

DON HEWSON'S CHILDREN LAUNCH

BOOK 6 IN THE DON HEWSON SERIES

Chapter 1: Mark Johnson

When I returned from China I went through the Red "Something To Declare" Customs channel.

I declared the gold memento Mr Wong gave me.

I was quite impressed with the Customs people. They weighed the memento. They dipped it in water to establish its volume. They did some calculations.

The memento may look like solid gold but the Customs people told me that the memento is in fact mainly steel with only a very thin gold coating. I had virtually no import duty to pay.

Don was at Manchester Airport to meet me. On the way home Don caught me up with all the events that have happened while I have been away.

My appointment with Cecil Byram is at twelve tomorrow morning. Cecil is going to take me to lunch.

I have an appointment to see Bishop Singleton on Friday evening.

Don had one important piece of news for me. Karen Byram is seeing a young man. Giles is in the year above Karen at the College.

I told Don that I am fine with that. I am happy for Karen. I hope that Karen ends up with a good man. I wish Karen well.

I had lots of hugs and cuddles with my family and all the girls and little children. I roughed Robert Graham and Max Hewson and Colin Donkin because they wanted it. Then I hugged them because they wanted that, too.

There are a bunch of new children, Don's grandchildren. They seem nice enough children.

I am not on kitchen rota until next week. Don thinks it will be a few days before I get over my jet lag, so I am free to do whatever I like.

I checked my bank account online. I am still being paid my profit share, but it seems down from what it should be. I will check with Cecil.

On the morning after I returned I went to our Church.

I sat quietly with The Lord Jesus Christ for over an hour. Neither of us spoke aloud, but I felt better afterwards.

Praying in my container had not been as satisfactory.

After a while I came home.

I borrowed a car and I drove to Willerton. Cecil and I had a good lunch.

Apparently the weekly reports and the photos that I have been sending to College have very much impressed the College. The first exam is in a month's time. I am requested to pop into College to speak to my tutors.

Cecil was relieved that I already know about Giles. Cecil is also happy that I am pleased for Karen.

Giles is a grandson of a long established bed manufacturer in Meldon.

I did not say anything to Cecil but I think it must be awful to go through life as somebody's grandson or somebody's son or daughter rather than as your own person.

"Do you, Karen, daughter of Byram's Bearings take Giles, grandson of Meldon Beds to be your lawful wedded husband?"

I am my own man, whoever I am.

Cecil debriefed me about my experiences in China. What have I learned?

I said that the most important thing I have learned is about the benefits of planning a project in meticulous detail. The job had gone very smoothly because I had planned it properly.

The Project Management books Cecil had lent me had been very useful in helping me to plan the project.

I am now not frightened to be on my own in a foreign country.

I feel enormously proud of having moved a foundry before my eighteenth birthday.

I told Cecil that I am due to see Bishop Singleton on Friday for a discussion about the missionary application. Assuming Bishop Singleton is supportive I will put myself forward to become a missionary.

The next step will be to complete the application form. I will formally apply to become a missionary. As part of the approval process I will have interviews with Bishop Singleton and with the Stake President.

Cecil said that he was thinking about how to use his money. I have heard Cecil being rude about banks before.

Cecil knows that if he advertises a willingness to invest money he will be inundated with requests. Deciding which investments to make will be very time consuming.

“Cecil. Why are you making this so difficult for yourself?”

“You have customers like Pierre in Toulon who you have been doing business with for more than twenty years. You know Pierre. You trust Pierre.”

“Write to Pierre. Say that as Europe comes out of the crisis there will be opportunities for Pierre to expand his existing business, to develop new businesses, or to buy good businesses at a good price.”

“You do not wish to lend money to Pierre. You would like the opportunity to join with Pierre in a joint venture.”

“You do not have time or expertise to be involved in the running of the businesses. Your intention is to be only an investor or a sleeping partner.”

“If you write to twenty guys you trust, some of them will have good propositions for you.”

Cecil looked at me like he does sometimes. I state the blindingly obvious and Cecil treats it like a Revelation.

George Arron and Irene Byram are going great guns on the project to use ex services ex prisoners to build sheltered housing for elderly people.

Outline planning applications have been lodged in respect of three former stockpile sites. A College will provide training and qualification routes for the workers. The builders union is supportive.

The Prison Department of the Home Office says that when we are ready to recruit they will put sensible guys who are near the ends of their sentences all together in an open prison in the North.

The Department of Work and Pensions has assigned a middle ranking civil servant to the project. If things go wrong this civil servant will intervene to put things right quickly.

Cecil is using his industrial research company to find someone to build up and to run the metal stockholding business.

Cecil has no intention of putting me into a significant managerial role between now and September when I go off to be a missionary. Unless something comes up!

I will still go to management meetings and to meetings with the union.

In my absence Bert has been sacked as Chef.

Barney Stoker noticed that the catering profits were down. A surprise search of Bert's vehicle discovered that Bert had several joints of meat in the boot of his car. An agency chef is running things until I return.

Now that I am back, what do I wish to do?

I said that I would pop into the Neverthorpe canteen tomorrow morning and then come over to Willerton to see Cecil.

I am sorry about Bert. I thought that he would have more sense.

The obvious answer is to advertise for another chef. I will sleep on that.

Charlotte is happy with her CD sales. Charlotte sold nearly three million DVDs/CDs, and she has made four million pounds. Charlotte is working on another CD for this coming Christmas. I said to Charlotte that she has done incredibly well to sell so many of her first CD. So well done!

"Good Riddance, Rat" and "I Ain't Kissing Toads" have been terrific successes.

"Are You The One?" sold reasonably well but it is not in the same league as the other two songs.

Charlotte has sent a couple more pop songs to Mr Driburg for placing with singers. "Your Loving Lips" is good I think. Until I said it Charlotte had not realised that the lyrics could be a man singing to a woman.

"Take Me Slowly" is almost a love guidance tract for young men. I think it could be a big hit.

Charlotte turned sixteen while I was in China.

Charlotte is at last allowed to be interested in young men.

There are no young men in Tryton who interest Charlotte.

Charlotte intends to serve as a missionary. On Charlotte's calculations it will be four and a half years before Charlotte is ready for a romance.

Unless Charlotte meets somebody really special before then Charlotte is just not interested. So Charlotte says, anyway.

Sally is happy and well. Sally is ready for High School in September. Or for the theatre school if it opens.

Sally has planned a CD of patriotic songs for issue for Christmas. There is also going to be a DVD. Gerald Butler is going to be Sally's pianist.

Gerald is a good looking lad as well as being an excellent piano player. I will ask Charlotte to keep an eye on those two while I am on missionary service.

Colin and Peter and Georgina are going to put out a CD and DVD of protest songs.

The Tykes collectively are going to put out a second DVD and CD of songs for children.

Andrew and Michael have grown! They are well and happy.

Around the time that I have my exams the GCSE exams will begin so everyone who has exams is just concentrating on preparing for their exams.

Bishop Singleton was really nice. He listened to my account of my Chinese experiences.

Bishop Singleton says that he has no hesitation in endorsing my application to become a missionary. The experience will be good for me.

Bishop Singleton says that my biggest fault is that I am too humble and modest. I undervalue myself. I judge myself too harshly.

At the weekend I chatted with Carlo Stewart from Dower Productions. Carlo visits Tryton almost every weekend.

The children have a schedule of music they are learning. Carlo's visits give the children a target to have learned their music by.

Carlo really likes our children. Carlo has chosen the music, so Carlo likes the music, too. Carlo advises the children about patriotic songs and about protest and folk songs.

Carlo has spent his life in music.

Carlo told me that "Terrible Tykes" has been running for half a year and it is already the most popular program on ITV children's television by a long way. Unless there is a major upset "Terrible Tykes" could go on for years and years. The problem for Carlo's company is in maintaining the quality of the series. This new theatre school is very important to Dower Productions because otherwise the children will lose all their holidays every year. It is tough on everyone to produce nine episodes in seven working days as they had to do recently. One or two episodes a week is much better. With a theatre school the children would lose no holiday at all.

Carlo told me that contracts have now been signed for the third series of "Terrible Tykes".

Andrew will be in the third series along with Margaret Graham and Janine Wilkins. Although Andrew plays the bagpipes Andrew will be a guitarist in the third series. Andrew may have bagpipe solos.

Or they may save Andrew's bagpipe skills to reveal on a future Christmas Special. This year the surprise is Colin's trombone expertise.

Carlo said that it cannot be long before Derek Donkin's voice breaks. The third series may well be Derek's last series.

Gerald Butler is the next eldest boy. Carlo is watching both boys.

Carlo is going to ask Andrew to learn the piano because when Derek and Gerald go the series will be slightly short of male pianists.

Carlo is installing a piano at Daniel Wilbey's house so that Daniel may learn the piano. With Daniel being so young that is a sensible investment.

Mary from the Tryton office of Meldon Social Services came to see me.

I will turn eighteen soon.

Normally Mary would be trying to persuade me to move into a council house and to bring up my siblings. If I am going away on missionary service then that suggestion is not practical.

When Rebecca returns from her missionary service in July will Rebecca wish to look after the Johnson family?

I told Mary that I have not spoken to Rebecca since she telephoned at Christmas. I have no idea what is in Rebecca's head.

Mary is concerned that Bob and Geoff no longer visit the house.

I told Mary that with me as a priest and with Charlotte and Rebecca as very steady individuals the Johnson family is not obviously in need of Mormon support. Bob and Geoff have been moved to other challenges.

I told Mary that Bishop Ted Singleton and Don Hewson get on well together. If there are any problems the problems will be resolved. Those two men together can crack any problem.

Mary is nervous about the proposed theatre school but she has no objections.

Mary has no objection to Andrew becoming involved with "Terrible Tykes".

I had to complete the application form to become a Missionary. It is an online form. I recorded lots of things. When I thought that I had finished the application I asked Bishop Singleton to look at it.

Bishop Singleton sent me an email listing four things that I had left out.

I spent a few days two summers ago sorting out an old couple's garden and painting their fence. I repaired their shed and I painted it. This was to help Rebecca who was one of a group of Mormon teenagers who were cleaning and painting the old couple's house.

I thought nothing of it, but Bishop Singleton said that I had to write about performing the task.

The raffles I organised at Christmas at Byrams were raffling off meat and whiskey that we could not use at the Hewson house. I gave some meat to Bob to distribute to needy Mormons. There was nothing to it, but Bishop Singleton said that I had to write about the raffle and about giving away food that my household could not use. I am nice to Robert Graham because I like Robert and I respect him. I like Robert. I get on really well with Robert.

I have never been nice to Robert because it will look good on my application to be a missionary.

Bishop Singleton told me that I had to write something about my relationship with Robert.

I didn't like that. I felt that including our friendship in the application cheapened our friendship.

I even more disliked Bishop Singleton making me write about my donation to the hardship fund. When we Johnsons were desperately poor the Church had helped us out a few times. I had a windfall payment from a Florida mall shopkeepers association. So I was able to repay the money we had been given.

I did this because it was right, not to put on an application form a few years later. I mentioned the rescue of Linda Donkin but not that I deliberately broke a man's arm when we lads were rescuing Linda. It was probably not necessary to break his arm but I wanted to do it. I still feel a bit bad that I do not feel bad about what I did to that man.

When the application was finished I looked like a cross between Mother Teresa and Saint Francis of Assisi, with a touch of Rambo. It is all true. It just isn't a complete picture of me.

I left out the difficult times I had with Rebecca when Rebecca was trying to bang my head through a wall.

The martial arts training that I had from Tohur is not mentioned.

My week in France was a spiritually and personally interesting experience for me. It does not get a mention.

Nobody hangs out their washing to show visitors. I did not put these things on my application to become a missionary.

The interview with Bishop Singleton was fairly short. He knows me pretty well.

The Stake President is David Swift. I did not know him.

President Swift remembered interviewing Rebecca.

President Swift spent a lot of time asking me about my personal relationship with the Church. Some of the questions were very deep.

Our troubled background before we were taken into care seemed to be of huge interest to him.

President Swift was interested in how our Mormon family is able to thrive in a non-Mormon house. We talked about my relationship with Don Hewson.

We also talked a lot about my relationship with Cecil Byram.

We talked about the breakdown of my relationship with Karen Byram. President Swift was amazingly supportive.

It does get to me a bit though that Cecil Byram, my sister Charlotte, and President Swift all think that I manipulated the situation so that Karen would chuck me.

They think that I was clever and subtle.

The fact is that I was dog tired, irritated, and stupid. There is no point trying to explain this. Some fights you just can't win!

I saw my College tutors who gave me advice about the exams.

I reread my course book and I practised on some past papers.

I sat my exams.

I flew a bit.

At work I appointed a new chef, Jason, who seems sound. Mind you, I had thought that Bert was sound.

I turned eighteen. We had a small party.

I was surprised how many girls came to the party. Charlotte has a lot more friends than I had realised.

I have passed my first year exams. I have Distinctions on every paper.

I am going around the new factories that we bought. If there is any maintenance that needs doing I do it. There are maintenance staff in each factory of course but usually they are fully busy maintaining the machinery.

Some non-essential maintenance jobs have been deferred for years.

I found myself cleaning out a drainage channel that had never been cleaned out in living memory. I repaired some roof tiles and guttering.

Some machine tools have not been used in thirty years. I put those into working order for them to be sent to China.

Really I am filling in time until I go on my missionary service. Matt has given me a tremendous training and I am so grateful to him.

I was at a joint management and union meeting, one of the last I am to attend before going away for two years on missionary service. These meetings are generally fairly quiet because there are normally no surprises. Byrams is a well organised and happy company.

At the end of the meeting, in the Management Announcements, Cecil said,

“There is one announcement that I am enormously pleased to make.”

“We have never had an “Apprentice Of The Year” at Byrams.”

“We have had some very good apprentices, but none of them have ever won. I am very pleased and proud to announce that this year the Apprentice of the Year is from Byrams.”

Everybody cheered. I was trying to think who it could be. Alec is pretty good. So is Gwen.

“So congratulations to our Apprentice of the Year, Mark Johnson!”

I had not known that I was entered for the competition, so of course I was completely shocked to have won the award. I could not speak.

Everyone stood up and applauded.

There is an awards dinner in London in July that I must attend with Cecil and Matt. There is a small cash prize. The important issue is the award itself. I was in a state of shock for most of the day.

Everybody is very pleased for me. Matt is very happy with me. I am very happy with Matt.

Sally put a sparkler on my ice cream at dinner.

After dinner I had to add this information to my application to become a Mormon missionary. Mother Teresa with a spanner!

Charlotte has some good news, too. “Your Loving Lips” is going to be sung by a leading American male singer.

CHAPTER 2: Ali Miah

At the helicopter squadron repair and maintenance workshops I had hands on experience taking helicopters and engines apart and putting them together again.

When I repaired each helicopter I had to fly it before signing it off.

Knowing that you will be flying the helicopter yourself is a real incentive for taking extra care!

Up until now I have had very little social contact with the lower ranks in the Royal Air Force. Working alongside them I learned a lot about their lives. They take great pride in doing a good job.

They are pleased to see an officer cadet like me getting my hands dirty. They gave me some of the really mucky jobs like clearing fuel lines and emptying a sump. It is all good experience!

This may sound silly but although I study engineering I have very little experience of getting my hands oily. I am all for it.

I was the only Muslim on the base so I just ate the vegetarian option.

I enjoyed the whole experience.

Back at Cambridge I am working very hard for my exams.

The May Ball is going well. I am so pleased that I am not on the Committee. Those guys are working so hard.

I have the catering side under control. The catering squad are recruited. They each know what they will be doing on the night. I have three people doing nothing. They are floaters who can be assigned to anything as the night progresses. The Committee members are very happy not to have to worry about the catering as well as everything else.

The vegetarians at King's who sampled my Vegetarian Special have booked me to demonstrate the Vegetarian Special for the University Vegetarian Society in November.

Rumours about the May Ball food and my two new alcoholic drinks are circulating. All the tickets are sold.

It suddenly occurred to me to worry about the liquor licence. The Committee told me that the legal side is covered. The College Bursar is the licensee and his licence covers everything.

My conversations with Major Dinsdale have really improved my Putonghua.

I am now having conversations with Fan about so many things. We have talked about issues in Chinese society like their population control. How does a dictatorship cope with the anarchy of a capitalist free market?

There is a very strong ancient Chinese culture within which Communism is trying to operate. Where are the tensions?

What is Fan's perception of the Taiwan issue?

Over Easter I will be at RAF Culdrose. Wing Commander Beeson has told me to build my stamina for swimming clothed and for swimming under water while clothed. I will be doing a lot of that at RAF Culdrose.

The Irish Sea at Easter is going to be cold.

I get up early every morning. I swim fully clothed in the University swimming pool before breakfast. Some of my lengths are under water. I am building my stamina and my speed.

After forty lengths I have a hot shower and I dress for classes. The other early morning swimmers were surprised that I swim fully clothed. I told them that I am training for Air Sea Rescue. They are impressed.

I don't see Hank around at all. Apparently Hank has finished his Doctorate and he has gone back to the United States.

I have not told anyone what Major Dinsdale told me about Hank.

Fan's father is someone high up in the Highways Department of Beijing Council. When Fan returns to China one of his options is to work under his father. With two Engineering degrees from Cambridge Fan will have lots of opportunities.

I have stopped flying now because we are so close to the exams.

CHAPTER 3 : Shakoora Daar

I was so happy and proud in New York.

Emma and Karen looked really good in their dresses. The Fashion Channel kept showing Emma and Karen. It even showed me sometimes.

Sahid had sent the Fashion Channel and all the journalists a story about the Daar business.

Sahid made Doncaster sound romantic, which takes some doing.

I have never heard of "the café society of the Doncaster Riviera" or "the coffee houses of the Doncaster Plaza". I did not know that the River Don is named after the Goddess of Women.

Sahid said that none of the fashion journalists will have been to Doncaster so Sahid can say what he likes.

There is a high fashion company called "Doncaster". Sahid takes care to explain that we are not the same business.

Sahid's "story" is that we are the children of refugees, three orphan teenage girls succeeding in the fashion business. This makes us more interesting.

We are already one of the largest suppliers of bridal wear and bridesmaid's dresses in the UK. Our ballroom dancing dresses appear frequently in national ballroom dancing competitions.

By the time I returned to England we already had four orders. Two orders for each of the dresses that Emma and Karen were wearing at £25,000 a time, making £100,000!

