

Assorted Memories  
Of  
An Unconventional Life  
By  
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*Part Two*

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## Chapter One: The Big Bangs of 1990 aka "The Man with his Stone"!, (1989-1990)

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In fact, the Big Bangs occurred at the end of 1989 but the repercussions continued well into 1990. The year of 1989 had been a turning point in my life. Also, thankfully, Sally had got on well with Amanda & Iona and the year had up to now been both magical and memorable but was, at the very end, about to become unforgettable for all the wrong reasons as well.

Nancy, Sally's little cat sadly died aged only three which upset us both for a long time. But also, we had the problem of what my mother referred to as "The Man with his Stone"! This is how that all came about. In those days I was still relatively new to renting out properties and probably didn't check out prospective tenants in the way I do now (big mistake!). Consequently, when Drew (name changed for obvious reasons) approached me asking to rent one of my houses offering to pay 2 months' rent as deposit and a month's rent in advance because he had no references, I agreed to take him on. Somehow, I had a bad feeling about him right from the start (was it his size, he stood 6'6 and weighed 245 lbs – don't ask me how many kilos that is! - and his reputation?) but kept reassuring myself that with the cash in hand that everything would work out.

All went relatively well for a few months until Drew decided he wanted to buy a house for himself but, with only a small deposit and, on paper, a modest income, he was unable to proceed. He'd also found his perfect house and negotiated a good price but wanted me to come in with a 50/50 share. I initially agreed as he assured me he could come up with a substantial down payment for his share then rent my half at a figure that did, on paper, stack up. The purchase moved ahead but, just prior to exchange, Drew informed me that he didn't in fact have any deposit and asked me to go ahead on a 50/50 ownership basis and he would pay his share, part rent and part mortgage, to me. Without his financial commitment, I decided that this was a step too far for me so I refused his proposal but bought the property myself thinking, as it turned out correctly, that I could resell it at a profit. Of course, and having had his first property purchase, as he saw it, snatched away at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour, Drew was not a happy bunny - even though I offered to split any profit on a resale with him. Did I say bunny? He certainly didn't turn out to be a bunny, more a raging elephant!

Of course, the difficult part of all this "a wheelin' n' a dealin'" was that he was still my tenant! And the late-night phone calls started with associated threats which involved fire (my house) and blood (mine!) but thankfully no brimstone! However, of more concern were the similar threats against his next-door neighbour, my tenant Malcolm, who was also my friend. Plus, from that moment on, the rental payments halved! Thankfully, his tenancy was the new Assured Shorthold Tenancy which had been introduced in 1988 which allowed me to give him 2 months' Notice at the end of the fixed period - which was, by now, up!

And the "Man with his Stone", I'm getting to that but have to outline the background! Sally and I were sitting peacefully at home one evening and in the process of getting ready to go

to bed when there was a tremendous bang on one of our double-glazed front windows! We hardly had time to recover from the shock when another and even greater bang occurred (thanks to the double-glazing exploding!) but this time a huge rock landed in our living room along with splinters of glass everywhere! Thankfully neither of us were injured, apart from a cut hand, nor were our pets.

There was then a violent hammering on the back door which Sally bravely answered only to find Drew (obviously "in his cups") demanding to see me! Sally (not very politely) refused this request and, as she did so, held back Woolfy from doing what a dog with a guarding instinct does at a time like this! Anyway, short story even shorter, Drew left with his co-attacker, having been thwarted in their evening's entertainment, and Sally and I called the Police.

After what seemed a long wait (maybe an hour?) a rather nervous young PC arrived in his panda car, got out slowly and carefully looked round, before knocking on our door. As it turned out, Drew had previously been convicted of inflicting the same sort of punishment on another PC which he'd planned for me! I'm here to tell the tale so I did survive but I did keep a careful lookout for several weeks whenever I went out, especially in the dark. However, in a short space of time, we were able to serve Drew notice to quit, giving him 2 months to leave my house. But, as expected, Drew did not leave on the due date and despite challenging the notice in Court (he lost) so it became obvious that the bailiffs would have to intervene. When the day of eviction arrived, I took no chances and despite the extra cost, hired 2 tough looking young builders as personal "minders", to add to Sally, myself, the locksmith, 2 bailiffs plus another nervous PC (there "just in case"! ) who turned up at the appointed hour.

