

Chapter 12 – Jenny Dies

(2004 to 2005)

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(24th May 2014 – Penang)

Back to the UK

As we pulled away from No. 1 on that rainy day in August, I was confident that the sale of the bungalow would go through. The Lady from Milan had returned for a third visit to the Fontenado, this time with her husband. Although Polly and I would have to return to Aulla to complete on the transfer of the bungalow title deeds to the new owner, I felt very confident that this was now going to happen. There had been one small hiccup in the selling process, though. In Italian law, a spouse cannot sell the family home without the prior consent of his or her partner; notwithstanding their being named on the property deeds or not. The power of attorney that I already had for Jenny apparently did not give me enough authority to sign on Jenny's behalf or anything to do with her finances. It covered only decisions I was making about her health care. For an extension of authority, an enduring power of attorney, I would need to apply to the English Court of Protection. This I did with the help of Polly to fill in the forms and after an anxious wait, I was granted the additional authority, which the notary accepted, thank goodness.

For this last journey out of Italy and back to UK, we chose yet another route, this time through Switzerland using the St Barnard Pass, with two stopovers, the first in Martigny, Switzerland and the second in France. Our new route through Switzerland is much less travelled than the other routes through the tunnels under the Alps and with beautiful scenery to pass through, the drive was relatively easy. Jenny slept most of the way back to the UK. She was only awake for a couple of hours in a day by this time in any case. She was finding it increasingly difficult to stand, needing support to move from the wheelchair, in which she sat for most of the day light hours, to her bed. However, she did seem comfortable in the front seat of the van. We decided that for such a long drive Jenny would be better seated up front rather than in the back in her wheelchair, although it was a struggle to get her in and out of the vehicle. This arrangement also allowed us to pack the back of the van with our overnight things plus the odd and sods that we could not get into the rented van. How Karim and our friend managed to load all the furniture and stuff into this rented van, I will never know. At the border checkpoint going from Switzerland into France, the border guard asked to see into the back of the rented van, only to signal Karim to close the door again after seeing all the floor to roof household goods packed in there.

The rest of the journey was uneventful. Once we in Bridgend, and after meeting up with Mark, we finally arrived with much relief at our new home in Sandpiper Drive, Porthcawl. I could feel myself becoming more and more relaxed as we approached Bridgend. My depression was caused by me being unable to cope with the situation I was in but once this changed, so did I.

We had to unpack the vans, at least enough to set up the beds for the night before we drove into Porthcawl and had a celebratory dinner at the Indian restaurant on the promenade. The

next day, our friend took off back to Italy in the rented van and we set about putting our new home in order.

(25th May 2014 – Penang)

Towards the end of September, we got the call from the Aulla estate agent to say that the papers were ready to complete the No. 1's deeds transfer to the lady from Milan. We found Jenny a bed in a local nursing home that was willing to take care of her for the three days Polly and I would be away in Italy. Karim visited Jenny each day at the nursing home whilst we were away. We took a budget flight to Genoa, hired a car at the airport and drove to Pontremoli where we had two rooms booked in the hotel that Polly had worked in as a housemaid. The proprietor gave us a discounted rate on the strength of Polly's previous employment there, which was nice of him. The notary used for this house sale was different from the one used when we had bought No. 1., but still the same procedure with the under the table money etc. When the deal was done and we had deposited the money in the di Siena Bank in Potremoli where I had moved my account to from Forcoli, the two of us went for a celebratory dinner in the town. Now I knew we would be OK and with the money from the sale of No. 1 safely transferred back to the UK, we could go ahead and look for a place to buy in Wales.

Whilst we were in Tuscany, we paid a return visit to our friend and his partner to thank them for all the help and support they had provided us with and in particular, me. They had just had a child and were adjusting to life with children. The biking business they had set up was underway and had made a promising start. His business idea was to hire motorbikes to visiting bikers who wanted to take advantage of the excellent biking roads in the Apuane mountains, all twists and turns as they are, without having the hassle of bringing their own bikes all the way from the UK to do that. After this visit, we sadly lost contact with the young family.

On returning to Porthcawl, I contacted Social Services to see if they could offer any assistance in caring for Jenny. As a result, we were given the loan of a lifting device which made getting Jenny in and out her bed much easier and they also provided a carpenter to make a ramp to get the wheelchair in and out of the house. The bungalow we rented was a short walk to Rest Bay, a popular surfers beach, and into Porthcawl's town centre. These are walks I became familiar with over the next seven months or so. Polly and Karim found part-time jobs in the town, Polly in a solicitor's office and later in a care home, whilst Karim had a job as a barman at the Seabank Hotel on Porthcawl's promenade. Life regained a pattern after a while, and I did feel as though I was getting my mind back.

Ruth came to visit us in Porthcawl, staying at the hotel where Karim was working. Together we took Jenny out to Swansea Docks. There were very few photographs taken by us at this time, which I suppose is not surprising. Jenny's condition had deteriorated frighteningly quickly over the last eight months, as can be seen in the photograph. From walking around

and at least taking some interest in what was going on around her, she was now totally out of it and sleeping most of the time. Did I get hardened to it? I suppose I did. The day, in day out routine dictated by Jenny's care needs, could have done nothing else; otherwise, I would not have been able to carry on with it.



