that you have enough financial standing to support your operations. We had no chance; so finally, after exhausting every avenue and working myself to a standstill, the door closed.

I have never asked for help from anybody about anything in my life, but my wife was at her wits end and contacted the RAMC Association. This association collects fees from all its members during their service in order to assist ex corps members in times of distress. The RAMC Association sent a retired colonel to see my wife. The ensuing interview left my wife extremely distressed as the colonel said it was our own fault and of our own making and did not constitute distress, despite the fact our house was being repossessed and the health of our family was suffering. My leg, at this time, was twice the size it should be because I was driving and working insane hours. Something snapped inside of me and I felt so full of guilt that I had let down all those who had believed in me and my vision that the only way out for me was to find these individuals and make them suffer just some of the pain, indignity and loss that we and our friends and families have lived through. I decided that I would take them hostage, plant explosives and through my frustration at the injustice would force the authorities to at least listen. To this end I planned what I was going to do in great detail. I fully expected, or probably wanted, to die. I knew what the security services and the police would do and how they would respond and evolved a system where an electrical circuit would be attached to the mains in the house which would trip if power was cut. I still had a lot of my Army equipment and items that I should not have I bought. I envisaged that they would have to assault the house, possibly from more than one direction and with great probability the use of flash grenades or tear gas would be a factor. My only problem was how to make a bomb and with a little bit of ingenuity and remembering some of the training exercises that I had been on I started to implement my plan and slipped quietly but swiftly into madness.

From what my wife told me I went into catatonic shock and I remember nothing but darkness. It was like someone had turned a switch off inside my head and the fragmented reality of my truth could no longer hold me in any form of framework and I ceased to be.

IT was happy, IT was content, IT was darkness, soft silky, warm but total. IT stirred with a primeval concept that something was interfering with the nothingness, IT was aware that peripheral to its existence there was a bright light. This light disturbed IT's silence. The light was invading IT's darkness. IT felt fear and under no circumstances would IT look at the light. Then suddenly the light became central and the universe of darkness became flooded with the stars and light and colour flashing through the vortexes of time, space and dimension and I woke up.

I awoke with total awareness, what happened? Where was I? Had I been in an accident? My body felt as though it belonged to somebody else and as I slowly orientated myself to my reality I was surrounded by mad people. There were people talking and screaming, banging walls, old ladies muttering, where was I? In hell? No... I had awoken from my catatonic state in a psychiatric hospital. The shock of the realisation of where I was, was like a bolt of electricity, my nervous system was out of synch with my mind. My body wouldn't do as my brain instructed. Every person I looked at was surrounded by beautiful colours and the vortex of rainbows would flash in and out of their bodies. I heard voices, music and could see translucent individuals of great beauty and great compassion. I felt that I had gone totally off my rocker!

Being an in-patient in a psychiatric unit gives you an insight to the shadow of humanity and the well of despair that individuals plummet to when they step outside the accepted perimeters of normal. I felt a

strength surge through me but I felt discarnate and not connected to a physical being. In fact, I was rather pissed off with the physical being that my spirit was attached to for it was in pretty poor shape. Nursing staff would come and call me by name, this caused me great confusion for they were strangers and their voices sounded as though they were at the end of a long tunnel. I had great difficulty in coping with the lights that I saw both in people and my surroundings, and when I looked at a person it was as though I was entering the very essence of them and I could feel and read their emotions, their hidden places, their loves, their hates, their joy, their sadness and to make matters worse they, or at least some of them, could sense that I was seeing them in their totality.

The days were a mass of confusion between stages of sheer panic and a deep serene peace or knowingness. It was not without its humour for when the psychiatrist would come on his rounds he would ask me how I felt, I had no reason to lie and told him what I could see and how I perceived the lights, voices and figures around him. The standard reply was "Well, no matter we'll adjust your medication", and it reminds me of an interesting saying which I learnt whilst doing my psychiatric nurse training. "Neurotics build castles in the sky, psychotics live in castles in the sky, and psychiatrists collect the rent". At this stage I discovered a desire to sculpt and in occupational therapy found that I was actually quite good at it. Tests continued and during these tests I can clearly remember one where I had a flashing strobe light placed in front of my eyes while they measured my brain activity. To this day I remember the beauty of that experience for during the whole test I was drifting in the most beautiful space, full of silvers and blue colours and I could clearly see and identify nerve neurones and synapses within my own brain, at that moment I believe something fundamental occurred which I am unable to rationalise in words. But the result was that my total perception on what I saw in the reality I lived changed forever, and afterwards I was able to start the task of integrating this new perception and awareness of me back into the vessel of my physical body. I had been sectioned for my own safety and that of others! under the mental health act and during this period I had visits from my wife. The clearest recollection of these times and visits was her pain, dis ease and sheer inability to comprehend this new being in the body of her husband. In fact, she looked closely into my eyes and I clearly remember her words... "I don't know who or what you are, but you are not my husband and I want him back." However, there was no coming back from this position and I felt a deep sadness enter my soul.