Drew was out when we arrived but soon afterwards, he drove down the track to the cottage. I can still remember the look of astonishment on his face as he got out of his car as he looked at the 8 of us and the 6 extra cars awaiting his arrival! Despite his threats, I almost felt sorry for him... he'd behaved like a raging elephant at times (or maybe a lion?) but he went out like a lamb and Malcolm's new girlfriend immediately moved into the house he'd just vacated, living there happily until they got married several years later.

And what happened to Drew, I hear you ask? Several years later I met him in the builders' merchants and we said "all right" (a local greeting) to each other and that what had happened was "all in the past".

Quite soon after that meeting and while I was serving on the Planning Committee of Kerrier District Council, he indirectly approached me seeking support for his planning application for 2 Local Needs houses he wished to build on the land of the property he had subsequently bought. For some strange reason, the planning officers would only support one extra house in that location rather than two on the basis of "access". Quite honestly, this seemed a nonsensical reason for refusal and the Committee supported his application, as I did! As a result, he rang me and thanked me for my support but having accepted his thanks, I explained that I did what I considered to be right - and I did! But I'm not sure that he believed me.

For years afterwards, my mother always referred to Drew as “the Man with his Stone” but Sally and I just referred to the incident as “The Big Bangs”!

## Chapter Two: Mackenzie Saves Sally, Amanda Hits London, Herland Barns Completed (Phew), (1990)

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Just to prove that misfortune comes in threes (first Nancy, then Drew), in February Sally became ill. Having endured several operations for Crohn's Disease, she now urgently needed another. The consultant she saw in West Cornwall Hospital reassured her that it was a simple procedure just to cut out another section and join the ends together. It didn't seem simple to me but, being the positive person she is, Sally went into hospital in the belief that in a week or two, she would be well again.

I remember seeing Sally on the day following the operation and her telling me that she had eaten, walked around and was better! But, when the anaesthetic wore off, she was still in severe pain but, nevertheless, was discharged. Long story short (as, quite simply, going into more detail just brings back too much for both of us) within a week she was in Intensive Care for a lifesaving operation! Luckily, the senior surgeon on duty was Martin Mackenzie (no relation) and it was thanks to his skill and abilities that Sally did survive. Of course, I was absolutely distraught and I especially remember speaking at length to my mother and, for once, pouring out my heart to her. However, her kindness and understanding at my time of need did reassure me that, with Sally's determination and strength of character, all would be well.

Sally still had a long, hard and painful road ahead which she bravely endured but it was about a year before she was stitched back together again! However, it was another 8 years before a 2 month stay in the Radcliffe Hospital, Oxford (which, of course, involved another serious operation) before she became fully well again.

While Sally was in Oxford, Amanda who had, by now, moved to London came and visited her as often as she could as did Lucy who was, at that time, living in Hampshire and neither Sally nor I will ever forget the time and support they gave her when she needed it most.

Now back to 1990 and this was the year that Amanda, aged 18, decided to try out London! My friend Martin Kennedy-Bell who was by now enjoying a bachelor lifestyle which involved snooker, cards with his friends and nights out, offered that she could stay in one of his spare rooms for a month. Poor Martin (or should I say Amanda) had no concept of what would be involved in having a teenager stay in his home or, for that matter, could Amanda have anticipated from the alternative perspective. If football was on, then Amanda (who hated football) had to forget her favourite "soap" and watch Match of the Day. And if she was out when Martin's mother came to clean his house, his mother always forgot that Amanda didn't have a second key for the mortise lock so Amanda was locked out till Martin came home whatever time that might be. So let's just say that the first 3 weeks were challenging for all concerned! But one bright spot in that time was when our cousin, Alistair (Lord) Kilmarnock invited Amanda for tea in the House of Lords. And later, she got to know the family who, it has to be said, were somewhat eccentric! At that time, Alistair was living with his wife Hilary in the basement of Kingsley Amis's house and Kingsley was Hilary's first

husband. Plus, of course, as the newspaper gossip columns papers kept reminding everybody, Alistair was employed as Kingsley's butler!

