

## Chapter 6 - Wales

(1973 to 1983)

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*(8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> April 2013 – over the Bay of Bengal)*

I am writing this crossing the Indian coast at 34,000 feet in a brand new Airbus A380. Gek and I are on way back to the UK for a four and a half month visit to see you, amongst quite a few other people. The flight info screen shows we are passing over Cuttack. Only another 9 hours to go before we land in Heathrow, London. But to return to my story.

## **From Spy to Nanny**

The American soldiers fighting in the Vietnam War had an acronym for situations that seemed completely messed up. FUBAR.....Fucked Up Beyond All Recovery. FUBAR was how I now felt after returning home from the hospital and it took several weeks before Jenny and I began to accept this, our new reality, and return to some sort of normalcy. During this time Mr. Cresswell, our landlord, and his wife were extremely kind to us. They lent us a TV. Whenever my eyes failed and being distracted by the TV was not possible, Jenny would read to me aloud. I was, of course, unable to drive or do any physical work due to the lack of power in my muscles, everything falling to Jenny to do for us both. Jenny even took to car maintenance, notably changing the head gasket on our old Mini's engine one time, under my supervision of course!! But as weeks turned into months thankfully, the attacks on my eyesight became less and less frequent.

And then the page really did turn when Peter and Mandy came to stay with us in Birmingham one fateful weekend. They had by that time bought a house in Wales, a cottage called Cwm Bach and the whole family was now living on the outskirts of a small village north of Swansea, Gwan-cae-Gurwen. They offered to take Jenny and me in, to go live with them in Wales. So we did.

We could not move immediately as there were not enough bedrooms to accommodate us all in Cwm Bach. The plan was to convert a barn attached to the cottage into a room for Jenny and me to use as a bed sitting room. Jenny and I did not have any money for the conversion work and in an amazing act of generosity Peter and Mandy said they would foot the bill, a friend in need is a friend indeed. Never more true. With a brighter future, Jenny and I revived our spirits considerably. I was also beginning to feel a whole lot better although I still did not feel up to being best man at Mark's wedding in March, something I am still sad about. Jenny and I both tried to return to the work that we had been so involved in before the consultant's bomb shell but our hearts were no longer in it, it all seemed pretty pointless and trivial now. All we could really do work wise was to consolidate the previous two years' efforts by writing up our findings. And so it was in early summer 1973 Jenny and I packed our bags, loaded Dad's Land Rover again and headed off to South Wales. Peter and Mandy's family was growing. Apart from Sarah, Peter and Mandy were in the process of adopting Julie having fostered her from a children's home for the previous eight months or so, in addition to which Mandy was also pregnant with Emma.

When life kicks you in the pants and you survive, you do some crazy things. Once we had settled into Cwm Bach, I took to playing the cello again and making model airplanes. Why I reverted to these childhood interests, I have no idea, I guess it helped to pass the time. By now, my eyes were functioning more or less normally but my mobility was becoming restricted by a new development. The tendons in my legs had become shortened which made placing my feet flat on the ground increasingly difficult. I ended up walking on tiptoes all the time using a walking stick to keep my balance. It got bad enough for me to consider having the Mini adapted for total hand control. About this time, the local doctor in the village began to have doubts about the MS diagnosis from Birmingham. He referred me to Morrison hospital to have a repeat lumbar puncture procedure done. I can't say I was wild about the idea but, hell, why not? What to lose? Well, the MS for one thing. From this second lumbar puncture, the test results came back negative, I hadn't gotten MS now and I hadn't had it eight months ago in Birmingham either. Bummer!!! Well, no going back now, our bridges back were all burnt and still burning. I had already written up as much as I could on the research I had already done. Although Jenny produced a thesis and had had it typed up, she didn't feel it was good enough and refused to submit it for examination. But I had been given a new lease of life, the sun was shining again and the dread of a lingering death from MS evaporated.

In July, Emma was born and we became a family of seven. I had gotten used to having young children around and to be honest really quite enjoyed the experience. When it was suggested that I look after little Emma and Sarah full time so that Mandy could go back to work early after Emma was born, I said "OK, why not?" Why some women suffer postnatal depression (PND) after some births and not others is a mystery, but Mandy had PND quite bad. We, as a group, thought it best if she returned to work sooner rather than later in the hope that her depression would lift. My health was improving in leaps and bounds by now. The local doctor had also found a way of releasing my tightened leg tendons using a prescription drug called Tand(e)ral. I have no idea why he thought it would work but it worked miraculously and I was walking quite normally again after a couple of tablets. Very strange but brilliant after months of hobbling about on tiptoe with a walking stick for company. Jenny had also landed a mathematics teaching job in Neath to start in August, so by default, I was the one left holding the baby. And I loved it, changing nappies, bottle-feeding, the lot. Mandy would leave her breast milk bottled in the fridge for me to warm up and feed to Emma during her absence at work. I was a real nanny to our little family for the next eight months. From spying on the Soviet Union, to fulltime nanny (is there a term for a male nanny?) in less than four months, from being given a death sentence to nurturing a new life. Funny old life, isn't it?

And literally funny at times too. Sarah was now two and a half and able to start at the local nursery school. I was the only man there each day to pick Sarah up at the end of the play sessions. A trip to the Bristol Zoo organized by the nursery also caused some amusement when I not only accompanied Sarah there but also brought along little Emma. But not

everyone was happy or amused with our domestic arrangements at Cwm Bach cottage. The local social worker assigned to Mandy after Emma's birth couldn't understand how or why a male who wasn't even a blood relative could be left in charge of a baby and an infant. In fairness, she was right to be suspicious, she was after all only doing her job to protect the children and in the end, she did accept our unusual arrangement.

But all good things must come to an end and by April 1974, I was recovered enough to look for a job. As a group, we were by then living on three incomes which we pooled into a common bank account with all four names on one chequing account. Caused a few raised eyebrows in the bank I can tell you. There was a time when we first moved to Wales, that we were all living on just Peter's income. We were a little hard up then and resorted to keeping cash for specific purchases in empty glass jam jars on the sideboard as a way of budgeting our expenses; one jar for beer money, one for food etc. Once a jar was empty, we would have to wait till the next pay cheque to fill it up again. So, for instance, no pub visits if the beer jar was empty. Emma was also old enough now to be left with a professional nanny, and so it was that I went looking for work and without too much effort, I landed a job as a Production Planning Manager at a bearing manufacturing factory in Llanelli.

*(6<sup>th</sup> May 2013 – Druidston, Pembrokeshire.)*

Gek and I have been in Wales for the past three weeks looking into the areas where we might want to come back to live when we return to the UK. This Pembroke visit is really a holiday within a holiday, nice and peaceful in a rented caravan on a remote farm just 10 mins walk to a beautiful, quiet beach at Druidston.

## Production Planning Manager

Getting into the job at INA Bearings wasn't that straight forward. INA Bearings is a German company for which the Welsh factory manufactured roller bearings used by the British car and truck industry. The factory in Llanelli recently had had a new Managing Director (MD) appointed by the parent company in Germany, one Mr. Chalupsky, who had been tasked to 'sort out' the Welsh operation, which up until his arrival had been losing money. I was soon to find out, Mr. Chalupsky was a rather autocratic MD having already made a number of changes to the management of the factory that didn't go down at all well with the incumbent middle managers. By the time I arrived on the scene, Chalupsky had already 'got rid of' over 20 people from the payroll, something like 20% of the work force. I should really have picked up on this in the way I was recruited. Chalupsky, we always referred to him by his surname, had me sit in the planning office ostensibly as a new assistant planner for a couple of weeks under the existing Planning Manager, Densel, before Chalupsky sacked him. And I went along with this cruel ruse. Now when I look back at it, I cannot say that I am particularly proud of myself for being part of a constructed dismissal but back then, I was still ambitious enough to take no prisoners. After Densel had cleared his desk and I stepped

into a dead man's shoes, I expected not a little animosity from the ten staff I was now the new manager of. But it didn't happen. Situation normal and I had full cooperation from the office staff and the store men out on the shop floor, right from the start.