I was discharged home and once again was faced with all the pressures that my wife had been holding on her own. The medication that I was on was extremely toxic and I instinctively felt that these drugs were actually hindering the process of integration and causing me harm. I decided that I would not take them, however, my wife on realising my resolution, still had the power of attorney and in her truth felt that my condition was not stable and I was once again sectioned and placed back into the hospital.

At this stage I was certain that I was completely sane, true my reality was not the same as others and true I could still see and feel all that I have previously described, but there was a rightness about this, one which touched a deep, primitive faith. I had changed as a human being and my task was to integrate this change and continue the journey. This presented me with very practical problems of how to discharge my duties to my family and the debt that had occurred as a direct result of the failure of our business. This time instead of trying to fight the process with my mind I contacted what I believe to be my universal truth and asked for understanding and guidance of the situation. I needed to find a job and with my history of illness, and some would say state of mind, it would be practically impossible, however, one of my old competitors was in need of a salesman. I called him and told him the truth and he offered me a job on the spot. The parent company was a respected German transport group and I went back to the hospital with a job offer and as such they could no longer hold me and I discharged myself from the hospital. There were conditions that I attended a day centre, but this proved to be a total waste of time and I soon discontinued it. On my return home I had new direction and purpose. This time I poured all my medication down the toilet and determined that I would survive and move forward.

I started with my new job and quickly found that my new perceptions could be used to benefit me for I was able to understand people's motives and could quickly ascertain whether a project of task could be closed profitably or not. I was very successful. At the same time I was looking for answers to try and make some sort of rational sense out of my reality.

On a domestic level I could clearly see that through circumstances the relationship had terminally suffered and the dis ease and disharmony within the family could only be healed through my leaving. There is no easy way to end a relationship which had started in love and now bordered on anger, hurt and confusion. So I took the decision that it would be in everybody's best interests if I left and duly moved into boarding

accommodation. The only thing that I could do that was constructive in order to help my family was to take on responsibility for the debts. Debt on any scale chips at the very fabric of your being for you never feel free and although most of our creditors had their loans insured from their point of view against default, there were several people who had trusted my word and who were in no such position. It was these people where a few pounds meant a lot. I had a good salary and settled with my estranged wife half my salary, the remainder I used to negotiate debt repayment, lodgings and of course living costs. Having never been to court the experience of County Court and Crown Court judgements proved to be harrowing in the extreme, so I then proceeded to the best of my ability to discharge my liabilities.

Something had changed in the core of my very being and I was seeking some form of rational explanation to the reality that I was living. I was still in a very fragmented state and in order to survive I had to concentrate on integrating the fragmented parts of myself into a new whole. This metamorphosis took place against the previously described background, my new awareness of people, emotions and the only word I can use is faith, would not leave me; so I set out on a journey to seek others who could perhaps shed some light on the situation. To this end I visited churches, spiritualist churches, psychics, clairvoyants and all manner of different individuals who professed or expounded that they had solved part of the mystery and in many cases my despair and isolation deepened as I came upon more and more abuse of spiritual energy.

My old system of logic no longer supported the reality in which I was trying to integrate. The breakdown had indeed broken my mind but in many ways this breaking down was the first stages of breaking through to a totally new concept of what humanness was about. Despite all I saw I believe that there exists an intrinsic source of universal truth and goodness and it is only through our own ignorance and conditioning, perhaps this could be attributed to our filters and perception, which in turn were inherited or conditioned from the filters of our reality. I studied Complementary Medicine and the major religions with new eyes and could feel that the power of truth had given way to the truth of the power. Healing, I believe, is a gift to humanity that exists within all, much of my learning, at this time, was, in fact, unlearning. However, that is too simplistic for in unlearning I was in fact relearning. My world included mysticism and magic, beauty and health, I learned that man was a duality of shadow and light, that the terms good and evil were subjective and more often than not manipulative; particularly in relationship to power. I studied meditation, the techniques of Chakra energies and found once again that I was out of step with many of the written and adopted truths.