Day out at Swansea Docks.

The search was now on for a bungalow to buy. Without too much looking, I found No. 4 Penylan in Litchard close by junction 36 on the M4. The current owners, David and Julie, were buying the bungalow next door at No. 5 which was a vacant procession. Since we had the money for the purchase of No. 4 in the bank, the sale contracts should have been completed in double quick time. In the event there was a delay due to No. 5 being the subject of a probate order, the previous owner having recently died. It was not until 31st March that I finally had the keys to the bungalow in my hand.

For April and most of May, I set to work to refurbish No. 4. New bathroom, kitchen, rewired the place, new gas boiler, patio doors installed to access the back garden: you name it I did it!! With Polly and Karim working part time, I could spend a morning or afternoon most days during the week at No. 4 and sometimes at weekend. I have to say, I really enjoyed working with my hands again. I had to borrow £8,000 from the Bank, as the purchase of No. 4 had taken all my cash. This was not a repeat of the Walton bungalow refurbishment, however, where I engaged specialist designers and installers to do the work. No for this bungalow, I bought what I needed from B&Q and installed it myself, all except the new gas boiler. But by the time it came to move in, No. 4 was transformed into a little palace, even if I say so myself, as shouldn't.

When we first moved into No. 4, I put Jenny in one of the two bedrooms at the back of the bungalow, but after a couple of days I felt this was too isolating for her. It would be far better that she was in the living room and have things going on around her rather than stuck in the back room with only the occasional visitor to attend to her needs. Another visit from the local Social Services department resulted in the loan of a fully articulated hospital-type bed which



No. 4's kitchen.

together with the hoist we already had made handling Jenny much easier to manage. Soon after we moved into our new home Jenny was admitted to the Princess of Wales hospital for an assessment, particular of the medication she was taking to counter her epileptic fits. Since she hadn't had another fit after the first one over a year ago, there didn't seem to be the need for it. The doctors told me in any case, the drugs Jenny was taking were not the modern way of treating epilepsy. I spent each day with her over the week but felt comfortable enough with the care she was getting, to sleep in my own bed at No. 4 each night. Most of the patients in the six-bed ward were elderly women with dementia. It was very sad to see that some of them never got any visitors for the whole week Jenny was there. Also, the staffing levels on the ward were way too low. When I questioned this, I was told by the stressed outward sister that nurses did not want to work on this kind of geriatric facility. A very sad place, where there really was no hope of recovery for the individual patients, only an unstoppable downward spiral in their condition. But after a week, thankfully, we escaped the ward and we took Jenny back home.

No. 4, a small semi-detached bungalow, was only big enough to accommodate Jenny and myself, Polly and Karim having to rent a place nearby in Dewi Pritchard Field. With the move over to Bridgend, both Polly and Karim found new jobs, this time in Cardiff, Karim as a supervisor at insurance company's call centre and Polly at a care centre in the north of Cardiff. As this new place had a garage and a small workshop built on to the back of it, I took a trip to Hooke and retrieved all my tools and equipment including my Dad's old bench, which must be at least sixty years old. I could no way afford a Morgan now, even a basket case these days was going for six or seven thousand pounds but a Fiat 500's, was possibility. Polly had a love of all things Italian and especially Fiat 500's and I was persuaded that I really would like to do one up for her. Well, in truth, I did not take much persuading. We found a 500 for £500, which once it was installed in the garage, I proceed to strip down to its last nut and bolt. So that I could work in the garage and still keep an eye on Jenny, I installed a video camera in the living room with a monitor above my bench in the garage. Fun, fun fun, I had.

Remember the analogy I made earlier of what I thought I needed to maintain my mental wellbeing? Now I had established two legs of my three-legged stool, the leg that was still missing was the social leg, the other two legs being my family support and now the little Fiat



Noah at five days old.

500 for my creativity. For this third leg I had the idea to do some home tuition in mathematics and perhaps physics. This would not only get me out of the house but also provide a little additional income to help pay off the bank loan I had taken out to refurbish No. 4. Not that we were short of cash. Jenny's insurance money and teacher's pension were still coming in, as well as the rent

from the Nottingham bungalow.

From the start of the new academic year, I was engaged to tutor Megan in 'A' level physics, the daughter of a work colleague of Polly's at the care centre; a twelve year old girl in mathematics; and a young man 'A' level mechanics for his November re-sits. Quite a wide variety of material to prepare for each weekly session, keeping busy. As the tutorial sessions would all be in the evenings, Polly kindly came over to be with her Mum whilst I was away from No. 4. Life acquired a rhythm again.

Noah you arrived on the scene early in November. I came up to Leamington Spa to meet you for the first time on the 13th, when the photograph was taken. A new kid on the block.