So there I was at 27 years old, as green to the job in hand as could be imagined, planning the throughput of a factory employing 110 people with a turnover in today's money of nearly 20 million pounds. The pressure in the job came from two sources. On the one hand, the customers on the phone chasing their orders, even if they weren't late, and on the other the factory middle managers wanting production schedules and the raw materials to fulfill them successfully and on time. In 1974 the UK economy was still very buoyant and since one of Chalupsky's first acts as the new MD had been to slash the work in progress, meeting the customers' needs for urgent deliveries was a bit of a challenge. Well, more than a bit, a huge challenge, hence poor Densel's recent demise. You have to remember there were still no computers available at this time, no handy spreadsheets or bespoke software to help with the planning process, just a large A1 sized sheet of paper and coloured pencils. We would plan the factory's production schedules for the three months ahead for each of the factory's two main production lines. My staff would then implement them, ensuring on a day-to-day basis any potential disruptions to our three-month plan were dealt with in a timely fashion. For me it was a really great opportunity to have experience of different types of machining processes: turning, grinding of all types, all sorts of presses included multi stage presses, plastic molding machines, heat treatment, etc.. You name it, this one factory had it all, even thread rolling.

*(15<sup>th</sup> May 2013 - Manlleu, Catalonia, Spain.)*

Now in Spain for a few days having arrived here yesterday. Gek and I are staying with Yin Yoke, Gek's long-term friend from her school days. Northern Spain is a very green, peaceful place, unlike the tourist areas to the south of the country. This is another holiday within a holiday

I worked at INA's for nearly three years during which time I first did the production planning for the factory and later the production engineer's job, preparing estimates that provided the costings for new order enquiries. I also became the secretary of the factory's social club, organising outings and functions for the employees to enjoy at the weekends. Mind you, Chalupsky questioned why I was getting involved so closely with the shop floor workers. He couldn't grasp the idea that INA's wasn't just a place of work but also a social environment in which people made friends and often socialised after work and at weekends. I am sure he saw employees just as numbers on the payroll, not as human beings at all. He and I had several run-ins during the time I worked for him. He did use constructive dismissals a lot, bullying people until they reached a point that they couldn't take it anymore and then hand in their notice. It would seem that they had left of their own free will but in reality, they had been forced out.

From my time at INA's, I did learn that management wasn't for me. As a foot soldier with no responsibility for people, you have the impression that if only you could get the position of your manager you could do his/her job a lot better than he/she does. But when you do get the 'foreman's' job you soon find out there is another level above him that you could do better than as well and so on ad infinitum. Unfortunately, most managers rise to a position in an organization to match their incompetence. That is to say that your promotion in an organisation stops when you reach a position in the hierarchy where you fail to do a proper job. This is an immutable law, best not to go there, or at least I didn't want to go there. I decided to stay technical and go back to the tools, regarding managers with pity. It was not their fault that they have problems, as good managers are born and not made, they are few and far between.

*(16<sup>th</sup> May 2013 - Manlleu, Catalonia, Spain.)*

## Cwm Bach Life

Jenny spent only one year teaching. Teaching was not her bag at all. The comprehensive school where she taught mathematics was in quite a rough area of Neath and the children there were a little undisciplined to say the least, throwing chairs out of the windows whilst her back was turned and all sorts of nonsense like that. In the summer of 1974, Jenny left teaching and started working for International Computers Limited (ICL) at their local branch office in Cardiff. This meant an hour's travel to and from work each day but for Jenny it was well worth the extra time spent travelling. She really did not like being a schoolteacher. ICL Cardiff provided software support for local council computer centres throughout the whole of Wales which meant Jenny had on occasions to travel to Mid and North Wales. Computers were still operated in isolated computer rooms and were not in any way linked or networked together as they are today. If a problem arose with the Snowdonia County Council computer, for example, that would mean a visit from the Cardiff based staff.

With all four of us, Peter, Mandy, Jenny and I now employed in well-paid jobs, we found ourselves a lot better off financially and we could finally dispense with the budgeting jars. Yippee!! In fact, we had enough spare cash to buy a boat. Between us, we bought a second hand cabin cruiser, a Shetland 21 footer complete with trailer. The Shetland had two berths, a small galley and a toilet and was powered by a large outboard motor. We borrowed Dad's Land Rover, yet again, and Peter, a friend and I took off to bring the boat back from Devon to Wales. The Land Rover was getting a bit long in the tooth by this time and half way through the tow home I noticed that the rear beam the tow ball was bolted to on the Land Rover was flexing in a rather alarming manner. But we decided to press on anyway and, thankfully, we didn't lose our new purchase, although there were a couple of heart stopping moments along the way home.



We moored the Shetland initially at The Mumbles in Swansea Bay and used the boat for days out in the Bay, taking trips down the coast to the beaches along the Gower Peninsular. All very exciting and new for all of us, none of us having had any previous experience of boats or the sea. The sea current in the Bristol Channel on the changing tides is quite fierce, running as it does at five or more knots. Making headway against this current gives you the impression that the boat is moving really quickly but this is only relative to the water, relative to the land you are moving 5 or so knots slower. A bit like walking the wrong way along an airport terminal travelator. A lot of work done to cover a short distance. Amazing how much fuel you needed to get a boat from A to B in these circumstances. A lot less miles per gallon than you get in a car.

Not a good idea to run out of petrol out in the Bristol Channel. Not that we ever did, but we came close at least once.

For the second summer, we decided to move the Shetland on to the River Avon and we hired a mooring at Tewksbury on the river there. The Mumbles mooring was great for days out, but it wasn't at all suitable for a sleep over, the boat being tied to a buoy out in Swansea Bay and not in the shelter of a marina. With a river mooring, we could now use the boat for holidays, cruising the rivers and canals in the English midlands as well as weekends out on the River Avon or the River Severn. One memorable trip we took was from Tewksbury up the River Avon to Stratford-upon-Avon to join the Stratford – Worcester Canal, crossing over to the River Severn at Worcester and returning to Tewksbury down the river.

Mandy was by now expecting Dylan who was due in May 1975 and it was clear that the Cwm Bach cottage was going to be a bit too small to accommodate four adults and four children. In addition to the Cooper's expected new arrival, Jenny and I had almost certainly decided to start a family of our own, which would have made Cwm Bach even more cramped. When we had first gotten married Jenny and I had agreed that we didn't want to have any children but having lived with Mandy's and Peter's growing brood, we changed our minds on the family thing. It was decided that Jenny and I would move out and buy a property of our own. Initially it wasn't certain that we would settle for a house nearby to Cwm Bach but in the end we plumped for a semi-detached stone fronted house with a long



back garden in the next village to G-C-G, at 100 Heol-y-Gors, Cwm Gorse. Sadly, to be able to raise the deposit for our new house purchase we had to sell the Shetland to liquidate Jenny and mine's share of the capital invested in the boat. The house was to cost us £3000, about £40,000 in today's money, or to put it another way, one and a half times my gross yearly income that year and so well within our mortgage budget.

The house, whilst structurally very sound, needed a lot of TLC which we set about giving it with a gusto, installing a new bathroom, central heating, redoing the wiring, etc. I even made a new set of stairs from scratch. Unfortunately, I somehow got the measurements wrong and when I came to fit them, the steps became a little steeper than I had intended. Jenny was very keen to knock down a side wall between the front room and the main corridor. After a short discussion between the two of us about the possibility of removing the wall without bring down the whole house, I left home to visit the local hardware shop for supplies. When I returned to the house some 30 mins later, there was a huge hole in the dividing wall, Jenny had taken a sledgehammer to it and created one heck of a dusty mess. She was white faced and had become prematurely white haired. Needless to say, the wall did come down completely and our new home became instantly open plan.