Sahid took the computer design programs that Mr Hewson gave us. Sahid tweaked them so that we can create whatever visual effects we wish. Once we have a design that we like we are able to size it to all the standard sizes, or uniquely if appropriate. We can deal with the client who is size twelve up top and size twenty around the hips!

Sahid is seeing how much of this technology he can put onto the web site to help clients. We have to be careful not to give the clients so much that they do not need us.

We can print off any paper patterns that we need. We usually generate information for our laser cloth cutter because the laser cutter is quicker and more accurate than paper patterns.

Max telephoned us and he spoke to Mina.

Apparently there is a child called Michelle Sayers who Max danced with in the film. Michelle would love to go on the red carpet at the London Premiere but Michelle's family cannot afford an expensive dress.

Mina did not consult with us but she just agreed that we would provide a "red carpet" dress for Michelle.

Michelle and her mother came to Doncaster. Michelle is eleven years old. Michelle explained that she and Max may dance on the red carpet so it has to be a dress that Michelle can waltz in.

Mina has been designing bridesmaid dresses and she now has about thirty designs on the computer. Amina put Michelle's photo into the computer program and we generated thirty images of Michelle wearing the different bridesmaid dresses.

Michelle told us which four she liked best.

Amina discussed with Michelle what Michelle liked about these four designs.

Amina sent Michelle away for lunch.

When Michelle came back Amina had created a unique design that was utterly right for Michelle.

Michelle went through our stocks of cloth. Michelle decided on a cream silk that we stock for ballroom dancing dresses.

The next morning Michelle came back and she tried the dress on. Michelle looked so good! We took photos.

At the London Premiere Max and Michelle danced on the red carpet. This was completely unexpected.

The kids pretended that it was a completely spontaneous idea that just came to them. Their dancing put them on almost every newspaper front page and on television news programmes around the world.

The film company is well pleased with the publicity. So are we!

We Daars are very happy. We are taking orders for Emma's two dresses and for Karen's two dresses. At twenty-five thousand pounds a dress, only twenty orders is worth half a million pounds. We have nearly twenty orders.

The dress I wore in New York is "only" eight hundred pounds to buy. We have orders for sixty.

Michelle Sayers' dress is also priced at eight hundred pounds. We have sold nine so far.

Our business now has a reputation and a track record in red carpet dresses.

Amina and I are leading in the "red carpet" area.

Sahid is now using targeted marketing towards every actress in California and Bollywood for our red carpet dresses.

Amina is still spending a lot of time with her father so I am managing eighteen young women churning out base dresses for brides and for Mina's bridesmaid range. There are three very good women doing the red carpet and ballroom and general sewing.

We had expected to have to struggle for orders by now because the Chinese have re-entered the bridal wear market.

Most of the dresses used to be made within thirty miles of the Chinese coast. Most of the experienced Chinese people died in the tsunami. Or if they have survived they have lost everything. Poor souls!

The Chinese manufacturers attempting to break into the English market have no track record here and they have no reputation here. They know nobody in England. Sahid is very good at internet marketing.

While the Chinese were quiet Sahid flooded the British social media with targeted advertisements for our bridal business. There cannot be a woman getting married this summer who does not know about the Daar bridal fashion business. Sahid is still saturating the social media for us.

We have a solid base of bridal dress shops who like the styles that we provide. We also prepare dresses to the designs that the shops send us. If a shop orders one of our dresses on Saturday our courier will deliver on Wednesday. If the design is not one of our designs our courier will deliver the dress on Thursday. The Chinese cannot compete with these response times.

On Internet orders from private individuals we promise despatch in five working days instead of the two or three working days we promise the bridal shops. That gives us the flexibility that we need to manage our workload.

Mina's range of thirty bridesmaids' dresses is doing well. We offer eight colours, five styles, and sizes from toddler through to size twenty. The bridal shops purchase these from us at prices significantly lower than our Internet prices.

Sahid suggested that we should do what Byram's do, which is to give a discount for quantity, with quantity measured over a moving twelve month period rather than

simply on each order. That will encourage the bridal shops to stay with us when the Chinese come back into the British market.

Our ballroom dancing and general clothes sales over the Internet are going well.

We are now the second largest employer of females in our Somali community. Our workers have reasonable jobs in good working conditions within five or ten minutes walk of their homes.

For a woman our jobs are pleasanter and better paid than food processing or running up dresses to sell on market stalls. It is an all Muslim all female business.

Many Muslim men behave properly.

Unfortunately there are some Muslim men, even in our community, who are not respectful of women.

Not having to deal with male colleagues or with male bosses is a huge benefit for our staff. Just not having males around is a great benefit.

We are the only all female large employer in our community.

We only take women who can already sew. We have a waiting list of people who would like to work for us.

When Amina and I have time we design more bridal dresses.

Although Abdullah and Sahid and Jabril and even Ahmed have some input into the business they never come to the building during normal work hours.

Sahid set our internet sales system so that it automatically prints out the invoice and the invoice acts as an address label.

Jibril goes into the factory after dinner each night. Jibril picks and packs all the accessory orders ready for the courier the following day. We do not need to supervise Jibril.

Uncle Jalil is now Head of the family. Uncle Jalil says that he does not understand the female fashion business, so Abdullah is deputed to represent Uncle Jalil.

Abdullah's role is to be above the day to day detail that can drown a manager.

Abdullah is "big picture", reputation, integrity, and gravitas.

Abdullah guides us to plan ahead and to think ahead well beyond the end of the current month.

It was Abdullah's idea to expand into bridesmaid dresses.

Mina really worked hard at designing our range. Mina has always been the third person in our co-operative but bridesmaids dresses is an area where Mina is the clear leader.

Mina is still our book-keeper. The wage-slips are prepared by our accountant. We pay the wages direct into employee bank accounts so there is almost no need for cash in the business. Mina has a petty cash tin for small purchases. Amina and I have debit cards that we use for the business.

Abdullah and Sahid are not paid anything for the work they put in. Neither of them needs money from us.

Abdullah and Sahid say that they are very proud of us. They want us to be a success. They are happy to help.

Jabril says that he is happy to contribute by picking and packing accessories. We pay Jabril each week to keep him keen.

Mina really appreciates that Jabril is doing a job that would otherwise fall to Mina. Mina has a lot to do anyway.

We three partners in the co-operative rarely take any money out for ourselves. We live at home. The housekeeping money comes from Sahid because Sahid earns such good money.

Almost everything we produce is ordered over the Internet and pre-paid.

We have nobody who owes us money. We have no debt. We pay our workers their wages each week. We pay for our raw materials as soon as they are delivered.

Our social media marketing is expensive but we do not advertise in any other way.

Our very large volume of business mainly comes from the social media marketing.

We also have a lot of repeat orders from the bridal shops.

We have stocks of base bride dresses but we keep those stocks down to five dresses in each size in each range.

Each morning we see what orders we have had over the internet since the previous morning. We fill the orders from stock and then we make more dresses to rebuild the stock.

Monday mornings are becoming exciting because the bridal wear shops and the individual customers place a lot of orders on Friday and Saturday and Sunday.

We work very hard to have all the shop orders ready for the courier on Tuesday afternoon.

We often have bare shelves in the stockroom on Tuesday afternoon. So we will increase our stock to maybe eight of each model in the more popular sizes.

At the moment we make each bridesmaid dress to order, but we are beginning to see that the majority of the orders are for girls between seven and twelve years of age. Apple green and pink are the most popular colours.

We will look at our sales at the end of September to see which styles are the most popular. We have agreed that a quarter of our styles will be removed from sale in September to make room for new styles.

There can be very slight variations in colour between one roll of cloth and another particularly if they are not from the same batch. When we order cloth our supplier makes sure that all the rolls he supplies in each colour are from the same batch.

We place fairly large orders so the suppliers are very co-operative.

We have a small private reception area for clients that we use mainly for ballroom dancers and for our friends.

When we set up the business our target was to earn more money working for ourselves than we could earn working for someone else.

We have achieved that.

Thanks to Sahid's marketing and our good workers and the Chinese tsunami we are much better off than we had expected. We might buy a few houses in the coming year. We have not decided.

Our accountant warned us recently that we have a tax bill coming up for more than it would cost to buy a house in our area. We have enough money saved in the business that we could buy five houses so the tax bill is no problem.

We keep some money with Islamic Banks but mainly our money is with normal banks that offer a specialist Islamic account. We have spread our money so should one bank fail we would be hurt but we would not be crippled.

Interest is un-Islamic.

Our Islamic Banks and Islamic accounts use our money in accordance with Islamic principles. A ship carrying new Mercedes cars from Germany to Saudi Arabia is

always at sea for weeks. During that time either the car manufacturer has money tied up or the Saudi distributor has money tied up. So our Islamic Bank buys the cars in Germany and sells them to the Saudi distributor in Saudi Arabia. The Islamic Bank shares its profit with us instead of paying interest to us. Simple! The money is just reinvested unless we give notice that it is not to be reinvested. We recently told one of the banks to stop our ongoing revolving investments. We will have to pay the taxman so as each investment comes to fruition we are taking our cash out.

Sahid is still earning very good money from the Byrams web site.

Sahid says that metal prices and component prices will go down a lot this year as mines and smelters come into production. Eventually Sahid will be down to maybe forty thousand pounds a year from Byrams. Even that is still a terrific income for a sixteen year old lad.

Sahid earns about thirty thousand pounds a year from his "Terrible Tykes" web site.

The three houses Sahid has rented out are all producing income. So is the house that Sahid and Abdullah own jointly.

Sahid still has his filming income.

Sahid earned a hundred thousand pounds for recording Charlotte Johnson's CD because it has sold so well. That is very good pay for about ten days work.

Abdullah has decided to miss out on music school. Abdullah is going to do a degree in business management instead. Abdullah is still having singing lessons. Abdullah is a very good singer.

Kali likes the idea of the proposed theatre school in Tryton. Kali says that she would prefer to be a weekly boarder at the Hewson house. Kali says the school will not open before September at the soonest.

CHAPTER 4: Rebecca Johnson

I was sorry to part from Katy. She is such good fun! I am sure that we will stay in touch.

In Cork I am the “experienced” missionary and Ruth Ganton is learning from me. Ruth is a nice person.

Each day we go on the bus to the area that we are working in. The Irish people are almost all Catholic by religion, but a lot of them are open to a new religion.

They are usually astonished when Ruth tells them that we are missionaries. The idea of female missionaries is such a surprise to so many of them.

A lot of them think it is great that young women like us are spreading the word of the Lord.

They are also interested that we are not nuns. Our Mormon religion does not have nuns.

We do not attack the Catholic Church head on, because that is likely to cause difficulty. We talk about the positives of our Church. We talk about the social bonds within our wards, our community spirit, and our coming together to worship the Lord Jesus Christ.

We Mormons do not have any paid clergy at local level.

I have been a Mormon all my life, and so far as I know no paid Mormon clergy have ever visited our ward. Our Bishop is usually a respected person in our community who is called to be Bishop. The Bishop is unpaid. Even our Stake Presidents are unpaid.

This is so different to how the Catholics operate. When we explain how our Church operates the Catholics sometimes make rude comments about their paid clergy. Ruth and I do not comment.

Each Mormon has a relatively high level of education about our faith because almost all of us lay people will have to guide or to teach others. The Catholics find this practice interesting. It makes our religion more empowering for lay people.

Our cottage belongs to a Mormon family who are living in England for the foreseeable future. They rent the property to Mormon missionaries at reasonable rents.

We are usually invited in for a hot drink once or twice a day. Some of the people we chat to several times. Then we have to move on.

The ward in Cork are very good people. They are pretty conscientious about following up contacts.

What have I learned from being a missionary?

I have learned to listen before speaking.

I think that I have learned how to appear friendly and unthreatening.

I have learned that many people have problems and issues.

I have learned more humility.

Have I been a success as a missionary? I have found some people who may step forward. They are "Investigators" at the moment. They may join the Church.

I am unlikely ever to know. I have not been a failure.

What will I do when I return to Tryton? I have absolutely no idea.

CHAPTER 5 : David Wilkins

I sat my GCSE exams. I was going to go to Meldon Sixth Form College to study for A levels. Instead I have booked into the Cordon Bleu College in London. They offer a full degree.

Applicants are supposed to have the equivalent of a high school diploma before joining the course. I have published four cookery books and I have been on TV now for more than three years.

Mr Driburg negotiated for me to be allowed to start the course. I must maintain a high average, they say. No problem.

Tohur Miah is looking for a house in London for us to buy together. Tohur thinks that Ali is likely to be based at Heathrow Airport doing long-haul flights to the Far East. So Tohur wants to be close to the Underground line that goes straight to Heathrow.

Our Trustee Don Hewson says that the property must be well above sea level and already in reasonable condition.

Once we have a house in London it will be practical for other family members to study or work in London. Or just to come to London for a holiday.

Tohur and I would like a large kitchen for filming our TV programs.

My exams finish in June.

I will go to Manchester to record a raft of cookery programs.

When the school term ends the Tykes are filming.

Then all the youngsters are going camping. I will go with them because it is great fun.

Lionel and Greta Sachs are coming this year, and so are Sally and Rupert and Lucinda Thornton, Alice Hewson, Moklisur and Monika Miah, Andrew Johnson, Ahmed Daar, and Simeon Graham, all for their first time.

Amy Waters and Diana Green have not been dancing because of their GCSE exams. They are coming camping with us. It will be their first time camping with us.

My sister Helen will be preparing for her wedding so she will not be coming.

Ali Miah will be in China.

Rebecca Johnson will be back from her missionary service. I hope Rebecca comes because Rebecca is good fun.

Mark Johnson is definitely coming.

Robert Graham will be at Stoke Mandeville Hospital having an operation on his spine, so Robert will miss this year's camp. Don is going down to Stoke Mandeville with Robert for a few days over the actual operation. Don will collect Robert later.

Emma will mind the few children still at home.

Mark Johnson and Dennis Wilkins can both drive, so they will be our supplies officers.

The whole exercise will be good for all of us. We will have the campsite to ourselves. Fortunately the couple who run the campsite like us singing and playing music in the evenings.

There will be more than fifty of us all there in one big gang. It should be great!

I do not know what I will do with my life. I am only sixteen. For the moment I will carry on making TV programs and writing cookery books.

I do not need to work at all but I should do something with my life. I don't know what. I don't really fancy running a restaurant.

I am not going to work for someone else. I cannot see any business that I wish to start.

I wouldn't mind working for Don's son in law Paul Thornton for a bit, just to learn how he is so successful. I would like to spend a month observing Mr Porteous.

Cecil Byram is not as obviously clever as those two, but he seems to be a competent manager. His family's stockpiling strategy has really paid off.

Susie Thornton has been in hospital since January. Still nobody can say whether she will live or whether she will die.

Don Hewson is very worried about Susie but there is nothing Don can do. Once a month, Don makes a flying visit to London just to see Susie.

Don says that the only contribution he can make is to look after Susie's children, so he is doing that.

The Thornton children have had a culture shock. It is not just moving from the warm soft South to the cold hard North.

Living in a very large family is unusual for the Thorntons.

From watching "Terrible Tykes" and Robert Graham to living with half the Tykes and cooking with Robert Graham must be like going into the back of your television set.

The Hewson house is full of music because the Tykes are constantly practicing. Other children also play instruments and sing.

The three older Thornton children go to a fee paying school for rich children. I did not know it existed. It is on the outskirts of Meldon. Their nanny chauffeurs them while Don minds little Guy.

Don and Emma have bought a disused factory on the edge of Tryton to be the theatre school. They have applied for planning permission to use it as a school. It needs work doing to it but nothing major. It needs a rewire, plumbing, security and fire alarms, and a lot of paint. It needs some repairs to the roof, but that does not need planning permission.

The name will be "Tryton Theatre School".

Miss Addie is going to move her dancing school to there because the facilities will be much better than at the church hall Miss Addie uses now.

Miss Addie is also going to teach dancing at the school.

There are already eight other children from other TV programmes booked to start in September, and three of their siblings. The theatre school looks like it will be a success.

Gerald Butler has a place at Manchester Grammar School to start in September. Don had a word with the school. Apparently the Grammar School lessons on Tuesday afternoons are Music and Physical Education. Gerald is well ahead of most children in learning music because of the amount of music he learned at the choir school. Gerald doesn't mind missing Physical Education. So Gerald's filming will take place on Tuesday afternoons. The filming will be scheduled around Gerald's availability.

Dower Productions intend to start September with two months of episodes in the can, and then to film a program or two each week. The limiting factor is the amount of music that the children can learn. The quality of the performances must remain high.

Jennifer Wilbey now has a new boyfriend. Mike Carney lives in Willerton. Mike is seventeen years old and he is training to be a motor mechanic. I have met Mike a few times. I think Mike is all right.

Chapter 6: Cecil Byram

I built on Mark's idea of buying up brass band instrument manufacturers. Under the European Union competition rules I should not control over 39% of an industry without seeking European Union approval. So I own one company. Irene owns another. Karen owns two small ones and my mother owns one.

The Byram family does not take an active part in their management. We don't want to.

I truthfully am not bothered who the companies buy their brass from. The Austrian company for example is very unlikely to purchase brass from Byrams except when it is desperate.

All the companies are in competition with each other.

There is no cartel.

Buying worthless companies and then making them valuable again by turning on the raw materials tap is astonishingly profitable. I realised that woodwind instruments desperately need metal. We picked up six woodwind instrument manufacturers for buttons.

With hindsight I should have identified this kind of opportunity in advance. I will know for next time. One of Daniel's tasks over the next year is to investigate these opportunities for me.

I could purchase other component manufacturers but I was reluctant to do that until metal supplies improved. At which point of course the component manufacturers were no longer cheap.

I have bought three disused component factories for future use.

I normally do not wish to buy existing businesses because of the possibility of hidden liabilities.

Mr Wong says that there is still a strong market for machine tools in China so Matt has put three apprentices onto fettling the machine tools for sending to Shanghai. Metal prices have dropped this year.

I did well with my big metals auction in January before prices fell. We have made two billion pounds in windfall profits from our metal stocks so far.

We still have enough metal stocks for our own use. We have used the existence of the metal stocks to roughly quintuple the size of Byrams Bearings.

Ming City was fenced when I bought it. Eventually it will be surrounded by a three metres high brick wall. Our remaining stockpiles will all be run down to empty by the end of the year. That will liberate another four properties for Irene's project.

Daniel Mason has calculated what we should buy for the new stockpile at Ming City. By the summer, a year after the tsunami, metal prices will fall sharply. At that point all the new metal supplies coming on-stream will hit the reduced market demand of the tsunami induced recession.

We will start buying metals for the Ming City stockpile in September or so.

