

## GREENHILL ROAD IN THE 80'S

---

The purchase of 75 Greenhill Road was the most fraught process imaginable and we vowed never to go through it again. We made the mistake of really wanting the property so that every minor setback was a traumatic event. The vendor, Mrs Chambers, was a wily old soul who had previously owned an old people's home. She had only been in occupation for one year but she was not settled, the garden was really too much for her, and she really wanted a bungalow. She took to us and encouraged us to come visiting. I even made a start on the garden and dug through the vegetable plot and mowed the grass. The house was advertised at £17,950 and we readily agreed to pay the asking price. We duly sold 47 Blean View Road for £14,950, settled the Halifax mortgage and realised £9,332 in profit. To this we arranged to add a further £9,000 by taking out an endowment-based mortgage with the Herne Bay Building Society. The difference of just under £400 between asking price and loan was intended to give us latitude to pay for carpets, decorating costs etc. after we had moved in. Two things happened to torpedo our plans. At the eleventh hour, literally the day before we were due to sign contracts, Mrs Chambers decided to raise the price by £500. Also, we were informed that the mortgage offer was to be conditional on having the loft sprayed for woodworm and the second garage, which had been illegally converted into a room, brought up to building regulation standards. This involved laying a new floor with a damp-proof membrane and installing a fire door, potentially another £200 at least. It was a vicious blow to our hopes. There was nothing we could do. It was too late to renegotiate a mortgage. In a panic we searched for an alternative house but could find nothing comparable. Once again Jenny's creative accounting saved the day. By clearing out our savings and raiding the budget account we found the money, but once again we were reduced to penury and had to make do and mend. We finally moved on 28th July 1978. We hired a van, and with the help of our friends who scrubbed and cleaned, lifted and carried, we were quickly installed and organised in a matter of hours.

The house was very little bigger than Blean View Road. All the rooms were of a similar size although the dimensions varied and they were far loftier. The space we gained was largely in attached outbuildings, a toilet and utility room on one side

of the building and a converted garage on the other, both of which were later additions to the house. The original house was built in 1934 and, by today's standards, was solidly constructed. The walls were of nine inch bonded construction with no cavity whilst the roof was totally lined with wood. The timbers were far sturdier than you would find now and the overall standard of workmanship far higher. Of course the condition was not nearly as pristine as Blean View Road. As an older building it demanded some attention. We began the refurbishment straight away by redecorating the lounge and reorganising the kitchen and over the following months we steadily worked our way through the whole house. The biggest asset, however, was the garden – one third of an acre of glorious land half covered with the remnants of an old orchard. There were 26 trees in total of apples, pears, cherries and plums. At the rear was a vegetable plot which we reclaimed and enlarged by felling two trees. It was everything we wanted to satisfy our passion for self-sufficiency and for two or three years we came close to achieving our aim. By selling fruit at the gate we raised sufficient money (£80 one year) to buy the things, like potatoes and brassicas, which we did not have the space to grow. It was really satisfying. The following spring I built a greenhouse which enabled us to see the process through from seed to crop completely – a miracle that we have never failed to appreciate. 25 years later we were still immersed in the joy and beauty of this piece of land and prided ourselves on its yields. Our enthusiasm for nature's bounty of food and flower never dwindled.

In September 1979 Jenny's Dad suffered two strokes and died. In some respects it was a merciful release. For some years he had suffered from high blood pressure but in his later years he suffered two crises which affected his brain. The result was that he became depressed, cantankerous and very difficult to live with. There were times when Jenny's Mum was at her wit's end. Dad Lawford was a quiet, private person who took great pride in his appearance and was always immaculately dressed – a legacy of his early working life in a gents outfitters. He was largely self-educated and had an appreciation of the good things in life. He read widely, took pleasure in good music and taught himself to play the piano. He also had a good baritone voice and was a long serving member of the Eastleigh Operatic Society with whom he played several minor principle parts. Like many of his generation, however, he was badly affected by the Second World War. Having been married in 1937 he was conscripted in 1939 and spent the duration of the war in the army. Whilst he was not in the front line he witnessed atrocities which had a long-term effect on his mental state and, after an absence of five years, he returned home a different person. He spent the remainder of his working life as a clerk for British Railways. He retired in 1972. There is no doubt he exerted a real influence over Jenny in her early years, particularly in encouraging her to read, and, although he did not display quite the same eagerness as Jenny's Mum, he welcomed me to the family. As an Eastleigh man through and through, however, I'm not sure he appreciated being relocated to Herne Bay. By that time it was difficult to distinguish his true feelings from those associated with his illness, and he was never completely happy with himself.