The garden at the rear of the house got a similar makeover with a new green house and a garage being installed, although this work wasn't done until one year later. There were no existing bases for the garage or the green house. In my enthusiasm I decided that I would have the concrete delivered ready mixed and dumped at the top of the garden for me to then wheelbarrow to the prepared shuttering to form the two bases. After six hours of wheel barrowing the concrete, it was already going dark and worse, the concrete was beginning to set. I only just managed to get the last barrow load delivered to the greenhouse shuttering before both the light went all together and the last of the unused concrete set. I was absolutely whacked, positively shaking with fatigue by the time I was staggering down the garden path with the last barrow load of concrete. Thankfully, gravity helped me with this job, otherwise I would never have managed to finish before the mound of concrete hardened. Very embarrassing that would have been, but on the positive side, my volumetric calculations for the amount of concrete I needed for the job was spot on.

After waiting a few weeks for the concrete to cure and dry, we erected the green house and I had a contractor in to put up a prefabricated garage that was some 25 feet long, long enough to house a car and have a workshop area at the back. Now, at last I had a place to rebuild my 1937 Morgan 4/4 Sports Car, the car that my Dad had bought for me on passing my driving test almost 10 years previously. Magic.

*(17<sup>th</sup> May 2013 - Manlleu, Catalonia, Spain.)*

Unfortunately, Dad died in March 1975 of a heart attack when he was only 62 years old and never got to see the Morgan he had bought me rebuilt. He had had his first heart attack a couple of years earlier, in his late 50s. His passing had a profound effect on me. Overwork



was a major contributing factor to his early death. I resolved not to be that way. If the situation ever arose, where work was getting too demanding of my time and too stressful, I swore to myself that I would leave and find another job. His death led directly to me resigning from INA Bearings the following year, just before Anna was born. But I am getting ahead of myself.

When Jenny and I first moved to Wales, we still had the old Mini but by now, we had also acquired a Mark 1 MG Midget two-seater sports car. It happened like this. Jenny telephoned me at work one day and announced that she would like to buy this little car from a work colleague. As the two of them would be passing by INA's factory that day in the



MG Midget, Mk 1.

said car, could I take a look at it with a view to us buying it. Jenny had fallen for it and it being in her favourite colour, bright red, she really wanted to buy it. How to say no? It was a lot of fun to drive and although we still had the Mini, when we went holidaying in Scotland with Peter, Mandy and family that summer of 1976, we opted to take the Midget over the Mini. We fitted a tow ball to the Midget and bought a small trailer for the tent and camping equipment. This was to be a camping holiday, taking in the Scottish Highlands

and a trip over to Skye. Peter and Mandy hired a towing caravan for themselves and the children whilst Jenny and I would be tenting it. It was a brilliant two weeks away, driving the Midget the whole time with the hood down, even in the rain. Loving it.

In August Jenny's dad, Fred, came to stay with us for the weekend with his new lady friend Beryl whom Fred had met twelve months or so before through their association with the church in Edgerton. The church where Jenny and I had been married. She was a very pleasant and easygoing lady. That Saturday I had taken off in the Midget to attend a speed trail event run by the Morgan Sports Car Club on a farm somewhere near Hereford, about two hours drive from Cwm Gors. I wasn't in any particular hurry to get home that evening and decided to enjoy a night drive home from the event with the hood down, wind in my hair. It would be a perfect end to a summer's day. When I finally pulled up at the front door of No. 100, I thought it a bit strange that the house was in darkness but I just thought everybody was still at the pub up the road.

But no, everybody, including Mandy was down at the hospital in Morrison. Fred had had a massive stroke whilst he was taking a shower and had been ambulated to the hospital earlier that evening, all very sudden and traumatic. Fred was a rather large fellow and the

ambulance men had had a bit of a job getting him down the narrow stairs in No. 100. Fred was not to survive the stroke and within a matter of a few days he had passed away without regaining consciousness. What made the whole dreadful experience seem much worse was the fact that Jenny had told Fred the evening of his stroke that he was soon to be a grandfather for the first time, news that he would have been clearly over the moon about. Next thing you know he was dead.

Beryl stayed with us until Fred passed away. I really felt for her as the two of them clearly got on very well together as did she and Jenny. Jenny made the decision to have Fred cremated in Bolton and his ashes placed next to her Mums in the Turton church memorial garden. This meant transporting Fred's body from Swansea back to Bolton, a task for which the undertaker hired a white transit van. All very surreal in some ways, the funeral directors offices being in a coal yard in Morrison and them using white transit vans to move corpses around. But the job was done and the funeral was very well attended by Fred's many, many friends. Fred had been a churchwarden for years, secretary of the Edgerton Cricket Club, a member of the bowls club as well as being very active as a Mason in the Bolton Lodge.

Jenny, being an only child, inherited all of Fred's estate, which included the house at 122 Queen's Avenue in Bromley Cross. Jenny decided to clear the house and sell it as soon as she could, which realised her about £12,000 in cash. This was more than enough to pay off our mortgage on No. 100 and eventually enabled me to quit INA Bearings and start a new life restoring Morgans.

*(19<sup>th</sup> May 2013 - Manlleu, Catalonia, Spain.)*

## All Change

Towards the end of 1976 Jenny and I had a review of how our lives would be in the future with children of our own. By this time, I was well cheesed off with my days working at INA Bearings. Jenny had already decided to be a fulltime mum and had given notice to finish working for ICL at the end of the year, Anna being due in February of the next year. By happy happenstance ICL had recently set up a new 'home working' section, one of the first in the UK. The company had recognised that they were losing valuable, highly trained people when women like Jenny left to have children and the company had set up an employment scheme to keep these women in the loop by allowing them to work from home. Jenny applied to join this group of home workers and was accepted, no problem. That just left me to decide my role in our child rearing future. A no brainer really, I wanted to be there at the coalface, not missing out on the whole caring bit.

Jenny was very sympathetic to me being totally involved in the childcare thing and agreed to me handing in my notice at INA Bearings to finish work at the same time as she. The idea was that we would use part of her recently acquired inheritance monies to allow me to start up working for myself restoring classic cars, working out of the newly built garage at the top

of the garden. We would then take turns to look after Anna, giving me seven hours each day to work on the cars and Jenny whatever hours she needed to do the work ICL sent her. Sorted.

When I handed in my notice at INA Bearings and explained what my future held, the new MD expressed his surprise and sadness as I had been one of the few employees Chalupsky had recommended to him as a 'good egg'. Chalupsky by this time was back in Germany having proved himself to the parent company by turning round the fortunes of the troublesome Welsh factory. Needless to say, this was a bit of a surprise to me not to say a shock, given the run ins I had had with Mr. C over the previous three years. And also because, by the time I handed in my notice I was up to my old tricks of taking time off unannounced and often arriving late for work in the mornings. The new MD even offered to take me back on the company's payroll in the event my new classic car restoration project failed. I responded, a little uncharitably, by saying that if my new venture failed, he wouldn't want to have me return to the company as I would be so pissed at having failed to make a go of being my own boss. Talk about burning your bridges. A case of mouth working with brain disengaged.