However, by the last week, Amanda was starting to enjoy London partly as she got a job as a teaching assistant at a school in London's East End which she was not only very good at but she loved it too. Of course they wanted her to stay on but, when her month was up, she came back to Cornwall although she'd decided, by then, that London was where she wanted to live and returned with her friend Jessica soon after and has lived in London ever since.

But in her last week Martin, taking pity on Amanda staying in every night, invited her to one of the several singles events he helped organize. Of course an attractive, vivacious 18 year old girl finding herself thrust into a party atmosphere with everyone else, at the very least, twice her age (or maybe quite a lot more) made her the star of the evening! Everyone made a fuss of her and, Martin told me several years later, that people who were there on that night, for years afterwards, kept asking about Amanda. Quite a few of those people were, unsurprisingly, men but none turned her head.

However the evening threw up a new challenge for Amanda as it turned out that Martin did have a second (and ulterior) motive for inviting her. The evening happened to be Martin's drinking night and, when they left, Martin gave Amanda the keys to his car and asked her to drive them home! Poor Amanda, who had already had a couple of drinks herself (just to steady her nerves) had only just passed her driving test in a tiny Nissan Micra car and in rural Cornwall too. She'd never driven in London and of course she'd never driven Martin's car, which was an almost new and very smart Rover, nor did she have a clue how to get back to Chiswick. Martin wasn't any help either as he was (to quote Chuck Berry) "feelin' no pain" - actually, that was the understatement of the year! Somehow, and nobody knows quite how, they did eventually get back to Martin's house and the car was in one piece too - despite a few crunchy gear changes. An unforgettable evening but thankfully a safe one and, for the record, Martin and Amanda are still friends.

Back in Cornwall, I applied to alter the Planning Permission for the small single storey barn at Herland Farm from a workshop to a dwelling. The Planning Department in their wisdom (?) recommended refusal despite the fact that the Estate Agents couldn't find any prospective buyers for a workshop. Thankfully the Planning Committee decided that Consent should be granted! However, the Chief Planning Officer ("Jimmy" Dann - more about him later!) wasn't going to have his recommendation entirely thwarted and persuaded the Committee to agree that a Section 52 obligation should be attached to the Consent which removed the right to extend the property, or build within its curtilage, at any future time. Well that was better than nothing! But nothing could surpass the inefficiency of Kerrier District Council's legal department as the binding agreement they sent me to sign, prior to issuing the written documentation, listed my home address as the address of the Barn! Of course, I signed as required but made a mental note to appeal at a later date if I subsequently decided to extend the property!

With the memories of forgetful Bingo, bolshie MB and the resulting aggravation of Barn No. 1 still fresh in my mind, I decided to employ a small firm of local builders to undertake this

conversion. Their work progressed satisfactorily (Hooray), was completed on time and resulted in the attractive barn conversion one can see today which still forms part of our property portfolio. And, as a bonus, this single storey roof only had to be slated once (Ahem! Ahem!).

As a result, for all of the 30+ houses I've built since then, rather than using a "rag, tag and bobtail" of the good, the bad and the truly incompetent, I've always employed similar small local firms of professional builders who have proved to be better, no more expensive and, as a result, far less stressful for me.

PS, several years later, I did challenge the validity of the Section 52 and Kerrier District Council had no option but to agree that the obligation wasn't enforceable and, as a result, granted consent for not just one but, subsequently, two extensions!

To be continued...