After Dad's death Mum Lawford gave up her flat in Arkley Road and moved in

with us. We created a lounge for her in the converted garage to allow both her and us a degree of privacy and she shared a bedroom with Kathryn. She integrated so completely, however, that she never used her lounge and it rapidly became a play room/study for the rest of us. With the sale of her property we began to lay plans to use the capital to build an extension to the house to create a bedroom for her and a new kitchen. A colleague of mine from school drew up plans to my specification and submitted them to the council for planning consent. This achieved, we then approached three builders for estimates. This was an interesting exercise. The three were entirely different characters. There was the whiz-kid who dismissed the whole thing as an easy job which he would have done and dusted in six weeks. He just plucked an estimate out of thin air (the cheapest). There was then a staid professional who exhibited little interest and whose estimate was grossly over-inflated to ensure he didn't get the job. Finally there was the little man who measured and calculated everything and asked lots of questions. It was no contest. We selected the little man with his measuring tape and a good decision it was too. Work commenced in September 1980 and was completed towards the end of January. Progress was slow but sure. John Player, the builder, was a meticulous craftsman who would not be rushed and as he nibbled away at the job he almost became one of the family. The building work cost £8,500 and added a further 50% by area to the house. By the time we had fitted out the kitchen, decorated and furnished the bedroom we saw little change out of £10,000 but it was worth every penny. The work included the modernisation of the bathroom and the provision of a separate toilet upstairs so space and amenity in the house were greatly enhanced. We wanted nothing more. We were content.

For many, a resident mother-in-law is a recipe for tension and disharmony. Not so for me. Jenny's mother was the most amenable and uncomplaining person imaginable. She was never an intrusive force. Whatever opinions she had she kept to herself and when visitors arrived to see us she melted away. She was generous and considerate and devoted her life to the family. We all thought the world of her and there was never a moment of discord. Her presence gave us a new freedom. An extra adult in the household meant that we were not so constrained by the children and household chores. Jenny gave up her job as a home help shortly after we moved to Greenhill Road and took part-time employment at Woolworths. When Mum arrived she went full-time starting at 9am in the morning and not finishing until 5.30pm. The additional income, both from Jenny and her Mother, plus the salary increases attendant upon my own promotions, took us into a new phase of life. For the first time in our lives we could entertain buying a few luxuries. However, with our fairly austere upbringing neither of us were prepared to mortgage our life away with hire purchase debts, so we bought little that we could not pay for outright. A typical monthly budget for 1981 overleaf shows the leeway we had acquired. By the end of the eighties the pattern had changed (also shown overleaf).

In neither case have either Jenny's earnings or mother's contribution to the house-keeping been included so the scale of excess is far greater than that shown. Nevertheless, in the early and mid 80's most of what we managed to save we spent.

---

**Income: £637.38 (My salary)**

**Gross Pay = £7,779 per year**

---

<b>Outgoings:</b> Mortgage	£105.24
Mortgage Endowment	£ 12.98
Insurance	£ 13.85
T.V. Rental	£ 9.53
Budget Account	£ 91.00
Rates	£ 26.57
Water Rates	£ 4.32
House Keeping	£222.42
Book Club	£ 3.00
Catalogue Shop	£ 20-00

**Budget Account Details:**

House Insurance	£65.10
House Contents Ins.	£39.15
Car Tax	£70.00
Car Insurance	£60.00
Car Recovery	£30.00
T.V. License	£34.00
Union Fees	£20.00
Telephone	£25.94

**£508.91**

**The end of the eighties:**

---

**Income : £1,189.98 (My salary)**

**Gross Pay = £20,814**

---

<b>Outgoings:</b> Mortgage	£ 70.91
Mortgage Endowment	£ 43.18
Insurance	£ 23.14
T.V. rental	£ 22.95
Budget Account	£190.00
Rates	£ 67.30
Water Rates	£ 12.23
Housekeeping	£421.00
Catalogue Shop	£ 50.00
St Martin's	£ 20.00

**Budget Account Details:**

House Insurance	£159.20
House Contents Ins.	£121.70
T.V. License	£ 71.00
Union Fees	£ 75.00
Gas Service Contract	£ 67.00
BUPA	£410.04

**£920.71**

---

During Stephen's College years the whole of Jenny's earnings were taken up in supporting him and there were expenses accruing from my own passage through University. We therefore still had little security against the unexpected. The situation changed dramatically when my mother sold her bungalow in Hampshire and donated £10,000 of the proceeds to us. This gave us a valuable safety net. By the end of the decade both children had grown up and fled the nest and we were banking several hundred pounds a month in savings. We never looked back!

It is worth dwelling briefly on the monthly budget figures for they reveal some interesting comparisons. A reasonable indication of the rate of inflation between the two years can be gained by comparing Gas and Electricity costs.

---

	<b>1981</b>	<b>1989</b>
Gas	£311.86	£501.42
Electricity	£186.84	£296.01

---

These show an increase of 61% and 59% respectively. The rise in take-home pay was 86% so there was an appreciable improvement in the standard of living. The rise in gross salary, however, was 167%, a clear indication of the effect of having to pay higher rate taxation (40%). Mortgage interest repayments were against the trend. As the government fought to control inflation so slowly bank rate eased down. In 1981 it stood at 15% and we were having to pay £105+ per month. By 1989 it was down to 9.5% with only £70+ outlay. Later in the 90's it reduced to £42!