On 12<sup>th</sup> February 1977 at 01:10 in the morning, Anna was born. Jenny had gone into labour



Austin Healey Sprite Mk 1, Frog Eyed

some twelve hours earlier. I had spent the afternoon and evening at her bedside in the Glanaman Cottage Hospital reading and chewing midget gems, much to Jenny's annoyance as she was squirming away with labour pains cursing me for not being able to share in this painful experience with her. What could I say, I am a male of the species. I was there at the birth, of course, all very exciting with Jenny screaming the place down, poor thing. But the deed was done and a few days later we took home a healthy bouncing baby girl, your Mum Anna, just the result we had hoped for.

*(20<sup>th</sup> May 2013 - Manlleu, Catalonia, Spain.)*

Since Jenny and I were used to having young children around whilst living with Peter and Mandy, when we two became three there wasn't much adjusting to do in our approach to life with Anna. That wasn't true for poor Ebenezer, our Irish Setter, though. He wasn't at all amused by not being the sole focus of our attention anymore. Peter and Mandy had always had a dog as a pet, notably a Labrador called Sully who lived with us in Cwm Bach cottage. After we moved to No. 100, Jenny presented me with a Red Setter puppy on my 29<sup>th</sup> birthday. We decided to name him Ebenezer, or Ebb for short, after our Ghanaian dog. He

was a lovely, bright and intelligent dog and clearly very sensitive to his environment and his place in the pecking order of our family. Whenever Jenny was sitting on the settee, feeding Anna cradled in her arms, Ebb would jump on to my lap and try to take the same position in my arms as Anna's in Jenny's. Not that easy being that he was quite a big dog by the time Anna arrived on the scene. He never really got used to children being around and soon after we brought Anna home from the hospital, he started to run away at every opportunity, a habit that would eventually lead to his early death.



Mk2 MG Midget

To start my car restoration business, I acquired all sorts of equipment: gas welding bottles, electric welding equipment. I also raided Dad's old workshop in the basement of No. 105 in Darwen for his tools to kit out the garage workshop. *(I still have these tools even today, 35 years later, including his old bench and vice which is now sitting in the garage at Penylan with the dismantled Fiat 500.)* The original plan for the business was

to buy cheap, small two-seater sports cars like the MG Midgets and Austen Healey Sprites of 60's vintage with a view to selling them on after restoring them to working order. To this end I managed to buy locally two MK 1 Austin Healey Sprites, also known as Frog Eyed Sprites, and one MK 2 MG Midget for a few hundred pounds total. We didn't have enough room on our drive at No. 100 to store the cars but Peter and Mandy kindly let me park them on their drive at Cwm Bach, helping me out yet again.

When Jenny and I had set up our own home at No. 100, I had rejoined the Morgan Sports Car Club (MSCC), having first been a member for a short time in 1962/3. The club's monthly magazine always carried 'cars for sale' advertisements and soon after I had started my new enterprise, I saw an advert in the magazine for a dismantled Series 1 Morgan for sale in Neath, just 10 miles away. And so it was that I took the flawed decision to restore high value Morgans rather than low value two-seaters like the Sprite and the Midget. I bought the Neath Morgan for £500. My logic at the time was that I would generate a higher return against the time spent on the restoration by restoring Morgans rather than restoring the Midgets and Sprites but, as it turned out, I was wrong

Another factor in my decision to change my business plan was the very sorry state of the Morgan that Dad had bought for me back in 1963. Almost all the wooden body frame was completely rotted away as were most of the steel body panels. The steel chassis had been so badly rusted when we first took the car home that we had discarded it soon after the car had been dismantled back in 1963. In fact, it seemed like only the logbook and the chunkier bits of the car were left, engine, gearbox and back axle. My new idea now was to rebuild my

Granddad Stories.

original Morgan after this Neath Morgan was completed and sold, using this Neath car's parts as templates when making replacement parts for my own car. Neat trick, I thought.

*(22<sup>th</sup> May 2013 - Manlleu, Catalonia, Spain.)*

## Motors in Wales

Over the three years that we lived at No. 100, I became involved in the local car scene, both classic and rallying. I had put an advertisement in the MSCC monthly magazine, Miscellany, for any club members living in South Wales to contact me to set up a meeting locally with a view to perhaps starting a Welsh MSCC centre. I got a few responses and as most of the callers lived in the east of the region around the Cardiff area, we agreed to meet at the Bear Hotel in Cowbridge. Some five or six people turned up at this initial meeting and after a beer or two we decided to give the centre idea a try.

*(7<sup>th</sup> June 2013 – Emerson College, Forest Row, East Sussex.)*

How the time flies by. We have been here at Emerson over two weeks now and I have not yet had the opportunity to continue with my story. Gek is here on a one month painting course, whilst I am trying to make myself useful, doing a bit of gardening in the house's grounds amongst other things.

The new MSCC Welsh Centre did take off eventually and is still very active today. But unfortunately for me, as the centre grew in those early days most of its members lived in the East of the region, which meant I was unable to get involved in most of their activities. But over the ten years or so we lived in South Wales, I did get to know quite a few Morgan devotees through Miscellany, the club magazine. Occasionally a Welsh MSCC member would advertise car parts for sale or put a request in the magazine for a car part they



Gary with us at a car show on Margam Park near Port Talbot

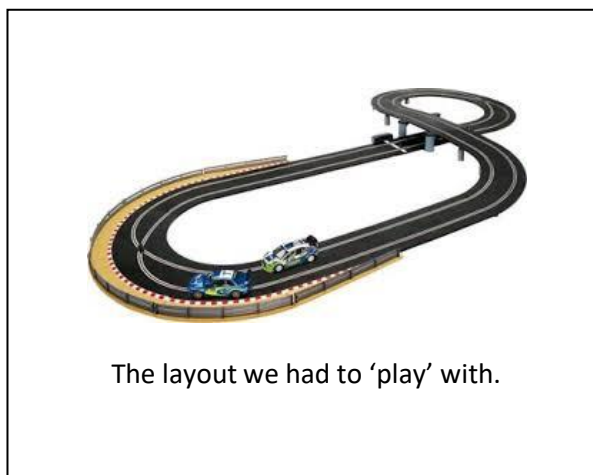
needed, giving me the opportunity to make a new contact with a Morgan enthusiast. One such contact who became a friend of both Jenny and me was Gary. Gary ran a business in Neath, an estate agent I think, and was rebuilding a Morgan himself. He and I took a couple of trips together to the Morgan factory in Malvern in search of spares for our rebuild projects.

A more successful involvement for me and Peter with other car enthusiasts was at the GCG Car Club, which used our local pub 'The Aberrant' as a monthly meeting place. Known locally as the Brew on account of it



having once brewed its own beer on the premises, The Abernant was only 2 minutes walk from our house and our pub of choice for a weekend pint or two. Soon after we moved into No. 100, I became the club's Social Secretary, which entailed organizing indoor events for the evenings the club members met in the pub. This was usually on a Thursday night when Reg, the pub landlord, would open his upstairs function room and bar for our exclusive use. On a good night we would have up to twenty members enjoying a pint and a natter. For their entertainment, I would perhaps have organised a Table Top Rally, devised by yours truly and Peter or hold a Scalextic competition.

Table-Top Rallying has its history in UK road rallying. Real Road rallies took place on open public roads and were usually run in the hours of darkness over a Saturday night/Sunday morning. They reached their height of popularity during the 1970s and each weekend it was not uncommon to be able to select from dozens of events all over the UK. Key events would attract up to one hundred competitors. Because of the nature of road rallying, a significant competition



element was placed on keeping down average speeds to usually 30 m.p.h. or less. This was achieved by making the route secret, having frequent control points to slow the passage of the event, and most significantly making the navigation not at all obvious, sometimes the whole route being handed out as a rally crew left the start control. The route instructions used all kinds of tricks to conceal the route thereby forcing the crews to slow down while the navigator attempted to unravel where to go next.