Truth, I believe, is fluid and constantly evolving; the moment of thought is trapped by words and adopted as others in truth. It stands in great danger of being written in stone and thus ceasing to be a truth but a dogma and the dogma of belief can become the birch stick of judgement. I felt alive and awake and despite the problems in the material, a new form of consciousness was awakening in my being. I became acutely aware that in my understanding we existed in four distinct bodies; the body of spirit, the mental body, emotional body and physical body. Dis ease, in the first three, could filter through to physical disease. The physical body was the external manifestation in the physical world and it represented a vessel, this vessel could be used in service to others and I believe that God or the Invisible World, when invited to do so, will fill the vessel with such richness and love that it transcends our understanding of the material.

A dichotomy of tension was obvious within me for as I strived to sort out the material so to the spiritual and trans-dimensionalism would cause me to be in crisis. I threw myself wholeheartedly into the one structure or scaffolding that I could understand which was my work. I had yet to learn more lessons which would allow me to let go of the old persona, however, within the space of a year I was promoted to be the General Manager of a new company within the German Group. This involved revisiting a lot of the situations that had led to my initial collapse. The old persona was not going to let go without a fight and the new was still formative and fragile and in its infancy. As a direct result this period was a great conflict on all levels of my being, I explored the psychic and the spiritual aspects of my being while still trying to function in an orthodox dimension.

The result was chaos within my heart. Prayers to God are answered by man, by that I mean that if we list our questions to God they are always answered through the actions and statements of others, and it was at this time that I met some truly wonderful people. Each provided me with another thread which I could weave into the fabric of my truth and to each I owe a tremendous debt of gratitude for these individuals helped ground the fragmented aspects of my reality and through their love and understanding I was provided with a safe haven in which to consolidate. At this time, I became aware of nature, the rhythm of the earth, its seasons, of animals and plants, in particular I became extremely sensitive to flowers and crystals. In my reality every living thing, be it animate or inanimate, has life. Flowers and crystals actually "spoke" to me. I began to understand that man's place was not at the top of the evolutionary pile where he had placed himself through his perception of his world and his assessment of his intelligence. The uniqueness of being human was, in fact, our faults; it was these flaws that allowed us to explore the different dimensions through transcending the barriers of ignorance. An open mind spirals in a vortex of learning that is not restricted by this dimension. I discovered that through recognising the dis ease in others I was in fact addressing the dis ease in myself and through this recognition I could transcend the old patterning of understanding and embrace a new concept of holism. This was my entry into the healing arts where, once again, I studied techniques and people. Part of me despaired that the human race was still locked in a material cycle of growth, greed and decay, while the greater part of me rejoiced in the potential that mankind had for good and for love. Harmony is not a static state. It is like being at a centre of a wheel, you visit shadow and light quickly but with less expending of energy while disharmony could be described as running round the outside of the wheel of life expending great amounts of energy but not actually getting anywhere.

I evolved a cosmology in which the healer did not exist for we were all healers of ourselves. Individuals through their own work could achieve three things. The first is that they could create the healing space and this was through the purity of their intent. The second is that they would clear this space of all negative influences and energies; the third is they would hold this space in their truth through their disciplines of meditation and prayer. Having accomplished this trilogy of union they, in fact, transcend time and space and all who enter the created healing vortex deal directly with their God or belief system through their filters of understanding. It became quite clear to me that the tools needed were, in fact, props in the therapist's development and it was through the therapist's own work and reflection using whatever tool necessary to create the trilogy of the union.

I found that flowers and flower essences were able to support and individual through emotional fragmentation and change. Crystals were like cosmic batteries charged with a constant frequency and unlimited energy which could revitalise the spiritual, mental, emotional and physical bodies. Aromatherapy, massage, reflexology were all tools of telling the body that it was okay to feel safe and pleasure and through safe touch, start the complicated process of repatterning cellular DNA and RNA.

Listening skills and communication skills support the individual through the dialectic process of questioning their own cosmology. In application of the above theorem in practical terms, I was honoured and privileged to witness great miracles of self healing take place.