The most notable improvements in lifestyle were in cars and holidays. In 1981 we traded in our Vauxhall Avenger for a nearly new Ford Fiesta Ghia. It was a top of the range motor car with velour upholstery and such luxuries as a radio cassette recorder and a cigarette lighter! It was a small car, essentially a super-mini, with an 1100cc engine. It cost £4,000, which, with the help of a loan of £2,200 from Jenny's mother, we paid for in cash. As with all my cars I cosseted and cleaned it, but being pristine and unblemished, I did so with extra enthusiasm and greater frequency. Owning and driving it gave me a real sense of satisfaction and achievement. It may sound silly but somehow it endowed status and confirmed that I was making progress in life. However we did not keep it long. Early in 1983 we began laying plans for a continental holiday for all five of us. The car was too small for comfort over long distances so we exchanged it for a NEW one!! Now I really felt that I had arrived. Pride was now accompanied by reverence as every minor blemish was quickly wiped away. The smell of newness was like an aphrodisiac – an odour to covet! The car was the newly launched Austin Maestro – a larger, more versatile hatchback with folding rear seats. It was the base model with no frills, metallic red paint and a 1300cc engine. The total cost was £5008, but with part exchange we paid £1,670. As a new car with everything firm and tight it felt like a quality vehicle, but it wasn't. When in 1985 it was given a glancing blow on the off-side rear by a passing van whilst parked in Herne Bay, it crumpled and most of the back had to be replaced. It was the signal to go shopping again. Enter Austin Maestro number two, this time a mid-range HLE version in light green, the result of a very good deal cut with Jacksons of Herne Bay. Apart from an irritating water leak it was an improvement on its predecessor, but not as good as Maestro number three which I acquired in late 1987. This car was supplied by Kent County Council as part of my new job and was, by far, the best of them all. It was a white 1600cc version and seemed to have a better build quality than the others. For the following six years I enjoyed a phase of very cheap motoring. As a lease car it had the advantages of free road tax, insurance, roadside recovery, servicing and maintenance as well as a mileage allowance for all journeys associated with work. Furthermore at the end of three years there was an automatic replacement with another new car of your choice. In 1990 therefore, I opted for a new Rover 1600. During the 80's the motor industry had cashed in on the advances in electron-

ics and had made huge strides in the refinement and reliability of cars. This vehicle embodied them all. With velour upholstery and walnut fascias it had a comfortable and luxurious feel, a world away from the humble Vauxhall Avenger.

With an increasing disposable income the 80's was a period of more adventurous holidays, although by today's standards they would be considered pretty tame. For two or three years after we moved into to Greenhill Road neither the funds available nor our aspirations were very high and our holidays were, by necessity, low-key and cheap. We camped in a number of locations: Hastings (1979), Suffolk (1980) and Ashburton (1981). In 1980 however, we began the habit of taking short breaks and, for the first time since our honeymoon, ventured into hotels. There were several that were memorable. With mother in residence to look after the children, Jenny and I seized the opportunity and spent a wonderful weekend in a posh hotel in Alfriston, Sussex in the autumn of 1980. The next year we all descended upon the County Hotel in Bournemouth for a hilarious weekend. I remember most of our luggage held in Woolworth's bags, Stephen reorganising the furniture in his bedroom and laughing our socks off when a 'banana dessert', contrary to expectations, turned out to be a banana on a plate. In 1982 we enjoyed a weekend with Marge and Michael Corden and family under canvas at 'Little Switzerland, Folkestone and had a hotel weekend at Eastbourne, visiting Sheffield Park and the Bluebell Railway. In November of the same year we travelled to Ottery St. Mary, near Exeter to stay with a friend of Vi. Coles to experience the famous bonfire and tar-barrel festival. I also took Stephen on our first week long break together to the Isle of Purbeck to do fieldwork for his geography C.S.E. We camped at Langton Matravers.