I still do not have a manager for what will become a multimillion pound business.

Daniel Mason is a clever analyst but Daniel is not up to that managerial job yet.

Mr Wong is full of praise for Mark Johnson.

The rebuilding of the Cleckheaton foundry was close to faultless.

Mark queried with Mr Wong why he was packaging the nuts and bolts at all.

Nuts and bolts are not delicate. When they arrive in the UK they go into covered sheds or they stay in their container until it is empty. Most of our sales are by the tens of thousands of nuts or bolts or both. We weigh them rather than count them. We load them into the hoppers with machinery.

It seemed to Mark that Mr Wong was going to ship cardboard halfway round the world for no good reason.

Mark's observation has reduced the Clever Eunuch Foundry operating costs further. Packaging equipment is installed at the foundry for when Mr Wong needs it.

Mark's suggestion also allows us to pack more goods into each container.

One of my offshore trusts is majority owner in the Clever Eunuch Foundry. Mr Wong has an option to purchase a larger share in the business. I am sure that Mr Wong will exercise the option fairly soon.

The 1910 technology operating this year is generating profit and positive cash flow already.

Byrams pays for the nuts and bolts and rods FOB (Free On Board). Before the first of the containers arrived in the UK the entire capital cost of the foundry had already been repaid.

Mark Johnson is so humble that sometimes I want to smack him.

Mark's latest suggestion is that I should tell my long-term customers that I will invest with them if they have projects they wish to undertake. I will be investing with experienced business owners whom I have known for decades to build joint enterprises. I just put in money but I will have equity rather than earning interest.

Brilliant!

Karen's new boyfriend Giles is all right.

Giles suffers because Irene and my mother and I cannot help comparing Giles with Mark. If we did not know Mark we would say that Giles is all right. Mark has set a very high benchmark.

What do I think about Karen having a boyfriend who is only "all right"?

It really means “nothing obviously wrong”.

Karen will have boyfriends. It will be hard for Karen to find someone as good as Mark.

When Mark won Apprentice Of The Year that was just the icing on the cake.

I do wish that Mark Johnson was our son. Or that our baby son Sam had lived.

I do not know what I will do with Mark when he returns from his missionary service.

That problem is nearly two years off.

Mark needs to finish his apprenticeship. I need to use Mark as a manager.

Georgina is a terrific manager of Irene’s project. Georgina and Irene have a great relationship.

Mr Porteous telephoned me to say that there is a possible investment opportunity for a hundred million pounds or so coming up. Would I please make sure I have that amount on hand in one account for Tuesday of next week. The paperwork will be with me by the weekend. I will have to decide by lunchtime Monday. It is my money. I can say “Not this one” if I do not like it. The project is highly confidential of course.

CHAPTER 7: Ali Miah.

RAF Culdrose gave me a terrific training in Air Sea Rescue. They explained that before they let me fly a helicopter I have to have experience as a winch man.

Before I can train as a winch man I have to train as a rescue operative.

I was landed on small ships a few times. Then I was landed in the extremely cold Irish Sea to rescue Algernon. Algernon is a dummy whose buoyancy is varied by putting water in or letting water out. I rescued Algernon from extremely cold water about twenty times a day.

The days were long!

Every day Algernon was a little heavier.

Although I am pretty strong I am not a big person or a tall person. It became a real physical struggle to rescue Algernon.

Then Algernon started hiding under upside down boats, beneath floating rafts, and Algernon became tangled in wreckage.

I had to cast off my harness. I had to swim to Algernon. I had to rescue Algernon from his predicament which far too often meant swimming under water. A couple of times Algernon was actually caught up in ropes under water. I had to cut Algernon free.

Once I had found Algernon and I had freed him I had to tow Algernon to my dangling harness.

Without letting go of Algernon I had to grasp my harness, put it on, and then strap Algernon to me.

When you are frozen stiff and exhausted you become weak and clumsy. It was fifteen days of extreme cold and discomfort.

The training I had done in the University swimming pool made all the difference. If I had not had that experience of swimming fully clothed I would have found Air Sea Rescue impossible.

I was utterly exhausted at the end of each day. And I was cold. And I was wet. Eventually they decided that I am as good as a rescuer as I am going to become in the time available. Winch man was a lot easier, but the job is not easy. I am already qualified on the Sea King helicopter so I only had two flights as the helicopter pilot.

I went straight back to Cambridge. I revised for the exams.

The exams were fine. I will be very surprised if I have not averaged a First across the second year. That makes a great platform for going into the third year.

Cambridge has a clever system where you can quit after three years with a Bachelor of Engineering Degree or you can stay for a fourth year and obtain a Masters Degree in Engineering that meets the entry requirements for the various Engineering Institutes.

I intend to study for four years so as to obtain a Masters Degree in Mechanical Engineering.

The May Ball was a great success. My food and drinks were a major contribution to the success of the event. I had a letter of thanks from the Ball Committee. I had a lot of positive comments around the College.

I had several requests for the drinks recipes. On the instructions of the May Ball Committee I said that they were confidential.

I left University and I went straight to the inter forces language school. The tutors there were very pleased with the quality of my Putonghua. The tutors improved my Putonghua further.

I have learned to recognise ranks and medals in the Peoples Liberation Army (PLA).

I learned a bit about Chinese Air Sea Rescue.

Air Sea rescue bases tend to be close to the sea. They tend to be on level ground not very much above sea level. The tsunami killed almost everybody then serving in Chinese Air Sea Rescue.

The Chinese are rebuilding their Air Sea Rescue.

Wing Commander Beeson appeared. He is a bouncy man in his early forties.

Wing Commander Beeson underlined to me that I have a small but important role in the first steps of a very long dance.

All Wing Commander Beeson wants from me is that I do not cause an international incident.

I do not need to do anything heroic or clever. Just get through the month without excitement. And keep my eyes and ears open!

As soon as I get back on the plane home I am to start writing my report.

Then I went to China.

I was wearing RAF cadet uniform. I have three cadet uniforms by now so that I can always look fresh. I flew by the airline.

As a matter of courtesy I made myself known to the cabin crew.

Later I was invited to the flight deck.

I told the pilots that I have an Engineering Scholarship from the airline. I look forward to flying long-haul once I start work with the airline. I showed the guys my pilot log book.

At Beijing Airport I was met by a Captain Lee of the PLAAF. I thought Captain Lee was old for a Captain.

We took another plane to Shanghai, and then a long car drive to the base.

Captain Lee read my log book very slowly.

The Captain asked a lot of questions about my personal history.

I sensed that Captain Lee already knew most of the answers.

The Captain asked after Colonel Norman. This was a name totally unknown to me.

My face showed my complete ignorance.

“He often uses the name of Major Dinsdale or Captain Dinsdale.”

“I was guided by a Major Dinsdale.”

“Give Walt my regards.”

“Could I ask you something, Captain?”

“Yes.”

“I sense that you and Major Dinsdale or Colonel Norman are in much the same business.”

The Captain did not dispute that.

“Why don’t you and Colonel Norman meet in Paris or somewhere and have a face to face conversation and keep little guys like me out of it?”

The Captain smiled.

“One day we will.

“We have to build trust, first.

“Your visit here is the first step in building trust.”

That was comforting.

The first few days were orientation into how Chinese Air Sea Rescue works. There was a lot of information on how PLAAF generally works.

There were discussions about communication between rescuer and winch man,

There is no radio. It is all hand signals, which is a problem at night.

We wear fluorescent orange gloves so that our hands can be seen more easily.

PLAAF tested my competence as a helicopter pilot, as a winch man, and as a rescuer. PLAAF did not issue me with a rescue knife but I had brought one in my suitcase.

About a few days in I was working in a shift pattern. There are three shifts and I was in Green Shift. Green is a lucky colour in Islam.

About two weeks after I arrived at the Air Sea Rescue base Green Shift was called out.

The pilot Captain said that the story is that a ship's engines have stopped. The ship's Chief Engineer was trying to fix the problem but he slipped and he broke a leg. So we have to lift off the Chief Engineer.

As the ship is drifting without power we are lifting all non-essential personnel.

It is an oil tanker. When the ship hits the coast there will probably be a huge pollution spill.

Our job is to do this rescue.

When it is clear that a disaster is unavoidable Air Sea Rescue will lift the rest of the crew.

The oil is from the Middle East. The common language on the ship is English. As I have the best English I will be the rescuer.

Fair enough.

I dropped onto the tanker. The tanker is so big that this was like landing on a football pitch. No problem.

There were high winds but I have been out in worse off the Welsh coast.

The Chief Engineer was strapped to a stretcher and he was lightly sedated.

In the rich rolling tones of Barnsley the Chief Engineer said,

"You don't look like a Chink."

Political correctness in Barnsley is obviously patchy.

I put on my best Yorkshire accent.

"Nay, lad. I'm a Tyke from Meldon in God's County.

"I'm qualified to bat for Yorkshire if they'd select me.

"Mind you, they are so poor at the moment they would probably pick thee, broken leg and all."

Yorkshire are not doing very well at cricket at the moment!

I was born in Yorkshire so I am qualified to play cricket for Yorkshire. The "birth" qualification has officially been lifted but most Yorkshire folk do not want

"foreigners" from Derbyshire or Lancashire to be selected to play cricket for

Yorkshire. They would rather have an Asian from Yorkshire than somebody from outside Yorkshire.

Quite a few would rather not have an Asian, either.

For those racists the only thing worse than a Yorkshire Asian playing for Yorkshire would be a Yorkshire Asian playing for another team and slaughtering the Yorkshire batsmen.

It is their problem, not mine!

I said to one of the crewmen,

“I am an engineer. Ask your Captain if he wants me to try to fix his engines”.

I strapped on, and the winch man lifted the Chief Engineer and me up to the helicopter.

As I was coming down again I saw a streak of yellow fly off the deck.

A small person in a fluorescent yellow coat had been blown off the ship!

I gave hand signals to my winch man. The helicopter moved towards the probable location of the small person.

Finding a yellow speck as the light is fading is not easy. I thought I caught a glimpse of yellow under some debris.

I had no choice but to take off my harness.

The water was so cold! I did a sprint swim to the debris. Again I caught a glimpse of yellow.

I went round the debris and saw nothing. I had to swim under the debris and there was the yellow coat!

I pulled the yellow coat and I found a child. I had to cut her free.

She looked like a drowned rat.

I waved to the helicopter and to the winch man. The child was nowhere near as heavy as Algernon. But I was so much colder than I have ever been in my life.

Eventually I struggled into my harness. I strapped the child to me.

Up we went!

As I set off down to the ship again I heard the child moan. I took that to be a good sign.

The people were lining up to be taken off. There was a hysterical distraught woman whom I assumed to be the mother of the child. I took her first.

On one of my trips a crewman said to me,

“If you are an engineer the Captain would welcome your help.”

When I had the last person up I said to my Captain,

“Captain.”

“I am an engineer. The ship’s Captain has asked for my help. I will be more use down there than up here.”

The winch man lowered me and I threw my harness off.

My helicopter left.

I was incredibly cold, and still pretty wet.

Getting out of the wind and down to the engine-room was a great improvement.

There were a couple of guys there who told me what had happened. The chief engineer had been trying to clear a fuel line when he slipped on oil and he broke his leg.

I could see what he had been doing.

These guys did not know where to start. I told them to get started on clearing the spilled diesel oil off the floor.

I was about forty minutes checking the fuel line. If I had not been so cold it would have taken me fifteen minutes.

I reckoned it was right. I pushed a few connections to make sure they were as firm as they looked.

I told one of the watch-keepers to start the engine.

For a minute nothing happened. Then there was a juddering and the main engine started.

Then we started the second engine.

We all listened carefully.

After a few minutes I said

“Phone the captain and tell him to get the ship moving.”

The captain got the ship under way.

I could feel that the ship was under control.

I said to one of the watchmen,

“Phone the bridge and tell them I need an escort.”

After about twenty minutes somebody appeared. Given the size of the ship that was not too bad. It was a very young officer of about my age.

“I need to go to the bridge and then I need a hot shower and clean clothes.”

Everything had been running smoothly so I had no qualms about leaving the engine room watch-keepers to get on with it.

My guide took me up to the Captain.

The Captain was very pleased to be under way.

I asked his permission to contact PLAAF.

PLAAF were pleased to hear from me.

I spoke to a Major at my PLAAF base. I told him what I had done.

Our estimated time of arrival at Shanghai is thirty hours from now. Am I to stay with the ship or will he send a helicopter for me?

He told me to stay with the ship.

I should think that I was in that hot shower for thirty minutes. When I came out there were clean dry clothes to change into.

By now my uniform was in a washing machine.

I asked my escort to take me to the galley where I made fried egg sandwiches until I had had enough to eat.

I agreed with the watchmen that they would share the watch tonight. I would relieve one of them at four in the morning. They were fine with this.

I am just as happy standing watches in the engine room as I am doing anything else.

With the Chief Engineer absent I stood in for him.

When we arrived at Shanghai there was a reception committee. A couple of middle aged officers in Colonel's uniforms rushed on board and they rushed up to the bridge. As I was back in PLAAF uniform I saluted as they ran past.

They did not return my salute because they were in such a hurry.

A small squad of soldiers carrying weapons ran in their wake. They did not salute me because they were tearing after the Colonels.

They did not speak to me, either.

Then came Captain Lee.

Captain Lee greeted me.

“Well, Cadet Miah. Congratulations!”

“Thank you, sir.

“Congratulations for what?”

“The child you rescued is alive and well.”

I was pleased to hear that.

“Do you know who she is?”

“No, sir.”

“She is a daughter of the Oil Minister of Bahrain.

“He is very grateful to you.”

I had no idea!

“The Oil Minister is a nephew of the King of Bahrain!

“Were you told not to create an International Incident?”

“Yes, sir.”

“You have failed miserably!”

I looked surprised because I was surprised. Captain Lee looked amazingly cheerful.

“Through your efforts the Peoples Liberation Army Air Force has salvaged a ship that would otherwise have been wrecked.

“Our coastline would have been polluted for hundreds of miles.

“The Peoples Liberation Army Air Force has seized this ship. The ship cannot unload and it cannot sail until the salvage fee is paid.

“The ship is owned by a Panamanian company. The ship is chartered to a Greek company. The oil belongs to an American importer. The insurance on the ship is with Lloyds of London.

“Somebody has to come up with forty per cent of the value of the ship and cargo before the PLAAF will release it.

Do you know how much money that is?”

“No, sir.”

“This ship has two and a half million barrels of oil on board. At the current price of a hundred and five dollars a barrel that is two hundred and sixty two million dollars.

“Forty per cent of that is about a hundred and five million dollars.

“Plus forty per cent of the ship.

“That roughly two hundred million dollars in foreign currency is a generous contribution towards PLAAF’s running expenses.

“So that is the first international incident.

“The second international incident is that you are on secondment to PLAAF from the Royal Air Force. The Royal Air Force will wish to see that you are properly rewarded for your efforts.

“If you were a regular member of PLAAF we would give you immediate promotion and we would send you to Staff College as a high flying future senior officer. We can’t do that.

“So what should we do?

“The third international problem is that the Oil Minister of Bahrain says that you should have a medal for gallantry in rescuing his daughter. So should it be awarded by Britain, by China, or by Bahrain?”

“You seem to be very happy for a man dealing with three international incidents?”

“I am.

“You have about ten days left in China and then you go back to England.

“Once you physically disappear then everything calms down.

“This incident creates opportunities for constructive dialogue between Britain and China, between the PLAAF and the Royal Air Force.

“The process of building trust will accelerate.

“Did you notice the journalists?”

“What journalists?”

“The Oil Minister of Bahrain and his family were on the oil tanker as part of a publicity exercise. So there were journalists on board the ship.

“One of the journalists filmed the entire rescue of the little girl. That footage has been shown all over the world.

“You are a hero all over the world.”

I was surprised. I had only done what RAF Culdrose had trained me to do.

“PLAAF rescuers do not normally take off their safety harnesses and swim under water. You did.”

“So some senior PLAAF people want to talk to you about the training of Air Sea Rescue crews.”

“We do not normally have engineers as rescuers. We are re-thinking that after your exploits.”

“I have your clothes and your belongings from your base. We are now going to a Staff College outside Beijing.”

The following afternoon I had an intensive discussion with some senior officers about training Air Sea Rescue rescuers.

I explained about using the knife to cut the child free.

I stressed that I am not fully trained myself. In fact I am only a University student. I am going to become an airline pilot.

I am not going to join the Royal Air Force.

I had the strong impression that were I Chinese I would not have the same career freedoms.

Captain Lee had long discussions with me about China’s perceptions of the international situation, China’s armed forces, and China’s objectives. I had a strong sense that this is all for me to pass on to Wing Commander Beeson and his committee.

Whether what Captain Lee is telling me is actually true or not is not my problem.

If I didn’t know better I would think that Captain Lee is deliberately keeping me incommunicado.

Two days before I was due to fly back Captain Lee and I flew to the Air Sea Rescue Base. There was a little parade.

A General made a speech about what I had done. I was awarded the Meritorious Service Medal (Second Class) for rescuing the little girl.

That was warmly applauded.

Then the General made a second speech. I was awarded the Meritorious Service Medal (First Class) for salvaging the tanker and for preventing pollution.

It is not that salvaging the tanker was more important than saving the child. It was because this is the second award for meritorious service and so it is First Class. If I were to earn a third medal for meritorious conduct, that would also be First Class. That award was also applauded.

I noticed television cameras.

I did not know that I would make the national Chinese news.

I am the first person ever to earn two Meritorious Service awards on the same day so it made the China national news. And I am a foreigner!

Then we went to Shanghai. We slept at Shanghai.

In the morning we caught a plane to Beijing. My flight for London left about an hour after we arrived at Beijing.

I was wearing a clean cadet uniform, now with my three Chinese medal ribbons.

At the check-in desk at Beijing Airport the Chinese lady got quite excited. She telephoned a superior. She told him (presumably him) in Putonghua that the black foreigner sea rescue hero was checking in at her desk!

(He) obviously gave directions because she nodded vigorously.

She checked me in.

She told me in English that it would bring much shame on the airline to require such a distinguished hero to travel with the ordinary passengers. Accordingly she has given me a seat in First Class.

I thanked her warmly in Putonghua.

She looked startled.

Captain Lee escorted me to the departure gate and he saw me board my plane.

I like Captain Lee. Although I like all three of them as people I would not play cards for money with Captain Lee, Major Dinsdale, or Wing Commander Beeson. I

suspect they are all three of them very capable card players.