The integration of this new consciousness finally reached the stage of where I could no longer, in my truth, play the game and the dis ease that I was feeling in the material world of international business would not allow me peace of mind and tranquillity of heart. I felt an overpowering need to trust the process within me and get back to nursing and to researching my truth.

The internal changes that were taking place within me had very positive external results. I managed to stop the chronic pain that had plagued me for so many years, I gave permission to heal and that healing took place. I was able to walk for longer periods without the crippling agony of my leg forcing me to stop. I touched a state of grace which, in its very essence, made me feel very humble and privileged. "In the real world" my colleagues though me distinctly strange and were very wary around me. There existed within the company the usual tensions of ego and power bases and once again I was to witness corruption and fraud which was deemed business practice. I resigned from my post as General Manager and called forward for an interview as the Operations Manager for a large group of nursing homes. On travelling to the interview I was involved in a car crash and damaged my pelvis, I sat through the interview almost in a sense of disbelief, the train journey home was an excruciating one as I felt every jolt. Once again I was presented with the old conditioning and the choice was victim again or survivor and thanks to the love and care of a dear friend I survived the experience despite having nerve damage to my coccyx. I duly received my appointment which entailed relocating to a town that was not more than 20

miles away from the very factory I had opened. Who says that history doesn't repeat itself? and with this in mind I entered my new post in a reflective and pensive frame of mind. My first function was to visit all the nursing homes and do an assessment on them. My employer thought that this would take about three months, however, I had my computer with me and in reality the business practice of these homes could be quickly analysed. There was much that I found which disturbed me, the term "granny farming" would not be unjust in its application to some of the practices of this company. To my mind care is the most important issue and a society that does not nurture the very people who gave them the society is a society that is in danger of terminal moral decline. The elderly in these homes were vulnerable and had served their countries through two wars, an issue which incensed me was the policy of central buying. From a logistic point of view and no doubt the bottom ledger point of view, it was a sound policy, but from a humanistic position it was an outrage. The elderly do not eat that much, one thing they do enjoy is bread and butter or bread and jam. The central buying policy was such that the bread was mass produced, plastic and tasteless, quickly went stale and of little wholesome value. Butter did not exist, only the central purchasing of margarine and alternatives. To me, this policy was wrong and the cost involved in providing what the clients wanted such as real bread and butter was not that great when compared to the fees they were paying for the quality of life they were receiving. The clients were looked after physically very well by dedicated staff, however, the training of this staff was not in line with the new government white paper and there was no effort whatsoever to address the humanistic qualities of existence. I made out my report for the board outlining what I had seen, the needs of training, the needs to review perhaps a more holistic delivery of care.... and I was sacked on the spot. I had lasted in this job for precisely 6 days!!

I was now in a situation through my own making that presented me with the values of my truth for as a direct result I had no income except that of my war pension and disability pension. I was in a strange village with no transport and an extremely high unemployment rate. However, this time there was no fragmentation for I truly believed that in their own way my ex employers had feed me from my own conceptual need to buy in to the process of earning money. The value of my truth was that I had to trust the process and if I listened I would hear the voice of truth speaking clearly. The lesson was to get out of my own way, acknowledge the being that I had become and through an act of blind faith stop moaning about starting the journey, but to get on with it.

At this stage I was introduced to the shadow economy of the unemployed and a whole new world opened up which most normal people don't even know exists around them. It is not an existence of greyness and depression but a truly rich concoction of individuals who, with by choice or circumstances, have opted out of the constraint placed on them by society. Many of these people, through personal traumas not dissimilar to my own, were awoken as human beings, genuine, caring and loving. If there is any poison that can permeate society it is the poison of judgement. I needed to eat and to survive and despite my spiritual beliefs I became adept as "gusting" along the fields and hedgerows of the countryside. I would use my skills which I had learnt in Belize and trapped and shot rabbits, pheasants, pigeons, in fact, hunger is a great leveller and hedgehog, which is called hedgerow chicken, is delicious when wrapped in mud and baked. I came across a group of people who would be called "travellers", it was with these people that I learnt about the alternative society. Unfortunately, quite a lot of their cosmology was based on the destructive use of drugs, however, there always existed within each group an enlightened soul who would hold a spiritual space. Within the groups were amazing skills, craft skills abounded in order to supplement the giro and their ingenuity and harmony with their environment was, in many cases, a marvel. It was with my friends, the travellers, that I was able to talk about the rise of the new man for they had few barriers, maybe due to the "wacky backy" who knows? but the conversations around the smoky fires with snotty kids and didgerydoos, yapping dogs would have done credit to any debating society within a university. In fact, many held very good degrees!