The following year, 1983, we took the one and only continental holiday we had as a family. Since Stephen was then nearly 17 years old we knew he was unlikely to holiday with us again, so we decided to push the boat out. Our only contact with France before had been day trips to Boulogne and, for Kathryn, a school holiday in a north coast resort, so the whole thing was something of a journey into the unknown. We booked a 'Gite' (holiday cottage) out in the country near Gaillac, near Albi in the region of the 'Tarn'. The 750 mile trip took two days. On the outward journey we took an overnight stop in a hotel in Poitiers. It was a night to remember. It was as though all our tensions and anxieties about travelling abroad for the first time were released like pulling the cork from a bottle. Over dinner we all dissolved into fits of uncontrollable giggles. The meal was not good. It was mother stashing bread rolls into her handbag that triggered our disgraceful behaviour, fuelled by wine which we thought was £1 per bottle 'plonk' but , in fact, turned out to be £10 per bottle classic Bordeaux. An overnight stay in Orleans, on the return was just as eventful when we flooded a bathroom and made ourselves ill on 'horseburgers' and mountains of petite pois. Between we travelled hundreds of miles and had a wonderful adventure exploring all the five-star tourist attractions listed in the Michelin Guide. We visited Cordes, Najac, the Tarn Gorge, Rocamadour and the Les Sidobre area south of Castre, returning each evening to our farmhouse lodging amidst the vineyards. For me it was a fascinating experience seeing the geography I had learnt and taught for so many years come alive before my eyes. An unforgettable holiday!

During the rest of the 80's we tended to alternate between holidays in this country and the continent as follows:

- 1984 Farm Cottage holiday in Ilfracombe, Devon.
- 1985 Gite (a converted mill) near Villefranche en Rouergue
- 1986 Ashburton – last holiday with frame tent.
- 1987 Trailer tenting – Wye Valley
- 1988 Trailer tenting – Tarn Gorge, France
- 1989 Israel (February)  
Caravan – Cambridge, York and Cheltenham
- 1990 Trailer tenting – Black Forest, Germany

We were fortunate in that they were all trouble free – a testimony to Jenny's gift for organisation and a string of new cars. In 1985 Kathryn was 16 and the holiday in France was the last we shared with her. Henceforth it was Derby and Joan. In August 1986 we invested in a trailer tent – a very smart dark blue and grey Conway Contiki costing £1,100. I loved it and it provided us with holidays for the next seven years. In 1989 we also bought a caravan – a very comfortable four birth van for use for week-ends and holidays in this country which we used until 1994.

The high point of our foreign meanderings was undoubtedly the pilgrimage to Israel in 1989. The trip was so memorable that even to this day I can remember almost every detail of our travels. We flew with a group of friends from St. Martin's Church overnight to Tel Aviv. We then transferred to Tiberius on the Sea of Gallilee where we spent two days touring, visiting Capernaum, Tabgha, Banias and the Golan Heights, Gergesa and the Kibbutz Ein Gev. On the third day we travelled to Jerusalem via Mount Taber, the Jezreel Valley, Nazareth, Cana, and Caesarea, ending up in the very respectable Mount Scopus Hotel. From there we visited all the significant religious sites in Jerusalem as well as Bethlehem, Qumran, the Dead Sea, Massada and Jericho. It was an amazing experience. To cap it all I sang solo in several of the Churches in Jerusalem, an opportunity not afforded to many. Of all the holidays we have taken, before or since, the cultural extremes we witnessed on this one and its religious significance marks it out as extra special.

During the 80's Stephen and Kathryn passed from childhood to adulthood and fled the nest. Whilst our lives plateaued out, theirs exploded upwards and outwards. Stephen's passage through Herne Bay High School led to some very good results at C.S.E. and G.C.E. 'O' Level. He was a diligent student who earned his successes. He mixed well, acquired some good, loyal friends and was well-liked by the staff. He emerged a socially confident, well-rounded and confident young man intent on making progress in life. His schooling revealed an aptitude for the visual, technical and mathematical subjects and he particularly excelled in Technical Drawing. His progress with English, Science and the factual subjects was a little constrained by his struggle to spell. Nevertheless he prevailed and, with the exception of English Language, which he had to sit several times before he won through, he managed very good grades, certainly good enough to win him entry to the Sixth Form of the

Geoffrey Chaucer School in Canterbury. There he studied Technical Drawing, Art and Maths between 1983 and 1985. After a year he substituted Maths for Graphical Communication and went on to achieve three good 'A' Levels. Certain now that his future lay in some facet of Art he then took a one year's Foundation Course at the Medway College of Art and Design. There he discovered his vocation in Graphic Design and in 1987 was accepted in to the second year of a three year course at the Bournemouth and Poole College of Art, graduating in 1988 as one of the top students with a Higher National Diploma. I have always been especially proud of his achievements knowing all too well as an 11+ failure myself, the strength of character needed to overcome the odds. After College he returned home for a short while until gaining employment in Croydon.