I also think that they would cheat if they could get away with it.

For instance I now doubt whether any of them has given me their true name and rank. "Captain" Lee is older than any other PLAAF Captain I have met, and he is very sharp. I suspect that Captain Lee is a Colonel at least.

I would like to be a fly on the wall when those three meet.

I have never flown First Class before. The reclining chairs are very comfortable. The food is much better than normal aeroplane food. The booze is of very good quality and is more or less unlimited. I am a Muslim so I drank apple juice and very good coffee.

I was invited to see the flight deck.

When I was seated again a flight attendant brought me an A4 lined pad of paper and some pens.

"I am told you need these, sir."

I had forgotten!

I started writing. I wrote all the way to England except when sleeping or eating. I used most of the pad.

I was not too surprised that I was met in the baggage hall at Heathrow by Wing Commander Beeson. He was wearing a suit. I was in uniform but he was not so I did not salute him.

Wing Commander Beeson said,

"I thought I ordered you not to do anything exciting and not to create an international incident?"

"Sorry, sir."

"Well, congratulations on your two additional medals!

"Rescuing that child was terrific television!

"Would you like to join the Royal Air Force?"

"I think I am committed to the airline, sir. But thank you for the invitation."

"You will report to me one week from today with a full report."

"Yes, sir."

"Listen carefully.

"I want it hand written. I do not wish you to use a computer at all. Is that clear? "

"Yes, sir."

"There are a number of journalists outside. They want photos of you wearing your medal ribbons, which fortunately you are wearing. Our press people have already explained how you came to be on a PLAAF helicopter.

"Just smile a lot and try to say nothing."

“Yes, sir.”

Wing Commander Beeson towed my suitcase and I walked out just in my uniform. There were even more journalists than there had been at Manchester when I landed the A320.

I told the journalists that the Royal Air Force has given me a very good training. The Royal Air Force will give a very good training to any young person who joins them. I smiled and I said nothing else.

Am I aware that the child I rescued is a daughter of the Oil Minister of Bahrain?

“At the time it was a small person who had been blown overboard in the high winds. I had no idea who she was.

“In Air Sea Rescue the emphasis is on “rescue”. So we rescued.

“It was a few days later before I learned that the child is anyone important. To me, every child is important.”

Bahraini TV asked me if my Muslim religion is important to me.

I looked at the journalist sharply.

I paused.

I said slowly,

“I am Quran hafiz.”

A pause.

“Islam is important to me.”

That shut him up.

I gave more or less the same interview in Putonghua and in Sylheti.

Mark Johnson met me and he drove me to Yorkshire.

We have not seen each other since Christmas so we had a lot to talk about. We spoke in English.

Tohur had cooked a special dinner.

Fulesa and Moklisur and Monika were there.

My rescue was up on You Tube. It looked very hairy, even worse than it actually was.

It was a very long clip, but it really was gripping.

The Australian journalist was swearing for some of the commentary. The journalist was obviously fond of the child.

When I took off my harness and I dropped into the sea her language became spectacular. As I swam and I delved and I looked for the child she remained spectacular.

As the child and I lifted into the air she said,
“What a man! I want his babies!”

That was nice.

The following morning all the Miahs went to visit the Shahs.

Mrs Shah is fading, but she is a tough lady. We all had a good hug and a good cry. I drove over with Tohur to Doncaster to see the Daars.

Uncle Jalil and Abdullah and Sahid took me to Friday prayers at their mosque. I was surprised by how many people recognised me even out of uniform.

Shakoora Daar is a very smart and intelligent and attractive young woman.

I have always liked Shakoora Daar but Don Hewson has this “hands off” policy that when I was younger was a deterrent. Now that Shakoora and I are both adults the “hands off” policy is not really relevant.

Shakoora had intended to go to university to read fashion design but she has decided not to go this year.

I told the girls that for the May Balls, which are in June, a lot of young women buy or have made really special dresses. That is a market they should look at.

The girls liked that idea.

Tohur was dragged up to the geekery. This is the room full of equipment that Sahid and Jibral call “the studio”. All the other Daars call it “the geekery”.

Almost all the Daars went upstairs with Tohur or otherwise disappeared.

Shakoora and I were getting on really well when Tohur appeared.

Tohur pointed out that we had to go because otherwise we would be late for dinner at the Hewsons.

I spent a lot of time over the weekend hugging my family. I have not seen them since Christmas.

On Sunday Tohur and I travelled to Tohur's apartment. I will be staying with Tohur and the couple he lodges with during August and September, doing my six weeks in the Engineering workshops at Heathrow.

I finished writing my report.

I reported to Wing Commander Beeson.

I sat while Wing Commander Beeson read it.

Wing Commander Beeson was very slow and thorough. The reading and the occasional questions took an entire afternoon.

"Well done, Cadet Miah."

Then he took my mobile telephone number in case he needed me.

I left.

Chapter 8: Mark Johnson

I had a lazy summer.

I was marking time at work. I was owed quite a bit of holiday so I took it.

It is so nice to speak English and not to be under pressure.

Like all the Tykes my sister Sally has no idea how much money she is earning.

Sally had a quiet word with me.

If Sally stays a "Tyke" for maybe another three years, will Sally have saved up enough money for her missionary service?

I burst out laughing.

I gave Sally a huge hug.

I told Sally that even after her tithes deduction Sally has already earned enough money for her missionary service.

Sally was very happy.

Sally is almost a pound millionaire already, but I did not tell Sally that.

I did not tell Sally that if Sally remains a "Tyke" for three years she will be a very rich young lady. It is better for Sally to do "Tykes" because she enjoys it.

It was wonderful when Rebecca returned. We Johnsons hugged for days. Rebecca gave us a blow by blow account of her experiences over the last eighteen months.

We told Rebecca about everything that we have done.

Rebecca does not know what to do now.

Rebecca is going to pray a lot and see if the Lord suggests an avenue for her future.

We had a great time camping with about fifty of us Hewson children. What tremendously loving and good people the Hewsons are to have taken so many children into their home.

George Butler has fallen into the same bed of nettles two holidays running.

George's first job was to gather nettles for nettle soup. George was very happy to harvest the nettles before the nettles had the chance to sting him.

Rebecca is undecided about whether to move the Johnson family out of the Hewson house. Until Rebecca has made a decision about her future she cannot decide what to do about the children.

Rebecca is sleeping with Charlotte and Linda at the moment because Rebecca's room is occupied by nanny Beverley.

Beverley is an OK person but she has a life outside work. We do not see much of Beverley on her days off.

I helped David Wilkins to cook for Helen Wilkins' wedding.

I helped Don to cook for Sharon Kellner's wedding to Andy Haines.

I was invited to a family dinner at the Byrams.

I met Giles. Karen looks happy.

Giles is very happy with Karen.

Giles seems to have nothing about him. I have seen more assertive leeks.

Unless Giles is hiding his light under a bushel, there is no light there.

If Giles Meldon-Beds is what Karen wishes after having had a relationship with me, then that is Karen's choice. With Giles, Karen will certainly wear the trousers.

Presumably that is what Karen wishes.

Ali Miah has had a busy summer.

Ali is going to have a relatively quiet third year. Ali is not involved with the May Ball in his third year.

Ali's aim is to obtain a First Class Honours Degree.

The Royal Air Force has given Ali so much that he feels he must continue to be active until say Christmas.

Ali will qualify on a few more planes with the airline and stop flying with them in February.

Then Ali puts his head down and he works his socks off until the exams. Ali will have a short break and then Ali spends the summer flying for the airline. Ali told me that he is looking forward to straightforward flying.

Tohur and David Wilkins intend to buy a house in London. They could simply rent some student accommodation but they would rather buy a house. Once they own a house other family members can visit London or they can stay in London.

I am going to miss some good parties while I am away on missionary service.

I went to the award ceremony with Cecil and Matt. As I don't drink it was agreed that I would drive Cecil and Matt back to Yorkshire after the event.

I made a short and funny speech about living for months in a container, and about being first the "foreign eunuch" and then the "clever eunuch". And then they named the factory after me!

I thanked Matt for being a terrific supervisor. I thanked Cecil for being a wonderful boss who has given me these opportunities. I thanked the College for their teaching. I thanked the organisation for making this award to me.

Cecil and Matt drank a lot. They were both asleep long before we reached the M1. They woke up outside Matt's house in Neverthorpe.

Then I drove Cecil home.

I parked Cecil's car and I picked up the Hewson car I had left at Cecil's house. I went home.

The foreign holiday this year was in Tunisia again. We all had a good time.

Robert had only recently had his operation so we could not throw him into the pool.

I helped Robert with his exercises in the water and out of the water.

Tohur and I threw the other children in, jumping in with Alice and Lucinda and the smaller ones.

Dennis Wilkins qualified as a pilot last year. Dennis passed his driving test on the first attempt.

In early September Dennis and Amy and Abdullah are going to record some more advertisements.

Now that they are all sixteen or over a more a sexual element may appear in the advertisements. The advertisement company is being very cool about this. They think that it is much better that romance is still only hinted at.

Apparently one ad is a tango where Amy lifts her partner instead of being lifted.

I have been told that I will serve my Mormon missionary service in Nevada in the United States.

I looked up Nevada on the Internet. It looks to be warmer than England although the winters are very cold. A lot of it is desert and mountain. The main industries are agriculture and gambling and hotels for the gamblers. It looks interesting. They generally speak English although there is also a Spanish speaking population.

CHAPTER 9: Ali Miah

I have worked on the engines of the little Cessna upon which I first learned to fly. I had a couple of weeks working on helicopter engines. The large passenger jet aeroplane engines are much larger than any of these.

Over the first four weeks at Heathrow I had a very good training.

At the beginning of the fifth week my supervisor spoke to me.

“Ali, tomorrow morning you don’t come here.”

“Put on a suit and report to Head Office. The Chief Executive wants to see you at twelve noon.”

“It won’t be the sack. It might be a pat on the back. I don’t know.”

I was curious of course.

I went along the following morning. I decided not to wear my medal ribbons. I had the ribbons bar and medals with me in case the Chief Executive wished to see them.

At twelve precisely I was ushered into the Chief Executive’s office.

“First, congratulations on your Chinese medals.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“And congratulations on the fifth best exam result in Engineering for your Second Year exams. You look like a safe First next year.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“Do you know Arthur Miller?”

“The playwright, sir?”

Where is this conversation going?

“I had just assumed that he is dead.”

“Arthur Miller is a consultant. His speciality is supervising the build of airport terminals.”

The Chief Executive looked at me.

“After the tsunami the People’s Republic of China was desperate for inward investment. “

“They have a huge amount of infrastructure to build or to replace.”

I nodded. I had understood this from my conversations with Fan, and from what I had seen in China.

“We have wanted to build a hub and terminal at Beijing for years, but the Chinese kept stalling.

“After the tsunami the Reconstruction Ministry gave permission for a terminal inside six weeks. It normally takes years to obtain permission to build a terminal, so we were caught off guard.”

“Arthur Miller is out there at the moment.

“I am going to read you part of an email Arthur sent me.”

“”Steve

“– that’s me

“I am absolutely desperate for an assistant.

“The person specification is challenging, but you must find somebody. I have looked hard in Beijing but I have not found anybody suitable.

“It has to be someone who speaks English and who has really good Putonghua. He needs an engineering background because he must discuss engineering issues in Putonghua. He should be a pilot because he may need to discuss flying issues

in Putonghua. It frankly has to be someone who is single because he will be working fourteen hour to sixteen hour days.

"I don't want anyone of Chinese ethnicity for obvious reasons.

"It has to be somebody whom the Chinese will take seriously.

"This might be a good time to appoint a Hub Manager Designate so that the person will have weight in negotiations when I am not physically present.

"I would like him here yesterday."

The Chief Executive, I don't think I dare call him "Steve", looked at me.

"Have you any idea what it costs to build an airline terminal?"

I thought about that.

"I don't know, sir. Between a hundred million pounds and a thousand million pounds depending on how big it is. At a guess."

"We will take five hundred million pounds. At ten per cent interest, what is the monthly interest bill I have to meet while I am waiting for the terminal to become operational?"

I did some mental arithmetic.

"Over four million pounds a month, sir. Four point one seven."

"How important is it to the airline to bring the terminal into operation on schedule?"

"Over four million pounds a month, sir."

"How important is it to the airline to find an assistant for Arthur, to make Arthur more effective?"

"About the same, sir."

"Eight head hunter agencies were retained. They have all of them been unable to find a candidate. You are the only person we know of who fits the personnel specification.

"So I need you badly."

I said nothing. I could not think of anything to say.

I could see what was coming. It would be very hard to find someone who fits Arthur's criteria.

What about my degree? What about my Master's Degree?

"I have spoken to your Professor. He says that you have several options.

“One is to take a year or two out of your degree. In the circumstances Cambridge University would agree.

“The Professor says that if you simply take your textbooks and read them, you could sit your Finals at the British Embassy in Beijing next summer. The airline will pay for a lecturer to come to Beijing and coach you for two weeks just before the exams.

“Your professor has explained about the fourth year for your Masters Degree in Engineering. No problem.”

I was stunned. I had a very strong sense that I had no choice.

“Shanghaied.” That is the word I am looking for. I am being Shanghaied.

“Money.

“You said to somebody “talent follows the money”.

What I had said to Colonel Norman alias Major Dinsdale has been repeated to Steve!

Directly or indirectly the Intelligence services have had contact with Steve.

The music to “Puppet On A String” is sounding in my ears. I normally like that cheerful tune. Today it is a warning bell.

“You are too intelligent to use as an office boy.

“Arthur does not want an office boy. He wants a Hub Manager Designate.

“What Arthur needs Arthur must be given.

“So you will be the Hub Manager Designate.

“A Hub Manager earns a minimum of three hundred and fifty thousand pounds a year, plus significant bonuses. As Hub Manager Designate you will be on eighty per cent of that. You will be living in a three bedroom apartment rent free. One housekeeper cum cook is supplied. If you need more staff than that you will have to pay for them yourself.

“We find it easier just to give you a two thousand pounds a month expense account. We don’t ask for receipts.

“As Hub Manager Designate you will have the weight to negotiate. With your medals you will have extra weight.

“You are very young to be a Hub Manager or a Hub Manager Designate.

"I just don't have any choice.

"Nearer the time, if I don't think you are up to being the Hub Manager I will put someone else in. But if you can hack it the job is yours."

I was not speaking. I was thinking furiously.

"That suit."

"Yes, sir?"

"For a student that is quite a good suit.

"For a man earning three hundred thousand pounds a year it is not a good enough suit.

"This is my tailor's card. He is expecting you at four o'clock. He will fit you out from head to toe, and he will supply a proper suitcase. His bill comes to the airline so don't worry about it.

"This may sound silly to you, but I want you to wear British clothing at all times.

"There really are political resonances to what you wear.

"I am desperate to give Arthur whatever he needs. That four million pounds a month is a very big incentive for me.

"After your Engineering Master's degree I would like you to study for a Masters Degree in Business Administration. We will pay for any University in the world.

"Here is a list of the fifty best MBA universities in the world. The ones marked in green ink offer distance learning.

"By the time the terminal is completed you should have earned your MBA.

"I would like you to be Hub Manager for the first two years of operation. Then, if you wish, you may stay there or you may return to the UK.

The starting pay is more than treble what a senior airline pilot earns and almost four times what a Group Captain earns. The perks alone amount to a decent wage.

"Oh. I have not mentioned bonuses. You will be on one tenth of Arthur's bonus, when it is paid.

"And that is, sir?"

"Arthur has his basic pay for doing the job. Arthur is on a million pounds bonus a month for every month or part of a month ahead of schedule.

"That gives you an incentive."

If I was not highly suspicious of this situation the incentive would be exciting.

“May I mention something, sir?”

“Yes.”

“You have repeated to me something that I have said to only one person in the world. He is an American intelligence officer.”

I waited for Steve to speak.

Steve was silent.

“What are you getting me into, sir?”

“At four million pounds a month the very last thing I can afford is for you to be involved in funny business.

“Nobody wants you involved in espionage.

“On the other hand, if the Royal Air Force could place you anywhere in the world to keep your eyes and ears open, where would they like you to be?”

“Are you sure of this, sir?”

“I had this discussion with Wing Commander Beeson. Yes, I am quite sure that you will not become involved in anything dodgy or illegal.”

“Thank you, sir.”

I don't think I will play cards for money with Steve, either.

As a Muslim I am not supposed to gamble.

I also know when I am outclassed.

“Here is an application form for your Chinese visa. You have to present it in person. I suggest you lodge it this afternoon on the way to the tailor.

“I will tell Arthur you are coming.

“Your suits will take a little while to make. Your flight is next Tuesday, a week today.

“You will always fly First Class now.

“You are off duty now until you fly on Tuesday.”

“Thank you, sir.”

Major Dinsdale had said, “I will see what I can do.”

Now this opportunity has arisen.

On the other hand, it could be serendipity.

I do not think the airline Chief Executive would take risks with his airline, so I think he is genuine. Financially this is a tremendous opportunity for me.

I feel like a mouse sniffing a particularly rich cheese resting on a strange metal contraption that I have never seen before.

My first call was to Tohur's house to collect my passport.

I completed the visa application form. It has been partly completed by someone at the airline. I made and I ate a sandwich.

Then I went to the Chinese Embassy.

I decided not to put my medal bar on my suit before I entered. There are arguments both ways but I decided to try to be low profile. I decided not to speak Putonghua for the same reason.

I handed in the form and I paid the fee. I explained that I would be back on Monday to collect the visa. They were fine with that.

I went to the tailor. I had heard of Saville Row, but I had never been there.

As I now have an expense allowance of two thousand pounds a month I decided I could afford a taxi.

The man serving me is about as old as Don Hewson, and I would say he is about as intelligent. He is an expert in what he does.

He took my measurements.

Do I have any requirements?

I gave him my bar of medal ribbons and the medals. I explained that I will very likely be wearing the ribbons all the time. The top left pocket that the bar fits to may need strengthening as on some occasions I will be expected to wear the medals as well.

His eyebrows rose slightly.

"Yes, sir."

We decided on four generic pilot uniforms, and four suits. We decided on fifteen shirts, either white or bold colours. No cufflinks. For casual wear I will have two blazers and three pairs of trousers. I was fitted out with socks, underwear, shoes, pyjamas, dressing gown, shorts, ties, and sweaters. And two coats.

We agreed that I would come back early on Monday morning to check the fit of the items that are being made specially. Everything will be packed and ready for me by four o'clock on Monday.

"These are obviously medal ribbons and medals, sir. I am sorry to say that I do not recognise them.