I quickly, though reluctantly, established a reputation as a "healer" for I used all the gifts that I had been given in order to assist others in their search for healing or enlightenment. I ran courses in crystal and flower healing, meditation and reflexology. It seemed as though I was protected and guided for I was passed from village to village, town to town and at each location I was given a hot meal and the facilities to wash along with enough money to pass me on to the next.

It was through this period that I learned to use my skills and to deal with the issues of my own judgement and prejudices. I almost, one could say, established a route where people would be waiting for me at allotted times and places although I lived in what some would call poverty I never felt richer. I made essences from the flowers and the trees which I traded for friendship bands, craft material and of course crystals. One of the most important changes that had occurred to me was this ability to dream and when people spoke to me I would, and still do, not hear the voice but see a series of hologram pictures. In trying to explain these pictures I developed the skills of the story teller and it was a result of one of these dreams that I found myself at four thirty in the morning in the chalice well of Glastonbury. I had no idea why I was there, but as I sat meditating a young woman sat down beside me and started gently crying to herself. As I listened to her tears, her crying became deeper and more wretched as though the very fabric of her soul was splitting. I observed her process with total love in my heart, for I believe it is important to allow people to cry and it's only our dis ease at their crying that we wish to stop them. When she was finished I told her a story, gave her a crystal and within a short space of time laughter rang around the gardens. The woman left and I did not know her name, for names are but labels and not necessary and once again sat there meditating. This time another individual arrived and said that I saw what you did, can you explain it? The result of this was this person directed me to go and see the director of a drop-in institute in Glastonbury, which I duly did. They were incredible people, trying in their truth to walk their path and I was invited to join the centre as the charge nurse, unpaid of course! and thus I began the "Glastonbury Experience".

Glastonbury is an incredible place, for it is both a vortex which attracts all forms of energy and people. It has both myth, magic and intrigue and like any vortex attracts both shadow and light. Within the clinic I established my practice which quickly allowed me to fund new crystals and courses. It was also on one of these courses that I met a very special woman. I can remember the day clearly, for I was running a crystal course in the centre and this lady arrived; to say I was smitten was an understatement, for she was beautiful. She had class, and grace and one of the most gentle, energy fields that I had ever experienced. To my mind, she was an angel and I loved her with every fibre of my being. My previous experiences with this emotion have already been described and once again I revisited the old emotional patterning which I associated with love. Needles to say I would not have dared express these feeling, but one day I plucked up courage and asked her "Would you like a beer?" which she readily accepted as being Austrian, beer was her favourite tipple. And so a new journey started and although we walk each path of our journey alone and no one can take a step of this journey for us, there is a vast difference between being alone and being lonely. I knew nothing about this woman and she invited me to meet her for coffee at her home, left her address and departed. I thought the address must have been wrong for it was just a name and the town. I duly dressed for this important date in my best Glastonbury shop gear of multi coloured top, beads, crystals, different coloured shoes and the obligatory bum bag. I started to feel concerned when I turned up this huge drive at the end of which stood a magnificent house. I stopped and asked a workman where I would find Helma and he said that she would be in the house. I naturally assumed that he meant the small cottage that was in the grounds and drove to it.

There was no answer and the man came back to enquire what I was doing. I said "You said the house", "Oh ar", he said "this is the gardener's cottage, that's the house I meant". I turned and faced this huge, beautiful building and though "No way!" and promptly got into my car with the intention of getting out as fast as I could. Helma obviously had thought that this would have been my reaction and had closed the wrought iron gates leading out of the estate. She was waiting for me and pleasantly said "Nice that you could make it". With shock in my voice I enquired that did she live here, and she said of course, it was her home. She invited me to meet her mother and her mother's first words to me after looking at me from head to foot as though I was something the cat had dragged in, enquired "What do you want, you gold digger?" and my first words to my future mother-in-law were "Are you naturally so rude, or do you practice?" This set the tone for a relationship which has grown from those early days of conflict and mistrust to one of nurturing and beauty and Helma's mother became our biggest supporter and patron in the building of Laurel Farm Clinic, however, I am ahead of myself.