Fortunately for us Stephen's journey through adolescence was largely trouble free. Apart from one incident where he was dared into petty shop lifting by a toe-rag of a boy, he kept good company and avoided mischief. He had the good sense to direct his energies into purposeful pursuits, particularly making money! Like father, like son, as soon as he was legally permitted to work at 13 years of age, he took on a morning paper round, but as time went on he became involved in a variety of other moneymaking enterprises. He collected and sold on golf balls, delivered the local advertising paper in the evening, cleaned shops, worked Saturdays in a Sports shop, undertook weekend/holiday work at a camping centre, and worked as a member of the stage crew at the local theatre. He was no couched potato. He was always busy and on the go, either with his friends or with one project or another. He was prone to ambitious ideas which he would pursue with relentless determination. Some of them, like building his bed on top of his wardrobe, showed some of his artistic quirkiness, others were ingenious, like setting up a rolling ball-bearing device to turn the light off, and others were beyond his capacity to see through, like building a clock, which ended in a fit of frustrated anger. He applied the same determination to acquiring the things he wanted. For example, once he had decided to buy something he would not be thwarted. Sometimes this caused financial difficulties. From somewhere came an appreciation of quality and an aversion to the cheap and nasty. His purchases were therefore seldom from the budget end of the market and paying for them caused some pain. I remember him struggling to afford a light-weight racing bike and a snooker table with all the attendant paraphernalia. In both cases he propositioned for a short-term loan to make up his shortfall – his enthusiasm was such that it was difficult to refuse him. Once he had decided on a course of action he was deaf to advice. The certainty that he was right was the only point of friction between us all. Jenny in particular found this difficult to accept. Fortunately the disagreements were minor and his adolescent rebellion was a fizzle rather than an explosion! Weren't we lucky? I'd like to think that this was a result of our mutual love and respect for each other as well as a need for a peaceful and ordered home life but I think it was altogether more complicated. There is no doubt, for example that Grandma, who both children respected, was also an ever present calming influence.

Perhaps the most significant signal of his burgeoning wealth and independence was the purchase of a motorbike in 1983. He bought this largely to avoid the long



and tedious bus journey to the Chaucer School. This sparked a passion for motor scooters which gave vent to teenage individualism. Whereas the extremes of his age group expressed themselves through multi-coloured Mohican haircuts, torn clothing, body piercing and heavy metal music, Stephen only got as far as a Parka jacket and a skeletal Lambretta scooter which he built himself. I suspect the closest he got to a 'rave' was the scooterist's weekend meets he attended with some of his mates at Margate and elsewhere!

As a young secondary school student Stephen indulged in the adolescent fervour for collecting things. I especially remember football cards and 'Smurfs' – little rubber pixie-like models that were given away with petrol. I also recall a collection of old bottles which were retrieved from a Victorian rubbish tip discovered near a local stream. The advent of more sophisticated electronic games began to catch the imagination of youngsters in the early 80's and whilst Stephen rarely watched television, he happily settled in front of it when it was plugged into an Atari Games console. The challenge to constantly improve upon your score in games like Space Invaders, Asteroids and Pacman seemed to be compelling. He was also swept up and carried along by the Rubik Cube craze and learned to solve the puzzle in seconds with a number of deft twists and turns! None of the family has ever been particularly sporty – it's just not in the genes, but Stephen was a tad more athletic than the rest of us. I remember he enjoyed swimming, gained some mastery at roller skating and played basketball. He also enjoyed camping and made the most of his working association with W.M. Camping by gathering all manner of shop-soiled equipment including about three tents. He took his holidays under canvas with a mixed group of friends and we never dared to enquire what he got up to!

Like most fathers I relived my own boyhood through the passions and activities of my son. I enjoyed playing with his toys almost as much as he did. The fact that our interests and aspirations were quite similar gave added poignancy to the relationship. It was a special bond. My relationship with Kathryn was every bit as special but was very different. I loved her to bits, was very protective of her and could refuse her nothing but naturally I did not have the same appreciation of her girly pastimes. She was altogether a different personality. Whilst Stephen was possessed by 'things', Kathryn was more interested in people and relationships. She did her apprenticeship in gossip during her adolescent years and was inquisitive of all the gory details of anything that befell humankind. Happily her interest was accompanied by a truly wonderful capacity for compassion and thoughtfulness and she developed the knack of making supportive gestures at needful moments – something that she has refined and extended over the years. Her interest in humanity made her a more avid televiewer than Stephen and she was in to several 'soaps'.

Her adolescent years were even quieter and smoother than her brother's. I do not recall any tantrums or histrionics and I can't say I recognised any starry-eyed mooning around with desperate crushes on boys or any idolisation of pop stars. Her bedroom, though never particularly tidy, was remarkably free from the usual posters over which teenagers drool. But then she was an altogether more private person than Stephen and she talked and played out her adolescent shenanigans with her friends either in

## *Greenhill Road in the 80's*



On completion of the extension 1980



Prize winner Xmas 1981



Kathryn 1980



Liberal Candidate for the Local Elections 1979



Kathryn's 12th Birthday



Hotel break – Alfriston 1980



Dartmoor July 1981



1982



France 1983



1984



1984



1984



1985



1986



1987

the privacy of her bedroom or elsewhere. She had a succession of close school-friends who always made a beeline for her room whenever they came visiting. Goodness knows how they managed to pass the hours. Kathryn was not especially absorbed by trendy clothes or fashion and had no particular penchant for pop music – the usual girlie topics. I can only assume that boys figured largely in the conversation! We never interfered and were careful to protect her privacy. Within limits we also gave her her freedom, even though on occasion our trust was strained by pretty bland accounts of where she had been and what she had been doing. This was the most agonising aspect of letting go, which for me was much more difficult with Kathryn than it was with Stephen.