"May I ask what they were awarded for?"

I explained what each medal and ribbon was for.

He had seen the rescue on television.

"It is a privilege to serve you sir. I hope your work in China is successful"

I thanked him. I left.

I caught the Underground to King's Cross. I had already telephoned Tohur to tell him of my unexpected change of plans.

I rang Don Hewson to tell him I was coming home suddenly. I told Don that I would eat on the train so he was not to save a dinner for me.

I said to Don that the airline is posting me to China. I will tell Don and Emma about all this tonight.

When I got home many of the children had gone to bed.

I gave Rebecca Johnson a huge hug because I have not seen Rebecca for eighteen months. Rebecca is a fine looking woman anyway and tonight Rebecca looks really well.

The Tykes have been filming part of the Christmas Special today. They have enjoyed it. Max and Kali and Derek Donkin are filming in London this Saturday with Dee Lishus the famous actor. Emma is chaperoning.

Also on Saturday Colin Donkin is filming in Manchester with the Byram Willerton Brass Band. Rebecca is going as chaperone and Linda Donkin is a member of the band.

Robert Graham had the first of his operations while I was in China.

Robert now has a lot more sensation in his lower regions, but no control yet. The poor sod is on another six to nine months of exercises before his next operation.

Robert is a brave boy. Robert is a real boy.

I told the older children the headlines.

Once I had Don and Emma to myself I gave them the whole story.

Don said,

“Any large company of any nation has to co-operate with the Intelligence services.

“Chinese Intelligence will be very suspicious of you turning up in this job. They will certainly keep an eye on you.

“Do you know what a “honey trap” is?”

“Yes, Don.”

“It is something to look forward to.

“But I am a strict Muslim. I can’t have sex until I am married “

“I think that provided you do not do anything stupid you will probably be OK.”

That was the conclusion that I had reached.

I cannot see that I have any realistic choice.

I went to bed. Mark Johnson was still awake. He has been told that his missionary service will be in Nevada. Mark is looking forward to going.

In the morning I went to see Mrs Shah. I told Mrs Shah part of what is happening to me. She was pleased for me.

I gave Mrs Shah a huge hug and a kiss because I will probably never see her again.

I telephoned the Professor.

Prof says that the opportunity is so good that I must take it.

Prof has given Heffers a list of Engineering textbooks to send to Steve. Steve has paid for them and Steve will have them shipped to me in Beijing.

Prof said that I am bright enough that I should pass the exams just from the books and past exam papers.

A lecturer will be sent out to me four weeks before the exams to work with me. This is just to buff me up so that I have a good result.

“What about my research project?”

“You are doing a real job. Research opportunities will occur.”

No problem!

I telephoned Kings College. They have already been told by Prof that I am off to Beijing. Congratulations!

They will ship my goods in storage to my Tryton address.

I telephoned the tailor. I told him that I will need two pairs of work boots and two pairs of Wellington boots.

“No problem, sir.”

I visited the Daars.

I had a good long conversation with Shakoora.

Other people were there but they drifted in and out.

We agreed that in January Shakoora and one of her brothers will visit me in Beijing. I have nothing else to spend my money on and I will not have to pay full fares for my guests.

I am very interested in Shakoora Daar. I just don't have the time to court her properly.

The holiday in Beijing will be our courtship.

Abdullah or Sahid, whichever it is, will get lost if Shakoora asks him to.

On Saturday I spent a lot of time with Fulesa and Moklisur and Monika.

I told them that this opportunity is so good that I just have to take it. They are old enough to understand this.

We will talk every week on Skype.

I missed the weddings of Helen Wilkins and Sharon Kellner because I was in China at the time. I nipped round to visit each happy couple.

On Sunday morning the Johnsons went to Church together.

Fulesa and the twins came in the morning.

After lunch I had a good hug with everyone, and then I caught the train to London.

I spent Sunday evening with Tohur. Tohur had been judo training in London on Saturday.

Tohur is still enjoying his cooking courses. David Wilkins and Tohur are purchasing a house together next week. This will be a home for the two of them while they are studying. It will be a London base for the rest of the family.

On Monday I saw the tailor in the morning. The work boots and the Wellingtons fitted fine. There were a few very slight adjustments needed to the suits but nothing that could not be completed by four in the afternoon.

I collected my visa. No problems.

The visa officer spoke to me in Putonghua,

“Mr Miah. Because of your medals for Meritorious Service you are on the “Blessed Gajin” list.”

“Your visa application will always be approved inside an hour at any Chinese Embassy anywhere in the world.”

“This may be helpful to you in the future.”

I thanked him in Putonghua.

I toured bookshops looking for anything that might be relevant to my next task. I bought a couple of books on Project Management and three books on different aspects of Construction and Civil Engineering.

Tohur has virtually no access to cash at the moment, only the allowance that Don makes to Tohur from Tohur’s earnings.

I have what to me is a lot of savings because I have spent very little of my earnings from working for two summers. I drew two thousand pounds and I gave it to Tohur in case any of the family has a need for cash.

In the late afternoon I returned to the tailor.

The tailor asked permission to take a photo of me in my uniform for his web site.

He took another photograph with me wearing a suit.

The suitcase provided is top of the range with a famous name.

I emptied and repacked it just as a precaution. There were no surprises.

On Tuesday morning I flew to Beijing.

CHAPTER 10 : Rebecca Johnson

I am so glad that I did my missionary service. It got me out of my comfortable life in Tryton.

The Scottish mining villages made me even more grateful for our material conditions in Tryton.

After Inverness I will never complain about Yorkshire’s weather again.

I never felt that I was an adult before. Now I know I am an adult.

I value my family even more for having spent so much time away from them.

Bishop Singleton interviewed me on my return.

A few weeks later he gave me the job of visiting a family who are thinking about joining the Church. This woman is a single parent so Bishop Singleton sends one priest and me. Tom D'Arcy is in his forties, married with children. We visit the woman one evening a week.

Normally Bishop Singleton would send two priests but Bishop Singleton is so very short of people to do all the work that there is to do that I am enlisted.

Mark has grown up while I have been away.

Now Mark has gone off on his own missionary experience.

Mark said that as he is away for two years Charlotte and I must do whatever is right for the family. Mark gave me authority to operate his bank account.

If we decide to buy a house and there is any problem in releasing Charlotte's money I may raid Mark's savings. Mark has enough money saved that we could buy a modest house outright.

Charlotte and I visited Tohur and David in their new house one weekend.

These boys are television chefs but they are inexperienced as interior decorators. Charlotte and I helped them to empty and clean and re-floor and paint their intended kitchen. It looked a lot better by the time we had finished.

There was a lot of laughter that Charlotte and I came to visit a couple of TV chefs and we ended up eating Chinese take-away!

Charlotte's fourth and fifth songs have done even better than the first two. "Your Loving Lips" is a storm all over the West. "Take Me Slowly" is almost as popular. Mr Driburg says that he has a very long list now of singers who want a song by "Emma Hewson".

Charlotte is going on another tour of the USA soon to publicise her second CD of religious music.

Andrew is enjoying his part in "Terrible Tykes". Andrew is learning the piano because Derek and Gerald will be leaving the program one day and then the program will need another good male pianist. Dower Productions is paying for the music lessons.

Mike is just enjoying life. He is a good kid.

Mike and Rupert Thornton are good mates. They and Heinz spend a lot of time together.

Max called them "The Three Musketeers" and the name has stuck.

Don and Emma have roped me in to help with the theatre school. I cook the lunches for the children and the staff. I am the First Aider. I supervise the cleaner and I see to supplies generally. It is a full time job to work in while I wait to go to University.

We have twenty-three children in the school. On Mondays and Tuesdays the Tykes go to Manchester for filming. Emma goes to teach them because each child may only work for a maximum of two hours.

On Wednesday afternoons and Thursday afternoons two other children film in Manchester for another TV show. I take them to Manchester and I chaperone them. Then I run them to their homes in Bolton and Halifax and I come home. That is a good earner for me.

Their parents do not have to take time off work so my fee is still a bargain for them. I think the TV company reimburses them.

Two more children leave us at Friday lunchtime to film for their program. I give them something to eat and drink in the car on the way to Manchester. I chaperone again, and I run them to their homes in Wigan and Hebden Bridge.

I make as much chauffeuring and chaperoning for three afternoons as I do for working two days and three mornings at the school.

There are eight staff working here, all part time except for Emma and I.

The school covers all the normal school subjects. We have a language lab for French and Spanish and German, with part time tutors available for each language.

With small classes of bright well behaved children the teachers get through the National Curriculum syllabus easily. There is also time for theatre oriented education.

Our gym is geared towards gymnastics and fitness and suppleness including climbing ropes and vaulting.

We have a proper room for dancing in. Miss Addie was involved in the design and specification for the room. It is more like a barn than a room. The floor is a special springy material.

There are mirrors all around the walls, and bars for ballet. All the children do at least an hour of dancing each week in very small classes.

We have a theatre!

The lighting and sound equipment is not the most modern.

Don says that this is deliberate.

Any fool can operate the most modern stuff. Using equipment from the 1990s means that if the children find themselves in a provincial theatre they can cope with the older equipment. If they can work with the old equipment then the latest equipment is easy for them.

I was shocked when I learned how much the gym and the dance room and the theatre had cost.

Don said that spread over a twenty year life span and split across the number of children who will use the facilities the expense is not that great.

Miss Addie is paid as a dance teacher. Miss Addie pays when she uses the facilities for her dancing classes.

I am not going to work at the theatre school forever. I have applied to five universities to read for a degree in business studies. If the London School of Economics and Political Science accepts me I will lodge with Tohur Miah and David Wilkins at the house they have bought in London. The other universities are all within travelling distance of Tryton.

Mary Pickles from the Tryton Social Services office still visits Don once a week.

Mark and I are no longer in care but Charlotte, Sally, Andrew and Michael are in care.

Mary has suggested that I could take the children away from the Hewsons.

I have explained that until I know which university I am to attend I cannot make any decisions. I would prefer to attend the London School of Economics because it is in London. London is a much better social scene for young single Mormons than anywhere else in England.

The Saint George ward in London is for young single Mormons only. We go to the Saint George ward for services on Sunday. There are lots of visits to museums and art galleries and river trips and other outings. There are also lots of socials and events of different kinds. The whole idea is that a single Mormon should meet a lot of other single Mormons and end up marrying a fellow Mormon.

I pay board to Don. I have to share a room with Charlotte and Linda because the house is so crowded. Don has halved his normal board fee to compensate for my sharing with two other people.

I feel fairly well off.

I am able to save.

I do not feel any need to work on Saturdays.

I visit Helen Jenkins née Wilkins most weeks, usually when Martin is on a late shift at the store where he works. Helen is very happy in her marriage.

Helen is happy at work. Helen is happy generally.

With Helen living with her husband and David living in London Dennis is in charge of day to day household management for the Wilkins family.

Andria Wilkins is the oldest child at home. Andria has studies and she works shifts including night shifts. Andria must spend quality time with her daughter Angela and with her parents. So by default Dennis is in charge.

Helen visits the house twice a week to keep everything on track.

Helen is amused to find that while Dennis is hopeless with his own money Dennis is spot on meticulous when managing the household money. Dennis knows to the penny what the household money has been spent on. Dennis hasn't a clue where his pocket money went!

David took his supermarket experimentation allowance with him to London. David's trust increased the payments to Helen to compensate.

Dennis prepares an order for the supermarket each week and Helen authorises it and pays for it.

So how do Tohur and David spend two hundred pounds a week on food between them? They are both writing cookbooks alongside their studying, and filming or preparing to film, so they have to experiment and practice.

Tohur's local mosque takes Tohur's food to elderly housebound Muslims.

David is not religious but David has found a local Catholic Church that takes his food to elderly housebound Catholics.

Dennis has applied to Universities to read Engineering. Like me Dennis is waiting to be called for interviews.

CHAPTER 11: Mark Johnson

Shortly after Ali flew to China I flew to Chicago. If I had flown to New York I would have to go to a different airport to fly to Las Vegas. At Chicago it is all one huge airport.

I saw an elderly Chinese couple who were looking a bit lost. I asked them in Putonghua if I could help them. They looked very surprised.

The elderly man said in English that it was very kind of me to speak to them. He recognises that I was speaking Putonghua but actually they are Cantonese speakers.

They both speak English because they were both born here in America.

Their problem is that they have poor eyesight and they cannot read the departure board. Which Departure Gate do they need for Austin, Texas?

The Departure Board is immense. The only flight for Austin Texas is leaving from Gate 82 in just over half an hour. I told them and we parted.

I needed Gate 110 in an hour. I decided to find Gate 110 and then to have something to eat.

I am glad that I decided to find Gate 110 first. I am a fit young man but it was a fair walk.

I felt sorry for all these obese Americans who were in discomfort with unaccustomed exercise.

It is not too surprising that the airport has defibrillators every few hundred yards. They probably need them.

I wonder if I could obtain permission to run a motorcycle rickshaw service inside O'Hare Airport?

Don paid for me to take a First Aid course which included how to use a defibrillator.

The flight to Las Vegas was interesting. Some of the passengers were very obviously tourists looking forward to the excitements of Las Vegas. Some were just as obviously relatively low paid people travelling either to work or back to work.

I was seated next to a young woman of about my age or slightly older. I think the Americans would say that she was dressed to leverage her assets.

Without examining too closely I thought that her assets were more than adequate to begin with. Her name is "Annie" not "Anne".

When Annie learned that I am a Mormon missionary she burst out laughing.

"Does this mean that I can just sleep without being pawed?"

"I am afraid so, Annie."

"Well thank you for that. I am very tired and I am dancing tonight. The chance to sleep in safety is great.

"Thank you."

That was almost all the conversation. Sometimes Annie snuggled up to me and she called me "Tony".

"Lucky Tony" is all I can say.

I have not read "The Book of Mormon" properly in a while, so I read it for most of the flight.

The stewardesses were slightly surprised to see this incongruous couple. I think they were pleased with me. They kept an eye on me to make sure that I was still not misbehaving.

At Las Vegas I had to take another plane to Provo in Utah. The training centre for all the Mormon missionaries operating in the USA is in Provo. There are several direct flights from Chicago to Provo each day but all the flights were fully booked. I could fly via Las Vegas or not at all.

By the time I hit Provo I had been travelling or sitting in airports for more than twenty hours.

I was shattered.

My luggage was not lost!

Once I had my suitcase I could leave the airport. I took a taxi because I was just too jiggered to find public transport and to use it. It was getting dark.

The Missionary Centre at Provo is huge. There are literally thousands of us arriving each week.

I was “plain vanilla”, the standard twelve week Mormon missionary training.

Some people had to learn languages and they would be at Provo longer.

There were people of Don’s age and older, training for post retirement placements abroad.

On arrival I was told that I had missed dinner. There were vending machines if I wished.

I had eaten today on three planes, plus the snacks I had brought from England. I was not hungry.

I only wanted a shower and bed. I was given a room key, and I followed the signs to my room.

My roommate was asleep. I decided not to disturb him by having a shower. I just climbed into the bed.

The next thing I knew my roommate’s alarm clock was ringing.

My roommate’s name is Tim Baker.

Tim is from an American state I have never heard of. It is called Vermont.

Vermont is on the border with Canada and is the Westernmost New England state.

Vermont is the largest producer of maple syrup in the world. Vermont is cold for much of the year.

Two important Mormon leaders Joseph Smith and Brigham Young were both born in Vermont but they had the sense to leave it.

Tim says that as soon as he has completed his missionary service he will leave Vermont for good.

Tim explained that breakfast is in forty minutes but we have to exercise and pray first, as well as washing and getting dressed.

I did my Hewson exercises. Ten stomach crunches, twenty press-ups, and then ten press-ups on each hand. Then I went for a shower.

Once I was dressed I prayed.

As we went to breakfast Tim explained that my exercise regime is a bit excessive.

In the first week we only have to do five press-ups each morning. Tim had not said anything because clearly I have an exercise regime that I am comfortable with.

CHAPTER 12 : Cecil Byram

I have been a “hands on” manager since I was twenty-two.

It was difficult for me to move up to Chairman and to give space to my managers to manage.

Standing away and letting people get on with it is the right thing to do, but I found it very hard at first.

Garth Stead is good at running Byrams Engineering. Unless there is need for a meeting about a particular issue I see Garth formally for half a day in each month. Garth’s written reports take fifteen minutes at most to discuss. We spend three hours thinking aloud, what is sometimes called “blue sky thinking” or “shooting the breeze”.

Garth is lifted from tactics and detail into discussions of strategy. We discuss time spans of a decade or more when Garth is usually working only in days and weeks. Garth says that these discussions are the highlight of his month.

Garth says that having strategies the way we do has affected some of the operating decisions that Garth makes.

David Taylor is my Chief Financial Officer. David gives me weekly reports on each business and quarterly reports on each investment. We meet for two hours each week.

Georgina Arron and Kevin Hanson run Byram Construction with Irene as an important influence. We four meet once a month for an hour over lunch at a restaurant.

The Ming City manager is on site. “Ming’s” is in operation. Tony Hart has worked in the stockholding industry before. Tony knows most of the suppliers and many of the larger customers.

Tony is based at Ming City but all the back office work is done at Group Headquarters at Willerton.

Tony sees me for an hour every month.

Partly by design all of my businesses are free standing and are fairly simple to manage. I learn enough from my meetings and reports to know that everything is running well.

I could spend a lot more time on each business but to what purpose? My financial advisor Mr Porteous told me that I should not have a dog and bark myself. He also said that my managers will benefit from a sense that they are fully responsible for the business they manage.

My role as Chairman is to provide strategic direction. I should be thinking about the future of the Byrams Group.

I should not waste time second guessing the day to day decisions of my managers. Once a quarter we have an away day meeting for all the senior team and myself. The first hour is presentations from each manager to the team on how his or her business is running. The rest of the day is "blue sky thinking". I have usually set out what areas I want input on, but team members sometimes table subjects they wish to discuss.

I have a lot of unallocated time.

I have started the MBA course at Meldon University.

I have read virtually all the books already. I attend for lectures and seminars. One purpose of this course is to equip myself for the role I am now in. The other is to try to understand managers and management issues.

I do not have enough managers.

I asked Garth to identify twenty future managers from our existing workforce. They attend at Willerton once a week for management training. As time goes on they will slot into junior management, freeing up existing managers for promotion.

Our trainee managers like the idea that while they may currently act as a charge hand at our Cleckheaton factory or as a team leader in packing at Neverthorpe they are part of a management cadre that is collectively the future management of the Byram Group. They are assuming a group identity instead of their earlier more parochial perspectives.