All such events were based upon the U.K. Ordnance Survey Land Ranger 1:50000 scale maps. Two hundred and forty maps in total define the UK mainland, with each map sheet covering an area of 40 kilometres by 40 kilometres. They are the most detailed maps in the



world, rich in content, geographical features and place names, with a precise grid for defining map references. Consequently, organisers had enormous scope for designing route instructions in various forms.

Table-Top rallies came about as a means of exposing road rally navigators to the kinds of tricks that organisers might use to define their routes. Events often took place at Motor Club meetings like ours

with tables and chairs laid out like in an examination room. At the appointed start time teams of navigators were given their first route instruction and they had to discover the intended route as quickly as possible. When complete, they would race to the "examiner's" table to hand in their answers and collect the next route card. Penalties were accumulated depending on how long they took to solve the route card and the accuracy of their plotted route. The accuracy of the route was determined in either of these ways (a): either the map was required to be annotated, usually by marking the route with pencil on each side of the roads used for visual inspection, with points being lost for any deviation from the correct route, or (b) a series of questions about the route were posed (for instance how many churches were passed?). With the decline of road rallying, such a training ground for navigators became less popular. However, as a sport in its own right table-top rallying acquired its devoted band of followers. Not just for ex-road rally navigators and motor sport enthusiasts, but also for anyone who had an interest in maps, puzzle solving and competitions.

The GCG Car Club did also get involved in real rallying, volunteering its members as marshals for the South Wales stages on the annual RAC Rally. This was a golden opportunity to go watch close up the rally cars belting through the local forests whilst at the same time providing the voluntary man power needed by the rally organisers to keep the rally reasonably safe for spectators. On these occasions, I would take our caravan towed by the Midget to the sector in the forest to which the club had been designated marshalling duties. The caravan became a temporary coffee and tea café, and also doubled as a dry zone if the weather turned nasty. All great fun.

The club also organised its own night rally whilst we were members, using the local back roads for the event. Peter as driver and me as navigator formed one team driving Peter's estate car whilst Mandy and Jenny formed another team, Jenny as driver Mandy as navigator, driving the Mk 1 MG. Peter's car was not really the type of vehicle that was meant for rallying, the suspension was way too soft and the car wallowed all over the place. About halfway way through the rally, I was heaving up through the passenger window. Not very nice but we weren't going to waste valuable time stopping for me to pucker by the road side. Mandy and Jenny came in last, in fact we nearly gave up hope of them arriving at the finish line at all and were making moves to go home when they finally did appear over the hillcrest down the road.

For the Scalextric Competitions, I used my own Scalextric set for which I made a two-section wooden base on to which the track was permanently screwed down. This was the track Mark and I had had as boys more than fifteen years before and although it was a bit old and worn, it still provided us with loads of fun. My model cars were a bit clapped out, though, making them a little unevenly matched for the races but the members stumped up the cash and we bought a couple of new model Minis, which made the races a bit more even handed. The knock out competitions were great fun, particularly after the 'drivers' had had a couple



Granddad Stories.

of pints of beer. I was always the track marshal and penalised any dirty tricks that the 'drivers' might get up to. Amazing how competitive people can get over something as simple as a Scalextrix car race.

13<sup>th</sup> June 2013 – Emerson College, Forest Row, East Sussex.

## Back to the Coal face.



John, me, Jon, Brian Phil and Chris. I am sure we will meet again

Last Saturday Gek and I drove from Forest Row to Birmingham for the University of Birmingham graduates of 1968 reunion. What a day. I was able to meet five guys who had been my friends and class mates forty five years ago, never having had contact with them until a couple of months ago. And better still, I was able to meet with Richard who I had shared a flat with during the last year of our time in Birmingham.

The attempt at building my own business restoring old cars lasted 18 months or so. I really did enjoy working out of my garage workshop and combining that with looking after Anna but in the end it became clear that my car restoration venture just wasn't going to pay the bills. I would have to look for paid employment. One thing was for certain though, I wasn't going back into any form of management. I had really enjoyed working with my hands and had learnt quite a few new skills in the process. But who was going to take on a guy with a Masters degree to do what was seen as manual work?

I visited the local Job Centre and had a chat with the careers advisor there and explained my little problem to him and much to my surprise he was very sympathetic, bless him. He told me about a newish government retraining scheme called TOPS. Under this TOPS individuals could get some initial training in vocational skills such as turning, milling, as well as the building trades, bricklaying and plastering etc. The course, which attracted me, and seemed to tick all my boxes, was the nine-month toolmaker's course. With the support of my new friend the career advisor, I applied to the tool-making course and was rejected but was offered an alternative six-month turning course instead, which I happily accepted.

The regional TOPS centre was in Port Talbot and required a daily commute of some 18 miles one way. This meant that there was no chance to do the course and keep on struggling to build a business. I sold the un-restored Sprites and Midgets, which I hadn't even touched since I bought them, and having at last finished the Morgan restoration, put it on the market, advertising the car through the MSSC magazine, Miscellany. All very sad but necessary as we needed money coming in to live on and with the training salary I would get from TOPS we would now be able to survive on a joint income of around £200 a month. After a couple of weeks of turning, the course tutor seemed impressed enough with my work to recommend my transfer to the tool-making course. Fantastic. I spent the next nine months learning the art of the machinist, skills I am still using today in my dollhouse building projects. There were around ten of us on the course including someone even more unusual than myself, a guy with a degree in French of all things.

I put the Morgan on sale for £2,500 which would cover the money I had spent on the restoration with a little bit of profit left over. It was really a no brainer that the Morgan had to be sold but it was still a very hard thing to do. I had, after all, built her up from scratch, having stripped her down to the last nut and bolt before putting her back together again. During the rebuild I had learnt to spray paint, electric arc and gas weld, do wood working on the ash fame as well as panel beating when replacing the sheet metal body work. Jenny had sewn up a new double duck hood on her sewing machine, using the old hood as a template. This didn't do the machine much good though, the tar between the canvas layers getting into places it shouldn't have been in the sewing machine. The engine the car came with wasn't the right type for the year of the car but I had managed to find a replacement, a Coventry Climax, being sold by a guy in Cheltenham. The 1930s Coventry Climax engine was also extensively used on mobile fire fighting water pumps during the Second World War. The engine I found was one of these and was only 1060 cc developing all of 35 BHP, not exactly the most powerful engine of its day. The Coventry Climax Company went on to much better things with engines being



Richard, Jackie, Me and Gek.

Richard had married Jackie, his then girl friend and the four of us had dinner in Birmingham's Canal Basin on the Saturday night. It really was as if the 45 years were just a moment in time, with us clicking just as we had done all those years ago. Don't you just love it when that happens....meet someone years after you parted and still managing to banter with each other? Neither of us could account for how an engineer undergrad and a political/social science undergrad ended up sharing a flat together.

developed for F1 cars in the 1950s & 60s. This 1060 cc fire pump engine I had found was a little less powerful than the original 1122 cc Morgan Series 1 Coventry Climax engine, but not so much that you would notice.

Nobody answered my 'for sale' advertisement in Miscellany and so I decided to try auctioning the car in a London Classic Car auction house. The company running the auction house had a car pick up service which we made use of and so on one wet morning I went with my little precious on the back of a small vehicle transporter to London. It took a few months for the car to sell at auction and when it did the auction house company seemed very reluctant to give us our share of the sales money. But after Jenny had a go at them and threatened them with legal action we did eventually receive the cash they owed us. Shysters really, a really dodgy company with a very plausible public image. Car dealers, what is it with them? Always seeming to want to be on the make at their customers' expense.