Kathryn's secondary education at Herne Bay High School was uneventful. She just coasted through it. She was never particularly excited by any of it, worked sufficiently hard not to be noticed and graduated with very average C.S.E. results. In her early years, aged 11 and 12, she was more actively involved and she took part in the school production of 'Oliver' and went on a school holiday to France. Outside of school she dropped ballet and instead was persuaded by her friends to join a gymnastics club. For a while, therefore, she donned a red leotard and went for a weekly workout. She also joined the Girl Guides although that too was fairly short-lived. She seemed happiest in the company of individual friends rather than a group. From the age of about 14 I'm sure this included boyfriends although they were never invited home and we never met them. The first boyfriend that I actually met was Wayne – the son of a driving instructor, who arrived on the scene briefly when she was about 17. The first impressions were not particularly favourable although Kathryn hardly gave us an opportunity to get to know him since she dragged him off to the privacy of the study or her bedroom before we even had chance to strike up a conversation! From the age of 15 or 16 she struck out more assertively for independence and there were tensions when we curbed the scope of her freedom by insisting upon a time when she should be in at night. I must say I could never get to sleep until I knew she was safely home. Beyond this her adolescent rebellion was mild and innocuous. There were no eccentricities in self-expression that I was aware of, with the exception of green make-up and the odd cigarette or two. She was remarkably conformist.

When Kathryn left school in 1985 there was widespread youth unemployment. The problem had been developing since the mid 70's. The government deemed it crucial that the young should be purposefully occupied and introduced the Youth Training Scheme. The intention was to provide 16-year old school leavers with a training in a choice of occupations and they offered financial inducements to employers to take on trainees. At first the Scheme fell into disrepute when some unscrupulous employers used it as a means of getting cheap labour but by the mid 80's this had been rectified and the major companies were offering well-structured training programmes supported by Technical College courses. Kathryn expressed an interest in office work and was accepted on one of the best Y.T.S. schemes organised by Kent County Council. The scheme lasted two years and provided her with a small income and free travel. In a 15 month period she undertook three placements – The Ramsgate Careers Centre, the Canterbury College of Technology and the Margate

Magistrates Court. She also attended Technical College one day per week and achieved a BTEC in Business Studies and R.S.A. Typing, the latter with distinction. During the second year trainees were encouraged to apply for jobs and, as a result, Kathryn gained her first real job with Prestige Insurance in Cliftonville. The immediate hoist in income, together with a bit of sponging from Dad led to driving lessons, the test and the purchase of her first car – a little red Mini which Stephen spent a large part of the summer holiday of 1987 doing up for her. It was not long before she transferred to Provident Life in Canterbury where she fell under the wings of an influential matriarch who taught her a good deal about the insurance industry before the office closed down. Unfortunately much of the confidence she gained was knocked out of her in her next job at Pharos Insurance, Herne Bay. After about a year relationships were so strained that when she showed too much of an interest for moving on, she was dismissed. However, she picked herself up and acquired another post with Thanet Insurance, Herne Bay and settled there happily as a 'Consultant' with her own business card. All the while, of course, her income rose steadily and in 1989 the Mini was sold in favour of a Ford Escort. We smiled happily and quietly wrote off the unpaid debts of her Mini whilst coughing up more to help her pay for this one. What are parents for?

By the end of the decade both Stephen and Kathryn had found partners. Whilst at College in Bournemouth Stephen befriended a fellow student, Paul Selvey, and during his second year there they, plus two others, pooled their resources and rented a house together. Their close association meant that they both met each other's sisters. So it was that Stephen started going out with Donna and Kathryn struck up a relationship with Paul. When Stephen started work in Croydon in 1988 things were sufficiently advanced for Donna to move in with him and they found a small flat together. Paul returned home to live but the strains of a long-distance relationship caused Kathryn to find a job and accommodation in North London in 1989 so that she could be close to Paul. It was not long before they too found a flat and moved in together. We were very happy for both of them even though such premarital shenanigans would have aroused strong criticism from our parents and grand-parents. It goes to show how attitudes had changed and the degree of moral liberation in post-war Britain.