They also like the "study supplement" to their wages of half a day's pay based on the assumption that they do some study work at home.

My succession problem is still with me. Should I fall under a bus who should run the Byrams Group?

I love Karen but Karen is five years younger than I was when I inherited Byrams. Byrams is so much larger than it was then.

Karen is nowhere near ready.

Garth and David are very much "in the box" people who are excellent at what they do but neither of them is visionary. They could not step up to replace me.

My mother could do much of the job.

My best hope is a tag team of my mother and Mark Johnson. Mark has generated so many good ideas that it would be criminal not to put Mark into senior management as soon as he returns. Mark has the vision that a business like ours needs.

Given how much money Mark has already made for me I really do not care how much I have to pay to Mark to keep him.

My mother would be titular head of the business and Mark would be her roving ambassador cum investigator cum sounding board. I have told all this to Irene and Karen and my mother in case of need.

Karen took it much better than I thought she would. Karen still values Mark as a person to be involved in the business.

When David Taylor first employed Daniel Mason as a costs and management accountant Byrams had 320 employees in one factory. We now have 1700 employees in five factories and Ming City.

I poached Daniel from David.

Daniel has been replaced by three costs and management accountants.

Daniel now works just for me.

I can understand a straightforward set of accounts but I am not in any sense a number cruncher. Daniel is a number cruncher and analyst.

Daniel's "hospital job" when there is nothing else for Daniel to do is for Daniel to work out how to maximise profit for the next time there is a supplies crisis.

So far Daniel has so far come up with 34 opportunities for profit that I missed. Given that I had twenty years to prepare for the crisis that is humbling and humiliating.

Daniel monitors the twenty customers who buy the most components from us. Should any of those companies hit trouble that might impact upon our sales. There might be an opportunity to purchase that company into the Group, and then to supply all of its components. As I am so short of managers I am not rushing to buy businesses generally.

I value Daniel's wide ranging mind.

Daniel Mason and Mark Johnson are the only thinkers I have, and I do not have Mark at the moment.

I have given Daniel one day a week when Daniel is free to analyse absolutely anything he wishes.

I see Daniel every day at least, if only for ten minutes. Except on Wednesdays when I work at home and Daniel has his free thinking day.

One idea Daniel has come up with relates to mining companies.

I do not own any mining company shares because mining shares are far too expensive at the moment. Daniel has built a complicated computer program that correlates the prices of various metals and metal "futures" and the share prices of individual mining companies that produce metal.

Daniel updates his program every month. One day Daniel will suggest that I purchase mining shares.

Although I have invested my two billion pound cash mountain in equities across twelve stock exchanges I still have problems of what to do with my money.

My investment income oscillates around seventeen million pounds a month. As the world economy improves after the tsunami the value of the shares I bought has already increased to about two point four billion pounds. My investment income is projected to increase to probably twenty-one million pounds a month.

Byrams Engineering generates over five million pounds a month of profit.

Mings Metals generates profit.

For the moment I am pouring money into Mings Metals to build up stockpiles, but at present rates of progress within eighteen months Tony will have bought all the stockpiles I ordered him to purchase.

From that point I will have nearly thirty million pounds a month to invest most months.

My investment problem is even more challenging than this because I have as much money offshore and even more income coming out of China. At the moment most of this money is out on short term loans while I look for opportunities to use it sensibly.

My brief to Daniel was to visit Alternative Technology Centres and anywhere else Daniel thinks appropriate to find a product or products that Byrams can manufacture, or a new industry that we can enter.

I told Daniel to go away for three weeks and then to come back with ideas.

I like and I trust all my senior staff but I am not stupid.

Through my industrial research company I have employed a freelance financial analyst. He remotely monitors all my UK businesses. I have a Chinese financial analyst monitoring my Chinese and Far East investments. The analysts send weekly commentaries to my computer at home.

CHAPTER 13: Don Hewson

The position with my stepdaughter Susie Thornton is rough.

Susie is not likely to die any time soon. Susie is on the list for a heart transplant.

Going for Susie is that Susie is young and she has four young children.

Susie has never smoked.

Since Susie started courting with Paul Thornton Susie has not been much of a drinker.

Against Susie is that she isn't going to die this month if she does not have a transplant. There are many other people ahead of Susie in the queue for hearts.

If it was a kidney that was needed Paul would whisk Susie off to India and some very poor woman there would sell a kidney. With a heart the situation is much more difficult.

So at the moment Susie is living in a flat about ten minutes away from her London hospital, waiting for a telephone call to say that there is a heart available.

Susie can't move back to the house in Devizes because Susie is not fit to make the journey.

Susie would not be fit to rush from Devizes to London for a transplant.

Susie has nurses caring for her and sitting with her twenty-four hours a day. Paul can afford it.

Susie's children visit with their nanny Beverley every weekend. Susie is not fit to live with the children.

Unless Susie has a transplant she will one day die.

Paul is frustrated because although he has wealth his wealth cannot buy Susie a compatible heart.

I am frustrated because there is nothing useful I can do except to look after the children. Knowing that the children are well looked after is very important for Susie's mental health. It is a weight off Susie's mind.

I pop up to London about once a month to see Susie.

Emma is very happy running her theatre school. It has enough children to be financially viable.

I was surprised that there are parents prepared to pay for a theatre school even though their children are not yet earning.

One of the parents explained to me.

"The thing is, Mr Hewson, life is going to be harder for our children than it was for us.

"Where we live, the state education is not good. My parents and my wife's parents are prepared to pay for private schools, just so the children will have a good education.

"You are more expensive than a prep school, but you offer an opportunity for my children to train for the stage. If they are fortunate they will make a career on the stage.

"If they don't make a career on the stage then at least we have tried.

“My children comment on the work ethic that your “Terrible Tykes” have. Each of your “Tykes” is learning between one and three pieces of music a week to play at a professional level. Derek and Colin and Fulesa have their religious classes. On top of that Colin Donkin is learning and practicing music for his brass band.

“The children who live with you often cook dinner for your large household as well.

“I would gladly pay your fees just for my children to learn that work ethic.

“That may be the most important attribute that they bring from this school.”

We have an end of year school concert planned in July. We have already invited theatrical agents and directors to attend, or simply to request the DVD we are producing of the event. The event is publicised on our school web site as an event that prospective pupils and their parents may attend.

Every child has lessons on a musical instrument and each child will display his or her skills.

There will be ensembles. There will be singing in French German Spanish and English. There will be tap dancing and folk dancing.

The children understand that this is an opportunity for each child to showcase his or her skills to an audience of professionals.

Sahid Daar will be the sound and lighting engineer.

Dower Productions and two other companies that use children from the school and the TV company that broadcasts “Terrible Tykes” have already booked tables. Tom Driburg has booked a table. Tom says that he will invite casting specialists.

Two of Dower Productions’ major rivals have booked tables just to annoy Malc Dow. We will see if they turn up on the night!

Refreshments will be provided by Robert Graham and the other teenagers. Robert will be thirteen by then.

“Terrible Tykes” is doing very well as a TV program. For the first time ever ITV is beating the BBC in children’s TV time.

After their second Christmas selling Christmas goods all of the Tykes will be pound millionaires. Some of the Tykes are already pound millionaires.

The press enjoy the supposed rivalry between Sally Johnson and Charlotte Johnson. This supposed rivalry generates free publicity for both of them.

Mr Driburg has arranged for the girls to have a “Charlotte and Sally Johnson in Concert” TV show over the Easter weekend. Abdullah and Kali Daar, Gerald Butler, Max, Dan Wilbey, and Derek Donkin will appear with them.

The truth is that Sally and Charlotte love each other. They are both pleased for the other’s successes. They are working together on writing some new patriotic songs to launch on the Easter TV show.

Charlotte has written a song about the Crucifixion. “Bless The Nails” is not to my taste but then I am not religious. It is upbeat despite the title.

The DVD of folk and protest songs has had a respectable sale. Most people would be very happy to sell three hundred thousand of their first DVD in the first month of sales.

Sally’s nearly a million DVD sales already is fantastic. Both DVDs will sell even better in the weeks before Christmas.

Where Sally scores is that her DVD of patriotic songs is the ideal present for anyone over forty. The niche that is currently occupied by Dame Vera Lynn is being invaded by Sally Johnson.

Charlotte’s second DVD of religious songs is doing fairly well. Charlotte sells better in the USA than she does in the UK.

Charlotte is still niggled that Charlotte earns more as the songwriter “Emma Hewson” than Charlotte does as a religious singer. Poor child!

Charlotte is now even richer than David Wilkins!

Charlotte still wears the radio GPS system I have asked her to wear, just as a safety measure.

Bishop Ted Singleton popped in to see me. Bishop Ted has heard that my son-in-law Paul Thornton is a speculator in the City. Is Charlotte’s money or Sally’s money invested with or by Paul?

I told Bishop Singleton that none of the children’s money is invested with or by Paul. This is for two reasons.

One is that for the children I believe that a sound and safe investment policy is appropriate. Speculators can lose their shirts, and I could not face the children if I lost some of their money.

The second is that Kali Daar, Derek Donkin, and Colin Daar are Muslims. They have religious objections to investing with speculators. I had assumed the Mormons would not wish it, either.

Bishop Ted was much relieved. I am quite right that the Mormons do not like speculation either.

Have I heard from Mark recently?

I said that from the last letter we had Mark is in a small community in the South of Nevada. Mark is helping to bring a family to the Mormon religion. Mark seems entirely happy.

Rebecca visits London fairly often now. She stays with David Wilkins and Tohur Miah. On most Saturdays Rebecca goes to some Mormon event or other in London and then Rebecca goes to Church in London on Sundays. Charlotte takes the three younger Johnsons to Church in Tryton.

I said to Bishop Singleton that Rebecca is twenty-two. Even if Rebecca were my responsibility I cannot and I should not stop a young woman of twenty-two meeting young men.

I just hope that Rebecca finds a good young man down there.

Elizabeth came to see me about the Donkins. The mother, Deborah, is much better for contact with her siblings.

Deborah has largely resolved the issues she has with her mother. Deborah's mental health has improved tremendously.

Deborah is now thinking to move to London.

Deborah's mother is living alone in a four bedroom house. She has invited Deborah to live with her.

If this works out then the Donkin children may follow after a couple of months.

"That is terrifically good news. They are lovely children, but they should be with their mother and their granny."

"How will their TV careers be affected?"

I thought about that.

"The filming of Tykes is in Manchester. Dower Productions would pay for the Donkin actors to attend a theatre school in London. The children could travel to

Manchester for the filming. They could probably negotiate to cram all their filming into Tuesdays like Gerald does. So after school on Monday they would come to Manchester and spend the night in a hotel. They would film on Tuesday and then travel back to London on Tuesday night.

“If it suits you they could weekly board here and go to London for the weekends and for holidays.

“Linda is studying for a catering qualification. If Linda is going to switch colleges then the sooner she does it the better.

“I think, Elizabeth, this is wonderful news!

“Have you any idea on timings?”

“The children don’t know yet. I would think that Deborah will go off to London in the next couple of weeks. If all goes well the Donkin children would go to London at the end of term just in time for Christmas.

“How are you managing with Kali boarding here as well?”

“Downstairs we have Emma and me and Kate in our room.

“Next to us are Robert and Simeon Graham.

“Upstairs we have Beverley in a single room.

Rebecca and Charlotte and Linda share.

“Mark and Tohur and Ali have a shared room between them but given that Mark is away for two years and Ali is in China and Tohur is in London that room would be empty. So Max and Andrew Johnson and Rupert share that room.

Tohur sleeps in the study when he visits.

“Colin and Derek and Damien share. Mike and Guy and Arthur share. Sally

Thornton and Georgina and Sally Johnson share.

Freda and Margaret share. Kali is in with them during the week.

Lucinda and Alice share.

“It is tighter than I like but I have no choice.

“If the Donkins do move out we do not want any children to replace them.”

“What is happening with the Thornton children?”

“Susie will not be fit to bring them up until she has had a heart transplant. Susie is nowhere near the top of the transplant list so that could be years away. I am working on the assumption that I will be bringing up these children.”

“Are you still all right financially?”

“Oh yes.”

“I am being paid for four Johnsons, five Donkins and five Grahams. Even if you take the Donkins away I will still have enough income.”

“If things become desperate I know that Paul would pay me a fostering fee for his children.”

“Doesn’t Paul pay you anything now?”

“No. Just a case of wine every month and a cheese parcel every week.

“Paul has set up a trust fund for my children. I don’t know how much Paul puts in there each month. A fair bit I expect.

“The school is surprisingly profitable.”

“My old age pension starts in July. I have two other pensions that I have not started to draw yet.

“I will be fine financially.”

Elizabeth told me that there have been some mutterings inside social services that it is not right for Emma Hewson to be making money out of educating children who are being fostered by Don Hewson.

Elizabeth has said within social services that in principle she is prepared to move the Johnson children, the Donkin children, and the Graham children. So if anybody knows of four empty slots in Tryton for the Johnsons or two sets of five slots anywhere else please let Elizabeth know.

It is against Meldon Council’s policy to move children unless the move is identifiably in the best interests of the children concerned. So the new households ideally should each have a piano and be as good for children as the Hewson house.

Elizabeth says that this muttering will continue but that Elizabeth thinks she has contained it.

Elizabeth has no plans to introduce more children when the Donkins go.

The big surprise this autumn is the success of Dennis Wilkin's autobiography. It had to be published this autumn because Dennis turns eighteen before Christmas. Once Dennis turns eighteen then he becomes an adult. Dennis becomes fair game for journalists like that bitch Jes Holt.

It is better that Dennis should publish a "warts and all" autobiography, so the family is no longer "news".

Dennis is not a writer. David Wilkins is. So David ghost wrote the book.

Together with photos the text tells the story of Dennis' life to date.

Tom Driburg arranged for the book to be serialised in the Sunday Scandal, earning Dennis a good chunk of money.

Literally millions of people have bought the book, earning Dennis a lot more money.

The bookshops report that most of the people who buy the book are what they politely call "non traditional book buyers". The bookshops are very happy with any writer who can bring millions of new customers into their bookshops. The autobiography is in every book shop window.

Dennis had sold the book before publication to a Cayman Islands company that David set up for him. Dennis has no tax to pay.

The pre-orders for David's autobiography next Christmas are over a million copies already.

Charlotte is also bringing out an autobiography for next Christmas. In the autobiography Charlotte will disclose that Charlotte is the song writer Emma Hewson. That will be exciting!

Tohur says that he expects to be selected to fight for the United Kingdom at the next Olympics. The Christmas before the Olympics will be the best time for his book.

CHAPTER 14 : Ali Miah

The flight to Beijing was straightforward. I wore a generic pilot uniform with the Chinese medal bar. The flight attendants were very attentive.

I could get used to travelling First Class.

I would like to think that the flight attendants were attentive because I am a good looking young pilot who has been decorated for valour. I suspect it is because they all know that I am a senior manager with the airline.

While I was in the baggage hall at Beijing an American man in his fifties with very short hair wearing a suit came in with an English man in his early thirties also wearing a suit.

“Mr Miah?”

“Yes.”

“Arthur Miller.”

“This is Tommy Sherson. Tommy is the local manager for the airline here at Beijing Airport.”

I shook hands with both.

“Ali Miah.”

When my suitcase came off the carousel I went through customs with Arthur and Tommy. My medal bar got some respectful attention from the Chinese customs men.

“I would suggest that we go for a drink but I understand you are a devout Muslim.”

“That’s right.

“I do drink coffee.”

Arthur has an office at the airport. We three went there and Arthur made us some good coffee.

“I am going to leave now with Mr Miah.

“We will be in at seven tomorrow morning.”

Tommy left us.

“You and I are in the same block of apartments. We share a maid.”

“That’s fine by me.”

“Mr Miller. You look to be in your fifties.”

Mr Miller nodded.

“You have probably been doing this work since I was in short trousers, or possibly since before I was born.”

Mr Miller nodded.

“So why don’t you tell me what you think my job is?”

“What have you been told?”

I told him what Steve had told me.

“OK.

“Your job has several strands and layers.

“First up is simply to be a very good interpreter.

“Then, once I am confident that you and I are on the same wave length, you will be a negotiator.

“Over time, if you have the skills, you will become a player.”

“A player?”

“Instead of just taking my orders you will have ideas and thoughts and you will argue for your corner. I have the last word but you get to argue your corner.

“Later you may be deputising for me while I am out of the country.

“And then one day I will be gone and you will be running the Beijing hub.”

Steve has obviously not told Arthur that my appointment as Hub Manager Designate is provisional. Or perhaps Arthur is choosing not to tell me what he knows.

“I am supposed to be studying for my degree. I need regular times for that.”

“I was warned about that. Sundays and Wednesdays?”

“That works for me.”

Two full days of study will have to do. I will study during the University holidays as well, so effectively three days a week.

Arthur drove to a block of flats about twenty minutes drive from the airport. We went up in the lift. We are on the top floor.

My flat is fine, There are three bedrooms, a kitchen, a living room, and a well equipped bathroom. Arthur told me that if I leave money out and a shopping list our maid will shop for me. The maid has reasonable English. She does Arthur’s shopping.

My kitchen is already partly stocked.

I took the whiskey and the beer next door to Arthur.

Arthur’s flat looks nice.

"These are no good for me. You might enjoy them."

"OK. Thanks."

"That Tommy Sherson. I have the feeling he does not like me."

"Have you any idea why?"

"Yes."

"Tommy thinks that he should be hub manager designate. He is upset that he did not get a look-in."

"Why didn't Tommy get my job?"

"Tommy has been here for three years. His Putonghua is barely good enough to ask for the bathroom. He can't read Chinese."

Tommy is a graduate in French and History and he knows nothing about Engineering in any language.

"He simply can't do the job."

"Have you told him?"

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

"He isn't happy. Fortunately you answer only to me. If Tommy stays then Tommy will eventually answer to you."

"Steve hasn't told me much about you except that you fit the criteria I had set. You look very young."

"I do look young, I know."

I had used my few days back at Tryton to update my CV. I had printed off a few copies.

I gave Arthur a copy of my updated CV.

I watched Arthur's face as he read it.

Arthur Miller is another man I won't play cards with for money. His face was completely expressionless.

"So how does a lad of twenty earn three Chinese medals?"

I told him.

"I saw the TV footage of that. It looked bloody cold."

"It was."

“And for an encore you fixed the engines of the oil tanker!”

“Yes.”

“You earned two medals on the same afternoon?”