Jenny Dies

In mid-December, Jenny was re-admitted to the Princess of Wales Hospital. We could no longer care for Jenny at home, as she could no longer chew her food and even keeping her hydrated had become a problem. In the admission's ward at the hospital where patients were assessed as to what treatment they should receive at the hospital, I had a run-in with a young Australian doctor who wanted to put Jenny on the so-called Liverpool Procedure. This Procedure was engaged for end of life patients and was in effect a quick way of bumping them off. I had read about a terminally ill guy who had gone to court to get an order to prevent doctors engaging this procedure at the end of his life, fearing that he would not be able to make known his wishes by then. The procedure involves not only withdrawing medical interventions to prolong a person's life but also food and sometimes even fluids. This leads to pain for the patients and much distress. I told this arrogant young doctor that this was not going to happen to Jenny. This is only the second time in my life that I can remember being really, really angry but I kept my anger under control and only exploded once I had gotten my way. Jenny would not have life prolonging interventions but she would be put on feeding tubes to provide her with nutrition and fluids. A couple of years later the Liverpool Procedure was in the news again, reporting on cases where the patients put on the Procedure had suffered unnecessarily. The Liverpool Procedure has now been officially dropped, although I am sure some doctors will still using it to this day.

After a week on the ward, Jenny died at 6am on the 22nd December 2005.

I do not know why I opted to stay by her bedside that night, as on the previous nights I had slept at No. 4. A sixth sense must have told me that she would not be with us much longer. Polly arrived soon after Jenny passed away as it had been prearranged that she would be with her mum that day. I managed to hold it together until the two of us had left the ward and were walking up the corridor and out of the hospital. Then it hit me like a blow to the chest. Suddenly I could not breathe. I could not believe that Jenny had gone. We had been together almost every day for the past forty-two years, but now it was all over.

(26th May 2014 – Penang)

Even though we knew that Jenny was dying, when it happened it was still a shock. I cannot imagine how terrible it must feel to have a loved one snatched away from you without notice, as in a car accident or plane crash or worse, the sudden death of one of your own children. It does not bear thinking about. But you still have to get up the next day and get on because 'things' need to be sorted out. The day after Jenny's death, Polly and I visited the undertakers to arrange the funeral. I had already decided for Jenny's cremation to be here in Bridgend and not up in Bolton. I would arrange a memorial service early in 2006 up in Turton at St. Ann's Church where I intended to have Jenny's ashes buried near her Mum's and Dad's. This would give Jenny's cousins the opportunity to be part of the process of saying good-bye to Jenny. We had a decision to make as to when the funeral should be, either in a week's time on the 30th December or after the Christmas holiday period in late January or early February. If it was to be in a week's time, then the decision needed to be made in the next twenty-four hours as the hospital morgue closed for Christmas week and the undertaker would not be able to retrieve Jenny's body. Left me thinking, don't people die over Christmas then? I found the whole thing a bit surreal, all too business like for the situation. We opted to have the funeral in a week's time even though it meant some relatives and friends would not be able to attend, it being so close to the New Year. But I wanted it over and done with.

The next issue to be addressed was the form of service to be held at the crematorium. I knew that Jenny would not want reference to God or any religious aspect to the service. The funeral director recommended to us a suitable lay preach for such a service and we arranged for her to come and visit us at No. 4. After a short discussion with the preacher, I was comfortable that she would be able to deliver a neutral service, one without reference to an afterlife, going to a better place and all that stuff.

We sent out notices to all the family and friends giving them place, dates and times for Jenny's funeral and we started thinking about what to do after the funeral was over. I opted to have a wake at No. 4 and invited people to bring food and drink that had been Jenny's favourites and we would have a party in the way that I felt sure Jenny would approve. I did not want to go to a strange place to have drinks and nibbles, I felt the comfort of a home was the right setting for the gathering. The whole thing was set up before Christmas Day and then all we could do then was to wait for the 30th to come around. Oh, and to go and collect Mum from Darwen.

Mandy and Peter flew back from South Africa once they heard of Jenny's passing and the Cooper clan, minus Sarah and her family, arrived at No. 4 on the morning of the 30th, loaded with food and drinks for the wake/party. The hearse carrying Jenny's body arrived soon after and we all progressed to the crematorium where the rest of our family and friends who could make it were waiting. To my surprise and delight, Peter Creamer, travelled up from Portsmouth to be with us that day. It was very telling of our friends and family that

the ushers at the funeral parlour had to shoo us into a room because we were making such a din chatting outside that we were disturbing the funeral service ahead of us. This would, I have no doubt amused Jenny very much!! Always the unconventional. The service by our lady preacher struck the right note for the occasion, I felt we had done right by Jenny's memory. Once the service was over and we were all back in No. 4, the chatter continued apace whilst we demolished the food that Mandy and co. had provided.

With the departure of the last guest, Mum, Polly and I accompanied the Cooper family back to Hooke to spend the New Year with them, the end of a year and the end of era for me. What did the future hold for me now without Jenny?

Memory Litter Bin.

- 1. Sapphire Gin** – Jenny's favourite tippie was a gin and tonic made with Bombay Sapphire gin. At the wake/party four bottles of gin were lined up on the food table, one of which had been send from Cumbria by my cousin Lyn.