In my experience the need to socialise is not so strong during middle-age and you are more content to relax at home. The first pangs of age coincides with the most pressured and stressful phase of your working life with the result that you are left with less nervous energy and a greater need for peace and quiet. There also tends to be less need for diversion because there is enough happening within the family, especially if the children are adolescent. So you sit on the touchline as an observer and live life through the children. There is a certain pace and fascination there which triggers memories of your own youth that make it compelling. The demands they make as they pull away from the apron strings absorbs an increasing amount of time and energy. With ferrying them around, playing open house to their friends and rescheduling meals and household maintenance around their commitments, they become an ever more dominating influence upon your life. That is not to say that it is not

enjoyable. There is a satisfaction in smoothing their way and sharing their pleasures, even if there is a niggling inclination to discretely protect and police them. You love them and will do anything for them. It comes as something of a shock to the system, therefore, when they suddenly leave home and it all comes to an abrupt end. When Stephen left it was not so bad. He was going to College, we had plenty of warning and we knew he would be returning for the holidays. We missed him, of course, but Kathryn was still there to divert our attention. Her decision to leave was, however, sudden and unexpected and she was gone in days. She left a huge vacuum in her wake and we struggled to come to terms with the emptiness. Naturally we worried about her ability to cope in the big City. With a generous mother and an over-indulgent grandmother always at her beck and call we felt she might be vulnerable and in for a bit of a shock, but not a bit of it! We were amazed at how well she coped even if she had to telephone home to find out how to boil an egg! For a young 19 year old she showed real grit and determination and we were proud of her.

For Jenny and I there were a number of changes to our lives in the 80's. One of the most momentous was giving up smoking. Since my first tipped 'Woodbine' in the bushes at the age of 13 I had smoked more and more. By 1983 both Jenny and I were smoking 20 a day each and sometimes, at parties where you smoke to drink and drink to smoke, we would smoke 20 in a single evening! During our lifetime there had been a total change in public attitudes towards smoking. In our youth everybody smoked. Given the lead by society's film star idols it was seen as fashionable and stylish. By the 80's the links with lung cancer had been made and the public were in full-scale retreat from the habit. By then smokers were beginning to be the exception rather than the rule. By the age of 40 I began to feel breathless when I ran up stairs. It was a danger signal which gave me the impetus to give it up. Jenny and I had tried to give up smoking countless times before but only one of our efforts lasted very long. When the irritability of withdrawal began to kick in we would goad each other until one or the other of us cracked. This time we gave up separately. I had my last cigarette at Easter 1983 and Jenny gave up on her birthday in 1984. It was surprisingly easy once you had convinced yourself of the serious health dangers.

During the 80's we returned to the fold of practicing Christians and started to attend Church. After spending a sizeable part of my youth in Church, for me it was like a homecoming. Our local Church – The Ancient Church of St. Martin-in-Herne – was the second Christian foundation in the country and after more than 1500 years of worship on the site it had an ambience of prayerfulness and tradition which I found particularly alluring. We also liked the incumbent, the Rev. Patrick Sales, and it was largely his influence which moved Jenny along the path of Christian belief and devotion. Unfortunately I was not so drawn. I have never felt myself to be a spiritual sort of person. In a great many ways I feel closer to earth than heaven and I am too happy and challenged by this life to spend too much time contemplating the next. Jenny on the other hand seems to be on a higher spiritual plane. She has no doubt about the power of God over man and adopts a correspondingly stoical attitude to life. I am more confused, more torn between the ideas of predestination and the power of man's free will. I suppose I feel that any quest for the truth would not help

me along very much so I don't spend too much time thinking about it. That is not to say that I do not believe, I do and I am very committed to Christian ideals and the Christian way of life. I am just not sure about certain aspects of theology. There was, however, something else that drew me to Church and that was the music. I loved the singing especially the four part harmony. With a local reputation for operatic singing it was not long before I was drawn into the choir, all be it only for high days and holidays. I was also invited to make solo contributions on many occasions, which was a particular privilege, and I also took part in a variety of fund-raising musical soirees.

During the 80's, for all the reasons outlined above, I was far less involved with Operatics. My last show as an actor with Herne Bay Operatic Society was 'Brigadoon' in 1981 when I played the dramatic role of Harry Ritchie. Stephen was part of the stage crew and it was the one and only time we were involved in the same production. My last outing with them was in 1986 when I directed 'Kismet'. By this time my drive for recognition and ambition for stardom had all but burnt out. I had been lucky to play all the parts which really stirred me and the challenge had diminished. It was all becoming a bit too routine. In 1988 and 1989, however, Vi Cole invited me to take the leading parts in Gilbert and Sullivan's 'Mikado' and 'The Sorcerer' with Ramsgate Operatic Society and I guested to sing a high tenor part for Canterbury Operatic Society's production of 'Fiddler on the Roof'. These were the last full-length shows I ever did. But it was not the end of my stage career. As before, I was involved in a great many cabarets and revues staged all over East Kent. The most notable were 'An Evening with Richard Rogers' staged by Annie Harrison and Dominic Adams at the King's Hall, Herne Bay, with just six of us in 1980 and a 'Grand Charity Music Hall' staged at the Marlowe Theatre, Canterbury, in 1988. There John McCrae (a fellow member of the Herne Bay Operatic Society) and myself resurrected, for the umpteenth time, a 'Hinge and Bracket' act which had been hugely popular in a Music Hall 10 years earlier. Hinge and Bracket were a famous drag act in the 70's – two men, one pianist and one performer, singing operatic songs in falsetto with a lot of comic banter between. We imitated them very successfully even though I had to mime playing the piano.