“Yes.”

“That explains something Steve said to me.”

“What was that?”

“Steve said that you are very effective at what you do. Bureaucracies bend around you because they cannot do otherwise.”

That was nice. I think.

“May I keep this?”

“Please do.”

“I will show it to Tommy Sherson. I think that Tommy will accept that you are better qualified for the post than he is. If that does not work I will ask Steve to move him.”

I told Arthur that I wanted to visit the local shops. Is there anything Arthur needs?

“No, thank you.”

I went down in the lift. I visited a small store and I bought what I needed. The people were surprised and pleased that I speak Putonghua. My medals attracted attention.

When I returned I offered to cook for Arthur but he said that he was on a liquid diet.

He will have an early night. Can I be ready please for seven in the morning?

In the morning I was on Arthur’s doorstep at seven sharp.

He looked at me.

“OK let’s go.”

We drove to the airport and we began an incredibly long day of meetings. I was simply translating at first. As I got into it I stopped translating and I started negotiating.

Arthur was silent and he let me negotiate.

After a while I stopped and I explained to Arthur where the discussion had got to.

“Ask for a tea break.”

I asked for a tea break.

The Chinese all smiled and they agreed.

“What is going on, Arthur?”

“Watch.”

Arthur pulled a bottle of whiskey from his briefcase and he topped up everyone’s tea except mine.

“You have done very well. The resolution to this I want is “X”, but I will settle for “Y”.”

About half an hour later we had settled on “Y”.

The meetings seemed to go on for ever.

One of the Chinese men seemed to be a note taker because he never spoke and he was with us all morning. After lunch it was a different fellow in the same chair who was with us all afternoon.

The last meeting of the afternoon, which by now was after eight at night, was the archaeologists!

The archaeologists wish us to delay the digging of the terminal foundations because they would like to excavate the entire site.

It seems that the Mongol Army that besieged Beijing in 1215 had camped on the site of the terminal for several months. The archaeology investigations will take two years.

Arthur was muttering some rude words not quite under his breath.

I commented that two years seems to be a very long time. Is there any way to speed it up?

They explained that their budget has been cut because central government is diverting money for Reconstruction after the tsunami. The national archaeology budget has been cut savagely.

I asked if they only had three months in which to excavate, beginning tomorrow, how much money would they need? Is it only money that they need?

They explained that because of the budget cuts there are significant numbers of experienced unemployed archaeologists at the moment.

Their only difficulty is to find the money to pay the excavators and the assessors and for finds preservation.

“So how much money are we talking about?”

After huffing and puffing and discussions the figure they need is three quarters of a million pounds.

I asked the archaeologists for a short break.

I took Arthur outside. I told him the problem. I told him the solution. Arthur was fine with it.

“OK. Now Arthur I want you to shout at me because you are extremely angry.

“Some of them will understand English.

“It is a waste of money. There is no money in our budget for this. I am supposed to be here to help you - not to help the Chinese to rob you. Which side am I on?

“Three months from today is the absolute outside limit.

“Can you do that?”

So Arthur shouted and swore at me. Arthur enjoyed it. Arthur was letting out a lot of accumulated frustration.

I had not asked Arthur to swear at me but I understood why he was doing it.

It is not the first time I have been sworn at. It was the least deserved occasion.

When we returned to the room the archaeologists were apprehensive. They had heard Arthur shouting and swearing.

I said to the archaeologists that we deeply respect China’s history and heritage.

We are under huge time pressure.

If the archaeologists can promise to complete the job in three months from today then I will write them a cheque this afternoon. Actually I will write two cheques. If every archaeologist is off the site three months from today I will give them a second cheque for a further one quarter of a million pounds. If there are artefacts worth displaying I will build a display case in the departures lounge to exhibit them in.

We were in agreement.

I gave them my card and I told them that if there are any issues they should speak to me and not to my boss. Having heard my boss shouting they were happy to agree.

I pulled out a cheque book. I filled in the cheque, and I signed it.

Arthur’s face and body language made it clear that Arthur was not pleased.

We pulled this “Bad guy Good guy” act a few times. Sometimes I was the bad guy and Arthur benevolently overruled me.

After two weeks Arthur told me that he is very happy with me. I have made more progress in the negotiations in two weeks than he has made in two months.

“OK “, I said.

“I want to try something new.

“The guys we are dealing with, some of them have never flown.”

“Yes.”

“They have never seen a First Class Cabin on our airline.”

“For sure.”

“Their wives and children are even less likely to have ever flown.”

“Yes.”

“So what I want to do is to take them, their wives and their children for a joyride.

“I want to get all the adults totally drunk, fed on incredibly good food, and for all the children to visit the cockpit and to touch the controls.

“They will see the Great Wall of China, the Gobi Desert, and the Chinese coast.

“The total cost to us is less than half a million pounds. The benefits far outweigh that”.

“Do you have any lists of who you have been dealing with, who has been helpful, and who has been a prick?”

“I can make the lists.”

Tommy Sherson was very co-operative. As it is a request from me Tommy will speak to Operations in London to make it possible.

“Tommy. Make it clear to whoever you speak to that this is not a request. It is an instruction.

“Anyone who gets in the way of this will be sacked by Steve.”

“Who is Steve?”

“Our Chief Executive.”

“You call him “Steve”?”

“Yes.”

“Right!”

I was not surprised to receive an invitation to visit the PLAAF Staff College on the outskirts of Beijing that I had visited before. Nor was I surprised to meet Captain Lee again. Captain Lee was now wearing a General's uniform.

"Congratulations General Lee. I see that you have received some of the promotions that you deserve."

"As have you."

"Thank you."

"Are you responsible for my promotion?"

"No."

"I saw the email that Mr Miller sent to your Chief Executive. We maintain lists of gajin Putonghua speakers. We wondered who might appear."

"You were one of the possibilities."

"My Chief Executive says that he does not know of anyone else who meets the criteria."

"Your Chief Executive does not have access to our database."

True!

"Welcome back to China."

"Why would you bother to read Arthur Miller's emails?"

"Your project is a huge foreign investment in our infrastructure. We keep an eye on how it is going because we want you to succeed. Arthur reports to Steve once a week summarising where he has got to and what issues he is facing."

"Arthur's reports save us an awful lot of work."

"Well done on the archaeologists by the way. The way you and Arthur dealt with them was masterly."

"They accept that there can be no extension on the three month time limit."

"How do you know?"

"The note takers report to me."

"Do you read Arthur's reports to Steve?"

"No."

"Arthur thinks you are terrific. Arthur is full of praise for you."

That is good.

“So, General Lee, how do you see our relationship?”

“You are an intelligent young man in a very demanding job.

“You are working for the betterment of China.

“I salute you.”

“Thank you, General.”

“Wing Commander Beeson and Colonel Norman and I want to open up communication between us.

“The time is not right for us to sit together and have the conversations we wish to have. So we need a conduit.

“Circumstances have selected you to be our conduit.”

“I don’t have any message for you?”

“Mr Miah. You being here is the message. You need not worry. I have understood the message that they are sending.”

“I don’t understand.”

“That’s fine.

“You do not need to understand.

“All you need to do is to convey messages accurately.”

I did not know what to make of that.

Between Arthur, Steve, General Lee, Wing Commander Beeson and Major Dinsdale a.k.a. Colonel Norman I am associating with some fearsomely bright people. There must be a phrase other than “piggy in the middle” but at the moment it escapes me.

Is “patsy” the word?

“You have a problem finding a contractor to dig your foundations?”

“Yes.

“All the contractors say that the Reconstruction Ministry has commandeered their diggers and earth moving equipment and drivers. They would love to take our contract but they do not have the machinery or the drivers.

“We have to wait for the archaeologists to finish their works.

“After that we need to start excavating the foundations straight away. We are very concerned that we do not have a contractor.”

“You know that here in China there is a tradition of the PLAAF helping out with civilian projects?”

“Yes. That tradition goes back for centuries.”

“Number Three Training School of the PLAAF just outside Beijing has a cadre of experienced civil engineering officers as instructors. It has an intake of trainees arriving in three weeks time. Their Commanding Officer was complaining to me only yesterday that all his construction equipment has been taken from him for Reconstruction work.

“Number Three Training School has to train the trainees to work with machinery that it does not have.

“Normally the trainees have two months training and then they are given a practical job to do like building a road or building a bridge.

“Digging foundations for an airport terminal would serve as a practical task.”

“I would have to run this past Arthur.

“Hypothetically, if the airline were to ship construction equipment to China, what is to stop the Reconstruction Ministry from commandeering these machines?”

“The Reconstruction Ministry does not commandeer equipment that is foreign owned.

“The machinery would not be owned by a Chinese contractor nor by PLAAF. “

“So if we were to import machinery for our project, we could lend it to Number Three Training School, and it would not be commandeered?”

“Yes. In fact Number Three Training School would like you to retain ownership for that very reason.”

“What would Number Three Training School wish to be paid for undertaking our excavation?”

“The wages of the trainees and the training staff are already in the budget. If you would pay for the fuel used while working on your project, and forget to demand the return of the machinery at the end of the project, Number Three Training School would be very happy.”

“Do you know what machinery Number Three Training School would like?”

“By an amazing coincidence I happen to have a list here.”

I looked at the list. It looked straightforward enough.

“General Lee. I have to speak to Mr Miller. I will telephone you tomorrow.”

CHAPTER 15: Mark Johnson

I have grown up as a Mormon. I have met probably a dozen Mormon missionaries in Tryton.

Everyone knows that Mormon missionaries have a daily exercise regime.

It seems obvious to me that anyone coming for training as a missionary ought to have started exercising before they arrive.

About a quarter of the young men in my entry cohort are unfit. They struggle to do two press-ups!

I blame them for their stupidity and I blame their Bishops for letting them come unprepared like this.

About half of us are fit enough to satisfy the instructors. One instructor leads us on a run while the other instructors work on the sad sacks.

The first time a sad sack graduates to running we all applaud him. We know that it has been hard for him to become fit so fast.

He starts off running for one mile and he builds up to four miles.

By the end of a month everyone is running four miles each morning. Everyone can do the exercises.

I note that some guys have disappeared.

Some of them should never have come.

Presumably they will come again in a few months time after they have got fit.

Tim Baker is not an ideal roommate. In over a month I have not heard Tim say anything pleasant.

The problem is that Tim Baker is deeply unhappy in himself.

It isn't the Mormon training. It isn't me. But it is me who has to listen to Tim.

I went to our supervisor to ask if I could share a room with someone else.

The supervisor explained that this is not a holiday camp. This is a place of work and learning.

Nothing in any of the Mormon literature promises you a good roommate.

If Tim and I are grinding against each other that is a learning experience. Not all learning experiences are enjoyable. I should pray and work with Tim to resolve the situation.

So I prayed and then I tried.

"Tim, did you ever watch "Bambi?""

"Yes."

"What was Thumper's mother's advice?"

"I can't remember."

"If you can't say anything nice don't say anything at all."

Tim was quiet for a few minutes.

"That is about typical. You born Mormons always look down on convert families!"

"What?"

"My family are converts. I was two when the family converted. You look down on me!"

"What?"

"You spend your time sneering at me because I was not a Mormon from birth."

"Tim. I don't look down on you.

"From where I am I am I can't look down on anyone!"

"The Mormon Church is a convert Church. Everyone is a convert or is descended from converts.

"Until you told me just now I had no idea you were not born a Mormon.

"The reason I don't like you is you moan about everything from waking in the morning until going to sleep at night.

"You even whinge in your sleep!"

Tim was surprised at that!

"My family were so poor that we had to have financial help from the Church.

"We children were taken into care.

"Our foster carers are not Mormons. I have left my family in a non-Mormon house so I could be a missionary.

"I could have set up a home and lived in it with my family. But I didn't."

"I can't look down on anyone!"

Our discussion went on a while. I do not pretend that Tim Baker and I became pals but we managed to tolerate each other until the course ended.

CHAPTER 16: Amina Daar

I grew up with my cousin Shakoora. We were in the same pram together. We were in the same pushchair.

We were always in the same class at school. We have shared a bedroom for all that I can remember.

We are very close. We are closer than most sisters.

I normally just have to look at Shakoora to know what Shakoora is thinking.

We love each other.

In our community, when a young woman marries she normally goes to live with her husband, and often with her husband's family.

Shakoora and I have always known that one day one of us would leave first.

Neither of us was thinking about getting married for a few years yet.

Ali Miah has visited. Ali is visibly smitten with Shakoora.

Shakoora and I have been interested in Ali Miah for a long time, but we thought that Ali was out of our league.

We are teenage girls from the inner city of Doncaster.

Ali Miah is Quran hafiz, Cambridge University, an airline pilot, very good looking, and fit. Neither of us can compare with that girlfriend George. We are both quite good looking, but neither of us is bright enough to go to Cambridge.

Now Ali has become a hero and Ali has landed an incredibly highly paid and responsible job.

Ali is obviously going to ask Shakoora to marry him.

Shakoora is going to visit Ali in Beijing for courtship. Abdullah will be there as chaperon.

If Ali proposes I am sure that Shakoora will accept. I would. Any young woman would.

I don't know what I want. For Shakoora I wish a very good man. We knew Ali Miah when he had nothing. Ali was a good person then. Ali still is a good person.

Ali says that it is as if Allah has lifted Ali to these heights for a purpose. Ali does not know what Allah's intention is.

I cannot think of a better man than Ali Miah.

Love strikes when it does. You can't hurry it. When it happens you have to deal with it.

Ali likes me I know but Ali is more interested in Shakoora. I like Ali. If Ali Miah was interested in me I would be very interested in Ali.

In Islam it is possible for a man to have two wives. Even four wives at a time is possible.

I know that many people think that polygamy is bad, but there are advantages to polygamy. First, when the Holy Prophet Mohammed (Peace Be Upon Him) was alive there was a lot of warfare. A lot of young men were killed before they had married. As a result many young women had nobody to marry.

There were many young widows, often with children, who needed to be supported.

A man who marries his brother's widow does a noble thing, but he should be allowed a younger wife, too.

Sometimes a woman does not conceive. Should she be divorced so that her husband can marry another woman?

Some of the Americans who most condemn Islam have married and divorced several times. In a Muslim society they might still marry several times but their first and second and third wives would still be living with them.

There is a requirement that the man must be able to support each of his wives to a proper standard.

In Islam Ali could marry both of us because Ali can afford two wives.

A Muslim cannot marry two sisters on the same day but we are cousins so Ali could marry us both on the same day, or one first and the other later.

I shall have to think about that.

Polygamy is quite rare here in England. I have never thought about being a second wife or of being one of two or several wives. I could do it with Shakoora. It is a lot to think about.

Who would look after my father? What about the business? Mina can't manage both.

Shakoora goes to Beijing in January. I think that Shakoora will come back engaged.

Ali will have to come to Doncaster for the wedding.

My father is not fit to run a wedding so Abdullah and Sahid will end up with that job.

There are no older women in our family. Some of our late mothers' friends would be glad to help out.

I expect that we will invite the entire Somali community to the wedding because of our prominent social position. We are not poor, so there is less pressure on us than there would be on many families.

My worry is that after the wedding Shakoora will be living on the other side of the world. Shakoora will not be here to support me and I will not be there to support her.

Shakoora will be totally alone a lot of the time because Ali works very long hours.

I don't know how Mina and I will run the business. Mina is too young to leave school.

I don't know if Joy would be willing to supervise the factory. What would we have to pay Joy?

We could promote one of the workers to be manager, but we will have to think very carefully about that.

I have to be happy that Shakoora has found the right man.

I can't ask Shakoora to delay the wedding. There is no point really.

I will have to design the clothes in which Shakoora will be married. Shakoora's wedding clothes will be Somali traditional clothing obviously and probably in silk.

We will need new clothes for the whole family.

My brother Sahid is a lucky young man.

Just as the income from Byram's Bearings is set to drop to "only" about £40,000 a year Sahid has picked up another contract from the Byram's Group for "Ming's".

This will run at a million pounds or so a year, possibly for years.

I had no idea that geeks could earn so much money!

Kali really enjoyed meeting Dee Lishus and singing with him. The Christmas Special will be broadcast on Christmas Day afternoon.

Abdullah has told me that by late January Kali will be a millionaire.

Kali does not know.

We will not tell Kali.

It is safer if nobody in Doncaster knows.

Kali spends most of the week in Tryton and Manchester but Kali comes home at weekends. Usually Rebecca drops Kali here in Doncaster on her way to London on Friday evening. Rebecca collects Kali as she is passing through around six o'clock on Sundays. Sometimes Abdullah runs Kali to Tryton.

Abdullah has been accepted to read for a degree in Business Studies at Sheffield Hallam University. Abdullah can drive to Sheffield easily.

Abdullah decided that he has to live at home to give Shakoora and me support.

Now Abdullah will be giving only me support.

I do not know when the wedding will take place.

Abdullah has made enquiries about wedding venues. We have to wait until there is an engagement before we book anything.

Jabril is now working two hours a night packing all these accessories. The picking and packing is getting in the way of doing all Jabril's homework, which has increased again this year.

Jabril has started taking Ahmed with him to do the order picking. Jabril checks what Ahmed has picked and Jabril does the actual packing.

Ahmed must be the best paid junior school child in Doncaster. We pay Ahmed and Jabril the adult minimum wage.

They think that they are earning a lot of money.

Ahmed is just stashing his money in a bank savings account because he does not know what to do with it.

When Ahmed opened his bank account Abdullah went with him because Abdullah is eighteen. Sahid went to the bank with them. Sahid is one of the branch's few millionaires so Sahid can always book to see the Manager if he wishes.

Sahid and Abdullah made it clear to the Manager that Ahmed's earnings are honest. Sahid made it clear that if the bank messes Ahmed around then Sahid and Abdullah will close their accounts with the bank. Daar Fashions will also close our account.

Ahmed is only a child but he comes from a wealthy family. Ahmed is not to be messed around.

The bank manager said that he has noted on the computer that any issues around Ahmed's account are to be referred to the manager personally. There is already a similar note on Jabril's account.

The reason Sahid was so heavy about Ahmed's bank account is because Sahid is still very angry that the previous bank suspected Sahid of money laundering. As a result our house was smashed up by the police searching it for non-existent drugs. Sahid does not want this to happen again.

Amal helps with picking and packing when he can but with his homework and his dancing Amal does not have a lot of time to give.

Mina is fine.

Fosia and Ahmed are having piano lessons and singing lessons in hopes of gaining a place in "Terrible Tykes" sometime.