It is fair to say that I tried everything to make myself as obnoxious as I could for even though I loved Helma dearly, a lot of the filters of my past were not, in fact, living truths, but she in turn toughed it out and taught me once again the value of loving another human being totally without judgement. She said to me that my dream was to build a centre of teaching an spiritual peace. She shared that dream and wanted to do it with me.

When you are used to fighting for everything and you are locked in warrior mode, when the object of your dreams is presented to you, you suddenly find that the only thing you are fighting is yourself and you need to develop a whole new set of skills. What does the warrior do when the battle is over? There is a series of choices, he can look for another fight, hang up his sword or seek the wisdom of counsel. I felt distinctly at dis ease with the prospect of giving up my sword so I chose to seek the wisdom of counsel but to keep my sword harp and ready should the need arise.

At this time I had another dream which showed that the starting point for our next venture would be around a property that had a well and a spring. We looked for properties and I had no idea how we were going to afford any such property in the price range that we were looking. And once again I had to trust, then one day Helma came in with an advertisement relating to a renovated barn in the village of Carlingcott. We went to see this property which was a 300 year old farm where the main house had been renovated. The owner had financial difficulties and wanted to sell the building and half the land. It was a very nice property with great potential and I said to Helma that it was nice but I had to trust my dream. At this point the owner said "Oh, by the way, did you know that there was a well in the kitchen fed by the spring at the top of the land?" At that moment, pictures appeared in my mind of what could be achieved at Laurel Farm. Within ten days Helma had raised the capital from her own assets and bought the property.

A new phase developed where I was in the position of being able to build a dream in the physical reality, I dug sewers, laid pipes and with the Reader's Digest book of building, taught myself a lot of the skills of bricklaying, rough stone walling and building. Slowly the dream unfolded and with every brick that I laid, I laid with a prayer and within three years we had established Laurel Farm Clinic and school of Complementary Medicine. There remained one area in which I felt vulnerable and that was that I had no formal teaching qualification other than my Army training certificates, so I started training at college and passed teaching certificates and went on to pass a PGCE(FE) and I am now studying at Bath University for a MPhil/Phd. Helma has qualified as a therapist and the clinic, with the support of her mother, has moved from strength to strength. There remained but one more thing to do in order to close the circle in a sense of completion and that was to dedicate the rest of my life to my God in service. I had taken this decision in my heart and we lived our truth, quite often a stormy truth in the beginning, but soon this truth was borne out in practice. Clients did heal themselves, the teachings and the pictures continued, there is an excitement as we attract many who are indeed becoming the new humanity. For they share an intrinsic belief in good and the healing power of the universe. Miracles do happen if you create the space there is no such thing as a vacuum and it is only through getting in our own way that we preclude our own union with the heavens for in our truth we believe that its our natural state for the heavens to manifest themselves in the souls of man.

The next stage of this journey for me is to be ordained as a Buddhist priest which in turn, through the authority of my own existence, will allow me to continue to journey to enlightenment and whatever the future holds with the love of a good woman, the union of masculine and feminine can bear fruit in harmony.

There is magic, love and abundance in our lives, balanced with hard work, determination and continually facing and claiming our shadow for we believe that the light exists within all as part of the whole, the collective consciousness. It is through the transition of shadow that we can unity the several states of mind and, indeed, fulfil the trust that was placed in our hugeness and take our place in a universe fill with wonder and joy.

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**Annex C - Training Courses**

Training and Qualification  
City & Guilds Hotel Management 147  
Registered Nurse  
First Air Instructor  
Casualty Simulation Instructor  
Health & Hygiene Instructor  
Health & Safety Instructor  
Weapons Instructor  
Survival Training, European, Jungle Arctic  
Nuclear, Biological, Chemical Warfare Instructor  
Cell Operator & Controller NBC  
Junior & Senior Management  
Army Education Certificates Advanced  
Paramedic  
Pre Para Training & Selection  
RSA European Transport Management & Operations  
Flower Essence Therapist  
Aromatherapist  
Reflexologist  
Crystal Essence Therapist  
Communication Skills  
Reiki Master 1st Dann  
FEATC 1 & 2  
PGCE(FE)  
Counselling  
Stained Glass  
Glider Pilot  
PADDY Open Blue Water Diving Certificate  
Pottery Raku