The Morgan was sold to a chap in Japan but I hadn't quite heard the last of the old car yet. A few months after the sale, I got a letter from the new owner telling me that the Japanese authorities would not let the car into the country because the number stamped on the chassis didn't match the chassis number recorded in the car's log book. It had never occurred to me that the chassis might not be the cars original, so I had never looked for it. In fact, at that time I didn't even know where the number was stamped on the chassis anyway. The replacement chassis now on the car had a number 900 and something. The new owner was understandably concerned that the car was a fake and that he had paid over the odds for, effectively, a kit car. He not only wanted his money back for the car's purchase but also the shipping costs to Japan as well. To say that this little bomb shell put the wind up us is a bit of an understatement. The only way out of this authenticity problem as I could see was to establish if the replacement chassis had actually been made by the Morgan Motor Company and to this end I wrote an enquiring letter to Peter Morgan, the company MD and owner, explaining my dilemma. Much to my relief, a few days later Peter wrote back to say that the chassis was indeed a genuine Morgan made one that had been stored in the factory during the Second World War. During the conflict, the factories car production had been switched to making munitions for the war effort. After the war was over the chassis had been sold to a restorer for his Morgan rebuild project. Phew, what a relief. I often wonder where the old Mog is now, 35 years later.

Towards the end of 1978, not long after I started on the TOPS course, Peter, Mandy, Jenny and I decided to move to two houses with 18 acres of land on the edge of the common at the top end of Heol Hir, Gwan-Cae-Gurwen, just up the road from Cwm Bach. I know, this seems to be a totally random decision, but we had been looking at moving our two families back in together again for quite a while or at least to be in much closer proximity to one another. We had already looked at buying a pub in Llandovery with a plan for two of us to quit our jobs and manage it. We also looked at a smallholding in that same area but that

would have been too remote for traveling daily to our places of work. But here on our door step was a unique opportunity to go 'bush' as it were without too much disruption to our work commitments and the children's schooling. The current owner of the property ran a chimney lining business from the site but now, after the recent death of his wife from breast cancer, he wanted to down size and move to a smaller property whilst staying in the same area. This was going to be a straight house swop between his Rhosemyndd and Peter and Mandy's Cwm Bach, with Jenny and me selling No. 100 to buy the derelict cottage next door to Rhosemyndd.

*(16<sup>th</sup> June 2013 – Emerson College, Forest Row, East Sussex.)*

## Pen cae Di

And so it was that in the autumn of 1978 all nine of us moved up the hill to live together again, along with three dogs, a few chickens and a small flock of ducks. Joey, our donkey, was already living up the hill before us, having been moved up there some time ago to be with an older female donkey for company.

To begin with we all lived in Peter and Mandy's house, Rhosemyndd, since our cottage next door was totally uninhabitable. The cottage had no windows nor was there any electricity installed, it being just a shell of a building although the roof was, thankfully, sound. In fact, the cottage had had a change of use registered with the local council from a dwelling to a barn that meant there was in effect no local tax due on it as a residence. This we hadn't realised at the time of the sale and the question arose as to whether we would be able to live in a property that was supposed to be used for housing animals and not humans. This was not the only problem we faced after the house sale was completed and we had all moved in with our boxes of stuff. Part of the land that we thought we had bought in fact belonged to our new neighbour and, worse, it had on it the outbuilding that I intended to use as a workshop and garage. But with a bit of good will from our new neighbour and cash from the previous owner of our new property, the land issue was settled pretty quickly within days of us moving in, thankfully.

The change of use issue was not that easily resolved though, and entailed much discussion with the local council officials to get them to see the non-sense of not reverting the buildings designated use back to a dwelling. Jenny and Mandy invited the council official whose decision it was to say yeah or neigh to the reversion for afternoon tea and cakes at Rhosemyndd. After a charm offensive failed, they plainly said to him that if the reversion was not made then the council would have a responsibility to find Jenny, Anna and me a council home. All the money we had had been invested in the 'cottage' as a dwelling would be lost to us if the place stayed a barn. That seemed to clinch it. A few days later we learnt the barn that we had actually bought was now a cottage.

Rhosemyndd was just about a big enough house to sleep us all with Jenny, Anna and I using what had been an office as a bedroom. This office was an add-on to Rhosemyndd being built at first floor level between the house and the cottage. A very peculiar arrangement to say the least, it forming a bridge between the two properties but which was only accessible from the Rhosemyndd side. As winter approached this room became colder and colder during the nights with the icy wind rushing underneath as well as over the top of us sleeping inside. This just added to the urgency of getting the cottage habitable again for us to move into.

Although there was work that needed to be done on Rhosemyndd, we decided to crack on with work on the cottage first to get it to a state where at least the three of us could move in to sleep, if not live independently there. To this end, Peter and I set to work on Pen cae Di in the evenings and on the weekends. We were very lucky to be able to draft in a local farmer, Bob, who in exchange for the use of our eighteen acres of land to graze his sheep, provided his much needed physical labour. In addition, he had machines to do the heavy work such as laying concrete floors in the cottage where there had been earth floors before. This symbiotic sort of relationship with Bob was to last throughout the four years we lived on the hillside.

Pen cae Di cottage we already knew was at least 300 years old with the newer Rhosemyndd having been built around 1928. The ground floor living area of the cottage had a wonderful open fireplace with an enormous oak lintel. There were two back rooms on the ground floor, the one that had been a dairy we intended to convert to a bedroom and the other that had been a bakery into a bathroom. This old bakery still had the original beehive wood-fired oven built into the sidewall of the cottage that we could use for storing towels and bathroom stuff. To get a better idea of the provenance of our cottage before we started the restoration and perhaps be able to tap into some granted funding to restore the cottage as a significant heritage building, we invited an expert from the Welsh Heritage people to come and inspect the property. His assessment was that the cottage was indeed over 300 years old but that the outbuilding associated with it was probably much older. Unfortunately for us the cottage did not attract a restoration grant but, hey ho, it was worth a try anyway. We did everything to that cottage. It started as four bare stone walls with a roof over them and ended up as a lovely, cosy home for the three of us to live in very comfortably. We did have a few surprises during the restoration work but nothing we could not handle between Peter, Bob and myself. The only outside contractor we hired was a carpenter to make and install new windows, each window having to be specially made to fit each window's opening in the walls. All the electric wiring, plumbing, etc we did ourselves. I could write loads on my experience in restoring this old cottage but I think it would be a real turn off for you to read. Suffice to say I loved Pen cae Di and put my heart and soul into restoring it.

The older outbuilding that I had intended to use as a garage come workshop turned out to be beyond repair. The roof on the building had been long gone and years of rain and winter

ice had weakened the wall to such an extent that the whole thing was on the verge of total collapse. This was not a situation that we could have literally on our door step, there being five children playing around the place, mostly unsupervised. Not long after we had moved up the hill we had Bob knock the whole thing down, which he did with frightening ease. What was I to do now about a garage and workshop? I had really been looking forward to having a place to work with such a wonderful view down the valley, overlooking Taigwyth towards the Black Mountains. A new four-car prefabricated garage, similar to the one I had had at no. 100 was the answer, but that had to wait for most of the work in the cottage to be completed first.

After some six months effort, Jenny, Anna and I moved into the cottage for sleep-over nights whilst still making use of the facilities for washing and cooking in Rhosemyndd. We had a port-a-potty outside the back door for night time emergencies. More or less from that time, Peter started work on Rhosemyndd whilst I continued to finish off the cottage.

*(20<sup>th</sup> June 2013 – Emerson College, Forest Row, East Sussex.)*

Today is Gek's 60<sup>th</sup> birthday. She decided sometime ago that this day, although a significant one in her life, was going to be a low key affair. So only a birthday kiss from me this morning and off she trotted to the last day of her painting course here at Emerson.