After the political and economic upheavals of the 70's, the 80's were sober, even austere. Rampant inflation during the 70's encouraged ridiculous wage claims and the most vicious and damaging industrial disputes. There were riots, marches and civil disobedience culminating in the 'Winter of Discontent' in 1979 where life was severely disrupted by public service strikes. Services ground to a halt and rubbish accumulated in the streets. The Labour government seemed unable or unwilling to curb the power of the Unions and it seemed authority was losing its grip. Even the fashions of the 70's seemed to challenge accepted convention with men sporting shoulder-length hair, flared trousers and platform shoes and women with mini-skirts and legs that seemed to go to their armpits! At the General Election in May 1979 the Conservatives swept to power on a ticket of tough action to bring inflation and the workforce under control. So emerged a raft of policies rooted in what has since been called 'monetarism', pushed through with venom and determination by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. She changed the culture of working life, especially in the



public services. There was a purge for efficiency, value for money and accountability with an emphasis upon personal responsibility. To achieve this Local Authorities were savaged and large areas of the public services were opened up to private tender. The competition pegged, even lowered, wages and the Unions were rendered powerless to act. The result was that inflation steadily declined. At the same time whole tiers of middle management were made redundant. It was the productive workers, the wealth enhancers, that really mattered. In Thatcher's world there was no space to carry passengers. Per capita productivity therefore rose, the country became more competitive abroad, exports rose, order books filled, more jobs became available and unemployment dropped. That, at least, was the theory. The practice was not quite so sweet. It was all a bit too mechanistic and dehumanising. Concern for the workers as people fell away. Making a fast buck was more important. The purge for productivity made victims of older and more vulnerable workers who found themselves being made redundant. It became the age of the 'Yuppy' – the young upwardly mobile people. As the 80's proceeded and the Conservative Party were re-elected, the monetarist screw turned. By the end of the decade few people could feel secure in their jobs. Even the traditionally safe world of education was turned on its head and I too became a victim of government policy.

The 80's was the age of the silicon chip. Computers conquered all. At the beginning of the decade only the largest business organisations had accomplished any degree of computerisation, and this was with large 'mainframe' computers designed to store and retrieve data from magnetic tapes. By 1990 almost every office worker was equipped with a P.C. (Personal Computer). By this time I not only had my own office computer but I was also equipped with a portable 'laptop' with a modem giving E-mail connection to Kent County Council's internal computer network. I had also become moderately computer literate and was well-versed in word processing. On the home front microwave ovens appeared on the scene along with video cassette recorders and C.D. players. The first cordless telephones also became available although they were extremely bulky. For us this was not a time for acquisition. We had everything we needed and were not dazzled by new innovations. We eventually acquired them all, but usually some time after their introduction. We replaced the lounge suite and bought one or two pieces of occasional furniture but that was all. As we were spending more and more time at home we became more avid television viewers. Unfortunately the creative flare of the 70's lapsed and programming seldom reached beyond the ordinary. Soap operas continued to flourish, especially with the introduction of 'Eastenders', and children's television improved, but there was very little else to write home about!

The most notable and life changing acquisition of the 80's was a four legged friend we named 'Ben' who we bought in 1984. He became a shining light in our lives. How we tumbled upon the idea I do not know. Neither Jenny or I were 'doggy' people. Whether Kathryn floated the idea or whether we felt the need for some kind of child replacement as the children were reaching independence I don't know, but the idea took root. When, in early August, we took a cottage holiday on a farm near Ilfracombe and saw border collies at work, we were sufficiently persuaded to chose





sex and name. When we returned we located a breeder and came home with a six week old bundle of fluff. Ben was almost a tri-colour border collie. I say 'almost' because his grandmother had had an accident with a passing Alsatian, so he was 25% Alsatian. Nevertheless, although he was longer in the leg, he had the collie looks and the collie intelligence. He was obedient, docile and loving and he quickly wormed his way into our affections. His loyalty, absolute delight at seeing you, and sheer pleasure at being with you tugged at the heartstrings. I walked him twice a day and spent hours exploring the woods, walking the shoreline and throwing a ball – things that I would not otherwise have dreamt of doing. He was a loyal and trusty companion. At home he earned his bones! He was good company for Jenny's Mum and had a bark loud enough to be a real deterrent to any would-be intruder. Ben lived to the ripe old age of 16 and became a much cherished member of the family. Jenny has often joked that if she had known what a delight dogs were she would not have had any children!

As the 80's drew to a close the faint sound of wedding bells heralded a new chapter in our lives.