A major factor in the move up the hill was to try our hand at some self sufficiency. Peter and Mandy had had a largish piece of land at Cwm Bach on which they had grown vegetables and been able to keep some chickens and ducks. The prospect of 18 acres of land offered an opportunity to perhaps develop this idea of producing more of our own food. Once we had established ourselves on the hill we expanded our menagerie to goats for their milk from which we attempted to make yogurt. Well, it soon became obvious that self sufficiency is a very time consuming business requiring an almost permanent presence on the 'farm', particularly when you have animals that need your attention every day for things like milking. As a result, we never really developed our 'farming' beyond the dabbling, restricting our activities to goats, chickens and Old English Sheep dog breeding. The unfortunate ducks decided they liked it better down at their old home at Cwm Bach and soon after we had moved up the hill, they took off back down it to their old home, never to be seen again. I guess the local fox had a few good dinners out of them.

In the spring of 1979 I came to the end of my toolmaker training course at the Port Talbot TOPS centre and was again looking for gainful employment. Unfortunately for me, this was still the time of the all powerful trade unions and I found it impossible to find a job as a toolmaker. The Unions insisted that employers take on only skilled workers who were fully indentured, i.e. had served their time on a full, four year apprenticeship much as my Dad had done in the 1930s. I did secure a couple of interviews for management jobs but I really didn't want to go there again. By coincidence, the personnel manager at one company I



visited was the personnel manager who had recruited me to INA Bearings some five years previously and surprise, surprise, he offered me a position in his new company. He must have had a good impression of my efforts at INA's in spite of my very lax ways toward the end of my employment there. But as luck would have it, I managed to find an in-between job as a draughtsman at Valentite-Modco, an American company located in Pontardawe five miles from our new home.

The Valentite-Modco parent company was based in Detroit, America, where they produced carbide tips and a standard range of tip holders which they shipped to the UK for direct sales to the metal cutting industries here in the UK. The Valentite-Modco (UK) Company in Pontardawe dealt with the design and manufacture of special tooling that incorporated the standard carbide tips shipped in from the states. The company employed around 30 people on the site in Pontardawe with an additional on-the-road sales force of around another 20 people, a nice sized operation. I joined the drawing office team of ten, preparing design proposals which became my main responsibility during my three and a half years with the company. The machine shop where the special tools were made was right next door to the drawing office, literally only a door away, making for a very close connection between design and manufacture. The experience I gained in this closely knit manufacturing



**Noah - First time hands on a Canon.  
Looking the part.**

This is our second visit to the Tetbury area where you are living at this time. Gek and I are staying in a converted barn on the old Woodlands Farm site in Stinchcombe. And very nice it is too. Yesterday you came over for lunch before Isaac was due at a birthday party in the afternoon. On our previous visit to Tetbury two weeks before, we had all gone for a picnic at Dyrham followed, of course, buy creams all round and a bit of fooling around.

environment served me really well when I eventually led the Engineering Design subject team at Staffordshire University, some six years later. I liked the compact nature of the company, being able to be involved with the whole manufacturing process from beginning to the end. From the initial sales enquiry, to proposing a design solution and supporting the sales team on customer visits, through to the detailing of successful tenders and finally the manufacture and delivery of the finished product.

Luckily for me, Brian, the chief engineer overseeing the work of the drawing office, saw a potential for me to contribute to the company's bottom line. He could not believe he had found a guy with an MSc. and toolmaker training in a small provincial Welsh town. It was through Brian's encouragement and his support for my application to the Institute of Production Engineers (IProdE) that I started to 'collect' professional engineering qualifications. Soon after joining the company I gained



Granddad Stories.

Membership of the IProDE and a few months later Chartered Engineer status that meant I could add not only BSc., MSc., but also MIProDE and CEng after my name. At the time, I did not realise how useful these tags would be later, when I applied for jobs in the education sector. These sorts of titles have a lot of currency in academia. So, thank you Brian for being so persuasive.

*(8<sup>th</sup> July 2013 – Woodlands Farm, Stinchcombe, Gloucestershire.)*



**At Dyrham.**

Over the next 4 or 5 weeks we are to be with you guys, we are planning to go watch Morgans and Bentleys racing at Silverstone, visit the Morgan factory in Malvern, take a boat trip on the River Severn and ride on a steam railway. We are also giving each of you a camera and set you loose to photograph the world. Well, perhaps not the world but then again who knows, may be the world? Jamie and Noah have already started taking photos with the Canon, with some of their efforts already uploaded onto our website. This morning I have submitted some of Noah's photographs for a photo competition run by the organiser of sculpture exhibition we all went to see. Fingers cross for a good result for that one. I have to say, I am well impressed with you guys' very first efforts. Early days, I know, but I have a good feeling about your inherent 'good eye' for a photograph.

In November 1979, Polly was born. After her negative experience of a hospital birth, Jenny insisted on a home birth for Polly. Bearing in mind that we were living in a three hundred year old stone built cottage half way to nowhere, I am amazed that the powers that be allowed us to do this. If there had been any complications in the birth, it would have meant a fortyfive minutes dash to the hospital even after the ambulance had managed to find the cottage. But Jenny being Jenny, a home birth was arranged. And so it was at 1:10am on the morning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1979 the 10<sup>th</sup> member joined our extended family. Polly was so anxious to come out into the world that she was almost born into the toilet bowl!!!! Jenny had gone for a pee around 1:00 am only to find that Polly was making her way out. A

quick dash upstairs to the bedroom and ten minutes later Polly emerged and immediately stuck her thumb in her mouth, a good sign I would say. Her entry into the world was witnessed not only by me but also by Peter and Mandy standing in the doorway at the bottom of the bed. Mandy insisted on being there as she had not seen the birth of any of her own children, being as she was at the other end from the business end at the time.

After Polly's birth, life up the hill settled into a pattern that wasn't broken for the next three years. Jenny continued to work from home, debugging ICL mainframe computer glitches; Mandy moved on to teaching children with special needs specialising in children with hearing difficulties; Peter worked for a company in Bristol; and I went every day to my drawing board in Pontardawe.

This was the time I finally got around to rebuilding the 1937 4/4 Series 1 Morgan that my Dad had bought for me some 16 years earlier. My new garage was absolutely brilliant, big enough to accommodate four cars. There was plenty of room to do the Morgan rebuild as well as fit in another car for any on-going maintenance. After sixteen years there was pitifully little of the original Morgan left. Cash being in somewhat short supply with a new addition to the family to support, I had to compromise on the materials used for the restoration. I did manage to source ash wood from Stafford from which I handmade a new body frame although I couldn't afford the replacement wings offered by the Morgan factory and had to be content with fiberglass one. Beggars cannot be choosers.

Getting the ash wood to Pen cae Di, I must confess to being a bit naughty. On the return trip from a site visit to the Leyland bus factory in Preston, Lancashire, I filled the back of the company estate car with planed ash planks from a wood yard in Stafford. The back of the car went down as a consequence of which the front of the car went up rather alarmingly. The drive home from Stafford was to say the least unstable, the car being very tail happy.

*(11<sup>th</sup> July 2013 – Woodlands Farm, Stinchcombe, Gloucestershire.)*

Yesterday was a rather interesting day. Gek and I were invited to your primary school, St. Mary's C of E in Tetbury, to give a short talk to Noah's class of seven year olds on our time in Mongolia. Well, I say talk, it was more of an entertainment with photographs and props such as camel hair waist coats and my dell, to show how people live a nomadic life in the countryside there. All very enjoyable for me as I hope it was for Noah and his class mates. Perhaps this may now be a remembered time for you, Noah, of Gek and my visit to be with you guys this summer of 2013. I really hope so. It is being a lot of fun for Gek and I to be with you all for these months.

Memories from this early period in our family life together is a series of cameos', some of which I have written about in brief in the Memory Litter Bin at the end of this section of your Granddad's Stories. Our life at this time was very stable and centred around the six

children's wellbeing, getting them to the right schools, trying to ensure they were content and happy, etc.

## Memory Litter Bin.

- 1. Grandma's visit.** My Grandma Ribchester, Lizbeth, came to stay with us at No. 100 for a couple of Christmases. She visited the local pub with us, 'The Brew', and sang 'She's a Lassie from Lancashire', much to the delight of the locals. Lizbeth had a sweet singing voice. Pub nights could sometimes end with a singing session, this was Wales after all.
- 2. Learning to play classical guitar.** I took up the guitar during our time at No. 100 but didn't continue with it after I started on the TOPS course and we moved up the hill to Pen Cae Di. Shame, really, I didn't persevere with it.
- 3. Car Crash.** Jenny, Mandy, Dylan and Anna were in a head on car crash with a policeman on his way to work. It happened on the road over the Black Mountain on a single track road that was being used as a detour during repair work to the main road over the mountain. Mandy's head went through the windscreen and Jenny knocked out her front tooth on the steering wheel of the Midget. Dylan and Anna were in the dickie seat at the back of the car and neither was injured, they being quite tightly wedged into the space. All a bit dramatic and frightening. The outcome could have been so much worse.
- 4. Water direct from the hill spring.** The water supply for Pen cae Di and Rhoosamynydd came from a spring welling out of the side to the hill above the houses. The water was very pure if a little rich in minerals, a dripping tap would leave a vivid green stain on the side of the sink. Turning the taps off would sometimes result in a crunching sound, as baby frogs had found their way into the supply pipe. But the main concern was to stop sheep's pee from ending up in our drinks!!! To this end we installed a small tank at the spring site that also provided us with a more reliable water supply.
- 5. Digging out the cesspit.** When we first arrived on the hill site, neither house had a septic tank, the black water running out of a waste pipe into a joining field. Not very hygienic. Bob dug a huge hole with his handy mechanical digger and built us a council approved septic tank, approved by the local council's engineers who checked that the outflow from the tank met the local water purity standards as this water would eventually end up in the stream at the bottom of the field.
- 6. The over fly's by fighters.** The area of South Wales we lived in was used by the RAF for low flying training by fighter pilots. They would come screaming directly over our houses following the contour of the terrain at barely 100 feet. I swear that they were so low that on occasion that you could read the writing on the fuselages and see the pilot's faces.

7. **First drive of the resorted Neath Morgan.** The day I first drove the restored Morgan was very memorable as the sun was shining bright, a perfect day for an open topped drive. Rhiannon, the daughter of our neighbour just happen to be leaving her house at the time of the outing and I invited her to join me on this first ever run out in the car. Rhiannon was being tutored at the time by Jenny for her A Level in mathematics exam to be taken that year, 1978, after which she left Cwm Gors village for Leicester Polytechnic never to return. She subsequently left for America a few years after her graduation. Rhiannon credited Jenny with giving her the confidence to leave the Welsh Valleys and make her way in a wider world. The car performed pretty well although the engine did over heat on the climb out of Brynamman towards the Black Mountains.
8. **Joey the donkey.** Whilst I was working at INA Bearings, I acquired a donkey. A friend in the drawing office had been to the horse auctions in Abergavenny one weekend and could not bear to see a donkey foal sold to an abattoir for dog meat. And so he bid for and bought the little fellow. He had had the foal in his terraced house's garden for about a month when he approached me to see if I would take responsibility for him, as we had at Cwm Bach a large, over grown garden, ideal for keeping a donkey. I rang Mandy, asked her what she thought of the idea of having a young donkey around the place, and to my surprise said OK, bring him home. Joey, as we began to call him, arrived at Cwm Bach that following weekend in the back of a small van.

We set up a small outhouse we had as a stable for Joey to bed down in at night and we let him roam the garden in the daytime. Joey was very affectionate and more than once reared up to put his front hoofs on my shoulders. Donkeys are not dumb. This is a popular myth. They appear stubborn because they have a mind of their own and if they do not want to do something, they will not. Around a year later, Joey was moved up the hill to Rhosemyndd to be with another donkey whose name escapes me at the moment. At Rhosemyndd Joey had 18 acres of mountainside to roam over, a much better environment for him to be in. Once we had all moved up to Rhosemyndd we had Joey and his new friend stay as part of the house swop deal with Cwm Bach.

Joey could be very naughty. At Easter time, he would jump the fence between our property and the cemetery and proceed to eat the flowers people had placed on the graves of their departed relatives. He and his friend, did this without fail year after year. On another occasion, over one night Joey disappeared down the road in to G-C-G village and it was left to me to go find him before I drove off to work. When I did eventually catch up with the little monster, I had then to persuade him to follow me home. I think he must have had enough of an adventure because he very meekly fell in behind me as we walked back up the hill together. He did not leave the comfort of his eighteen acres again after that. Learnt his lesson I guess. And then there was

the time he bite my backside. I was leaning into the car servicing the engine, and I didn't notice Joey sneaking up behind me. Next thing I knew he had nipped my bottom. There was never a dull moment with Joey around the place.

9. **Driving to work in the Morgan.** Once FUA had been rebuilt, I used her to drive to work in each day come rain or shine. At this stage the rebuild was to say the least a bit crude. I could not afford to refurbish the lovely chromed radiator that you can see on a standard Series 1 and had resorted to installing a large, ugly lorry radiator in it's place, I was that desperate to get FUA on the road.
10. **Jenny's white MG B GT.** I was not the only one with a passion for sports cars. Jenny came across a for sale advertisement for a white MG B GT in the local newspaper which we subsequently bought. This MG had a 2 litre engine and was much, much quicker than FUA. I must say when you stepped into our garage, FUA and the MG side by side made a grand sight to behold.
11. **Ebb's early demise.** Poor old Eb. He was a very, very intelligent dog. Red Setters are bred to be used as gun dogs to retrieve the game the shooters have brought down on their hunts over open moors lands. One afternoon whilst we were still living at No. 100 I decided to see if this was a natural ability of the setter or perhaps a result of training. On one of our regular walks up on to the hillside behind the house I tested Ebb's retrieving skills by have him sit beside me and stay sat whilst I threw a ball down the hill. And sit still he did. I hadn't 'trained' Ebb to do anything not even to sit on command, so it was a bit of a surprise to me that he did just that, never mind the fact he remained sat as I threw the ball. He just sat there looking up at me expectantly and waiting for the command to 'go fetch' at which he shot off down the hill to find the ball. First, Ebb went as far as the fence skirting the bottom of the hill and then proceeded to zig zag his way back up the hill towards me, head down sniffing the ground. Once he had found the ball, he came racing back to me and dropped the ball at my feet, looking up at me with a look that said "that was fun, throw it again". I was totally amazed at his grasp over what to do. We humans are so arrogant about our 'intelligence' that we dismiss the rest of the animal kingdom as dumb and without empathy. It is just not true.

Once we had all moved up the hill to live, Ebb's wander lust became a serious problem. Whilst we were living at No. 100 his little jaunts into the village to play with the children there were just a bit annoying, since I had to go look for him and bring him home each time it happened. But up the hill we were surrounded by Bob's sheep which Ebb might start to worry. If that happened, Bob would have no compunction about shooting Ebb on sight. To avoid that happening, I asked Bob to let me know the day he saw Ebb worrying his sheep and I would deal with it in my way rather than have Bob blow Ebb's brains out with his shot gun. And that day did come. I felt I had no choice but to have Ebb put down. I still do not know if I was

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right or wrong to do that. Eb is buried with his lead, collar and bowl in the top field outside the front door at Pen cae Di.