Abdullah is continuing his singing lessons because he wants to. Abdullah can afford it.

We see Arthur and Joy Brown sometimes. When they visit they often bring their two foster children.

CHAPTER 17: Tohur Miah

David and I have settled in to our house in London. It is in Turnham Green. There are five bedrooms and a small room described as a "study" or sixth bedroom. With all the fees it came to just under two million pounds for a house that in Meldon would cost maybe two hundred and seventy-five thousand pounds.

Property in London holds its value. If we wish to sell the house in a few years time we will not lose money on it.

I was surprised that we did not have to argue with Don.

Don was fine with it.

As we are both under eighteen we cannot own property ourselves. Our trustees are Don, Emma, and Helen Wilkins.

The kitchen is big enough to film in.

I have a small fridge freezer for halal meat and we have a much larger fridge freezer for David and for general purposes.

David and I have already filmed programmes to go beyond Christmas.

Our Christmas goods - cookbooks and calendars and aprons – are organised. We have nothing more that we need to do before Christmas.

We are preparing for filming after Christmas and we are assembling our next cookbooks. We take photos of the food as we go along.

Sahid does not have time to help us on the technical side so we are looking for a replacement for Sahid. We are taking care not to duplicate anything.

We are also preparing ideas for Robert Graham because Robert needs guidance. Robert could do good programs on his own, but with us helping him with the planning Robert's eight minute slots are like works of art.

Robert says that when he is fired for being "too old" he intends to take a few years off and concentrate on his exercises. Once Robert can walk properly, or Robert is as good as he can get, Robert will think again about his future.

Sally Johnson is lined up to replace Robert. Sally has been cooking since she was seven.

Sally says that because she attends the theatre school it is practical for Sally to film for "Tykes" and for the cookery during the week.

Mr Vincent does not know about Sally yet, only that when it is time Robert has a successor ready.

Mr Driburg says that the supermarket is very happy with all three performers.

Our earnings are in part related to the new customers we bring in. We are still gaining performance bonuses for bringing in new customers. We also earn bonuses for retaining customers.

Our cookbooks sell well. David produces two cookbooks a year because David is working through “gluten intolerant”, “diabetes” and so forth as well as the annual Christmas cookbook based around his series. David’s “second” book always comes out in May.

I have decided there is more mileage in “vegetarian” than in “Muslim”. I have planned a series of vegetarian cookery books to come out each Easter starting this coming Easter.

We have taken one of the double bedrooms as a study. We have planks and bricks shelving along one wall for our cookbooks. Sometimes after College we go to second hand book shops and we buy old cookbooks. We do not have a lot of money so we do not go that often. There is a lot of stuff on the Internet but the old cookbooks sometimes have interesting ideas.

We have a couple of desks to work on. We share a printer/ scanner.

We are paranoid about a burglary where a burglar might steal our books in progress or our program planning. We store everything online and not in the laptops.

Sahid lets us do a second backup on his personal computer. We email everything to Sahid before we close down the laptops we are working on.

Rebecca stays with us most weekends but Rebecca is normally out socialising with Mormons.

Rebecca tells us that she has been accepted for the London School of Economics. Rebecca will be living with us from next October. Rebecca says that she hopes to throw some parties once she is living with us.

Ali says that he is enjoying his time in China. Shakoora and Abdullah are visiting Ali in January. I have the impression that Ali and Shakoora may marry.

Not that it matters, but I approve.

Shakoora is mentally strong enough to stand up to Ali when it is necessary.

I have a lot of time and respect and affection for all the Daar family.

I suppose that if I were going to marry into the Daar family Mina would be my logical choice to marry. But I have no plans to marry until I am really old, maybe twenty-five. I am only seventeen now.

Mina is a very strong young lady. I like Mina a lot but I am not interested to marry Mina. When I marry I would like to be the boss. With Mina that would not happen. By the time I am ready for marriage Mina will probably already be married. Kali will very likely have married by then, too.

Fulesa is enjoying "Terrible Tykes". Fulesa enjoys playing a mischievous horror. I tease Fulesa about how the script writers really know the children and how they have based the characters on the personalities of the children!

The episode where Fulesa sabotaged all of Max's guitar strings is very popular. It comes near to the top of the episode downloads. What is terrific is that Max played the piece perfectly even when he was down to just one broken string. Carlo did very well to choose a guitar piece where that was possible. Max did well to play it perfectly while the strings were breaking under his fingers. That must have been interesting to film!

Fulesa and Georgina spark off each other and off Sally Johnson and Kali.

Carlo says that the four girls are the backbone of the program. In each episode there is usually a row between two or three of the female characters. It is playground bitchiness every week and it helps to give emotion to the series. Watching two girls who have just had a huge fight singing a duet together and pretending to like each other is funny.

Moklisur and Monika are not interested in getting involved in the series.

Their Bengali is now really good! They enjoy school. They attend the Bengali madressa and Bengali literacy classes because they have to.

Fulesa, Moklisur, Monika and I are visiting Ali in Beijing next summer.

Dennis Wilkins has decided that when he goes to University he has to continue living at home.

With Helen now living with her husband and David here in London, Dennis feels that it would be unfair to ask Andria to carry the household. There are a huge number of Universities within travelling distance of Meldon.

So far Dennis has had three interviews and three offers. Dennis would really like to attend Manchester University to study Engineering but Dennis has not heard from them yet.

When I heard that the Donkins are likely to move to London I spoke to Don over Skype.

Don said that he is happy for the Donkin children. When we have parties I should invite Linda Donkin.

I said that I would. Linda is a mate, anyway.

I am close to Derek and Colin but they are too young for adult parties. They will visit for tea and biscuits. During holidays I will take them to Mosque.

Emma's theatre school has four new children starting in January, so losing the three Donkins at the end of December is not a financial problem for Emma.

I go to art galleries on Friday mornings because I may never have the time to do this again.

I go to Mosque on Friday afternoons. There are lots of Mosques in London. I have a few favourite Mosques.

I make a small payment each time I use a Mosque.

I still pay my zakat to the Bengali mosque in Meldon near to where the Shahs live.

I enjoy my judo.

I have the highest win rate in the England junior squad so I am happy. I will probably make the Olympic squad.

Mr Driburg persuaded the supermarket to sponsor me as an athlete so the judo costs me nothing now.

The guys who attacked me all pleaded guilty. They have spent so long in custody that they will all be released next year.

If any of them attack me again I will have to hurt him or them convincingly. I will not break their backs but I will have to break arms or legs to show that I am serious.

A martial arts specialist like me has to be careful not to hurt racist thugs too much.

David loves the Cordon Bleu College. Like me David is always in the top three on each course.

We are learning so much!

Don keeps giving us the "beware" sermons over Skype.

I think that Don suspects he is losing the battle with David.

Mr Driburg appeared at our house on a Saturday morning. Mr Driburg telephoned at about eight in the morning to say that he had good news for us and that he would visit in half an hour. We scampered out of our beds!

When Mr Driburg arrived he told us that David's program and my program are both on the shortlist for "best cookery show" in the TV awards. Derek Donkin and Kali Daar are on the shortlists for best actor again. "Terrible Tykes" is on the shortlist for "Best Music" and "Best Children's TV program". "Tykes" won both awards last year and is a virtual certainty for both awards again this year.

Robert Graham is short-listed for "best performer" on all TV. Robert won't win it, but it is a heck of an honour even to be on the shortlist.

Mr Driburg gave us a "beware" lecture. Mr Driburg says that a "Tell All" story would be very hurtful to our reputations so we must avoid misbehaving.

After we showed Mr Driburg out the front door Gisela emerged from behind the sofa to say,

"I am the Tell All Girl."

"But I want some more to tell about first!"

Gisela dragged David back to his room and I did not see them for another couple of hours.

There are times when I envy David Wilkins his cheerful hedonism. I used to call David a pagan but David said that pagans believe in something. David just likes having a good time, so David says that he is a hedonist rather than a pagan.

Gisela was the girlfriend of another lad at the Cordon Bleu College. The lad ran out of money and he ended up cooking on a yacht.

Gisela just moved to David.

Gisela is an Art Student. Gisela has her evenings and weekends free for whatever. Gisela is getting plenty of whatever with David. Gisela is cradle snatching by about three years but Gisela and David are both happy with it.

David still has that lovely smile and that twinkle in his eye.

David used to be a County level judo athlete. A lot of us Hewson boys do the stomach crunches and press-ups and one arm press-ups. David is very fit. David has lots of stamina, which must be nice for Gisela.

I visit my family and the Hewsons and the Shahs in Meldon fairly often. David goes to see his family about once a month. David does not take Gisela.

Gisela was surprised that we celebrity cooks have so little spending money.

We own a house where Don pays the outgoings. We have plenty of free food from the supermarket.

Emma decided that we need a cleaner twice a week. Don pays.

Don asked my social worker Jane for advice on how much money a student needs to live on in London.

Jane came back with a figure. Don gives each of us one and a half times Jane's figure. We also each have a "float" that we can dip into in emergencies. If I have need I can take a taxi right across London. I explain what happened and then Don will top up the float. The "float" is a thousand pounds between us, which will deal with most emergencies.

By student standards we are pretty comfortable but we are not flush.

I also have the money that Ali has lodged with me. I have banked it for safety.

I am still in care so a local social worker visits once a fortnight for a cup of tea and a chat. She reports back to Jane.

Gisela used to get cross that David sometimes will not drop everything to spend time with Gisela.

I said to Gisela that if Gisela had to generate enough really excellent art to fill an Exhibition every May and another every December, and prepare for and perform in a weekly TV program, and follow a College degree course, Gisela might sometimes not have as much time for a boyfriend as the boyfriend might wish.

Gisela got the point.

David is also ghost writing an autobiography for Dennis, but I did not tell Gisela that.

Rebecca Johnson and Gisela have met.

This is our house. Rebecca is our guest.

If Rebecca has a problem with two unreligious people fornicating then Rebecca can live somewhere else.

Rebecca is a lot less uptight than she used to be.

We are pretty sure that Rebecca told Helen because Helen recently posted David a box containing a gross of condoms!

CHAPTER 18: Mark Johnson

I enjoyed most of the training for being a Mormon missionary.

I am used to speaking in public.

I was really interested in the psychology of our conversations with unbelievers and the psychology of conversion.

I have done some negotiating. Sometimes that is a good experience to have but frequently the experience is almost unhelpful. We are not in a zero sum game.

I was pleased to be out of training and on my way to Nevada.

I parted with Tim Baker amicably. Tim is off to Arkansas pronounced “Arkansaw”, another American state I have never heard of. Tim is happy because “Arkansaw” is much warmer than Vermont.

Four of us were off to Nevada. The Mission Presidency is in Las Vegas so we flew to Las Vegas.

We had been told to take a taxi to a particular hotel. The taxi driver recognised the name but he did not know exactly where it is. I showed him the address and he laughed.

“Are you Mormons?”

“Yes.”

“That explains it. Your hotel is used by Mormons and Baptists because it has no liquor licence, no gambling, and no flesh shows.

“Why come to Las Vegas?”

I told him that we are just starting out as a Mormon missionaries.

He had nothing else to say.

He dropped me at the hotel. I paid him the agreed fee and a tip.

In the foyer there were a lot of us young Mormon missionaries. We all had our suitcases with us. We were given name badges.

We were all excited and we were chatting and mingling. They just loved my accent.

Most of them were part way through their missionary service and were here to be assigned new partners for the next six month assignment. Some of us were new. Each cohort of missionaries had a different coloured name badge.

Eventually a middle aged man came into the room.

He put his fingers to his lips to motion for silence. We all did the same and eventually we were all silent. I remembered a teacher doing the same trick when I was at junior school.

He is our Mission President, the supervisor for all us missionaries in his State.

He explained that missionaries share bedrooms, which we all knew. He is going to call each pair of missionaries. He will give each pair a room key.

We have two hours to get to know each other. There will be a quiz before dinner.

Those who fail the quiz will not be given coffee after dinner.

We all laughed because Mormons of course do not drink coffee.

I was paired with Mark Walker. He is from New York State. He is on his last assignment now. Mark has a place at Massachusetts Institute of Technology to read Engineering. That is probably why we have been paired.

We talked about our lives so far.

Mark has been luckier than me in that he has both parents and his parents are not poor. Mark will not have student debt when he finishes his degrees. Mark intends to take his Engineering Degree and then an MBA.

I explained that my employer is going to fund my Management degree once I finish my apprenticeship.

In the quiz we discovered that we were not being quizzed about our room-mates as we were expecting. It was a quiz about the rules for Mormon missionaries. We all scored one hundred per cent.

Mark explained that he had not told me what the quiz would be about because he did not wish to spoil the joke.

During the dinner our Mission Supervisor went round the tables. The junior person in each team was given an envelope.

I opened our envelope.

We are assigned to Dry Gulch. There was a map of Nevada enclosed showing all our destinations. Dry Gulch is the furthest South destination in Nevada. Naturally we all asked around if the more experienced Missionaries had ever been to our destinations. Most people found people who had recently served in their destination and could tell them about it.

Nobody knew Dry Gulch.

Mark has a detailed map of Nevada, much better than the map the Mission Supervisor gave us. Dry Gulch has only one road leading into it. It is not one of Nevada's good roads.

Mark said that I will be surprised by how bad the road is.

Our journey plan said that we should make our way to Wet Gulch and spend the night there. As soon as we arrive at Wet Gulch we should go to the gas station and speak to the operator. He will organise a lift for us to Dry Gulch in the morning. We were warned that the departure could be at five or six in the morning because people do not like travelling in the heat of the day. It is a six hour road journey. We were also warned that there are no banks or cash machines in Dry Gulch. "It looks like an adventure", I said.

Mark gave me a look that suggested that Mark was not as enthusiastic.

The following morning we bought coach tickets to a town near Wet Gulch.

When we got there we found there is only one bus a day to Wet Gulch and we had missed it.

There was a motel we could stay in, so we did.

The next day we arrived in Wet Gulch at about two in the afternoon.

Wet Gulch looked pretty dry to me. Wet Gulch is a one gas station town.

The attendant was obviously used to requests such as ours. He made a telephone call, and then he told us to be at the gas station at five thirty.

We asked him to recommend overnight accommodation. He made another telephone call and then he directed us to a motel.

The motel was clean, but frayed. It was obviously well occupied because almost all of the key pegs were empty.

We decided to go for a stroll around Wet Gulch.

God beats Mammon in Wet Gulch because there are six churches including a small Mormon Church but only one bank and one cash machine.

The Mormon Church was locked up.

There was a diner. I let Mark order, as much of the menu made no sense to me. I have no experience of fajitas and tacos and some of the other stuff.

We had steak and chips.

If any of my staff had served a paying customer something like this I would have been very unhappy.

Mark told me that he has had much worse meals in Nevada.

When we returned to the motel it was heaving with teenage children.

Apparently a lot of the very small towns and hamlets in this part of Nevada do not have a High School. High School children from Dry Gulch and many other places attend High School in Wet Gulch.

The children from the more distant places have to weekly board in Wet Gulch.

The school bus leaves Wet Gulch at four in the afternoon on Friday arriving at Dry Gulch about ten on Friday night. The return journey is at four on Sunday afternoon. Some kids don't bother to travel every week, but they just go home every few weeks.

We discovered that none of the children in the motel are Mormons.

According to these children all the Mormon children board with Wet Gulch Mormons so they are not distracted by the wicked night life of Wet Gulch.

There are three bars in Wet Gulch but none of them will admit teenagers. You need proof of age to be served alcohol in Wet Gulch. The Sheriff is very strict.

The wicked night life of Wet Gulch is hanging around on street corners in a town where nothing ever happens. That is too exciting for Mormon children to be allowed to experience.

An alternative explanation is that our Mormon children have better things to do!

We paid for our accommodation in advance and we told the proprietor that we would be leaving very early to catch our lift from the gas station. We went to bed fairly early.

We were at the petrol station, called a gas station, in good time.

We bought water from the attendant, and snacks for the six hour journey. The attendant called to us that our lift had arrived, so we went out into the forecourt. It was a beer truck!

Mark was a bit upset but I just laughed.

“Mark, we don’t have to drink it!”

The beer truck has seen better days. It is older than me, and I am eighteen. I also suspect that it would not pass a vehicle test.

I don’t know if the Americans have vehicle tests on elderly vehicles like they do in the United Kingdom. I assume not.

The driver is a lady called Bernadette. Bernadette is in her fifties. Once a week Bernadette does a supplies run to the only shop in Dry Gulch. She is nice enough to us.

Bernadette told us that Dry Gulch is a very quiet community. Everybody knows everybody.

There are Mormons and Evangelicals and Catholics and Baptists and Don’t Cares. There are marriages across religious lines just because the population is so small. Bernadette has never heard of Mormon missionaries or any other missionaries in Dry Gulch before.

Bernadette said that it will not take us long to get around the entire population of Dry Gulch. Then there are isolated ranches that we can visit.

Bernadette I think is quite a good driver.

The road stopped having tarmac after about five minutes. Then it was a dirt road with potholes and unevenness that went on forever.

Bernadette could not go at more than maybe twenty miles an hour.

After about three hours I sensed that the vehicle is in trouble. I did not know whether to say anything.

There were clunking noises, and the vehicle coasted to a halt.

Bernadette opened the bonnet.

I got out to look at the engine. I stopped Bernadette opening the top of the radiator.

“Bernadette.

“Stop.

“You can feel that the radiator is far too hot.”

“Yes”

“There is superheated steam in there. Apart from cooking your hand in the superheated steam there is a serious chance that the radiator cap will be blown into the next county.”

“What do we do?”

“We wait. We have to let the engine block cool down.

“We are not losing time, because you can’t pour cold water onto a hot engine block. It would crack.”

“What do you know about these things?”

“Bernadette, I am in an apprenticeship to be what in England we call a fitter.

“I service anything mechanical. I have serviced cars, forklift trucks, tankers, trucks, machine tools, conveyor belts, and hoppers.

“I often make parts to repair machines.

“My last big job was to dismantle a foundry in England, and to reassemble it in China.

“I know what I am doing.”

“You are just a kid!”

“Yes I am.

“I have had a very good training. I know what I am doing.

“So, let’s open one of these bottles of pop, and just rest for a while.

“I thought I heard the fan belt go.

“Yes. There it is. Broken.

“The broken fan belt means that there is no transmission of power from the engine to the crankshaft, so the engine isn’t powering anything. The fan that cools the engine is not operating.

“So do you have a spare fan belt?”

“Or a pair of tights?”

“I will look in the back.”

Mark looked at me in disgust.

“You are a real “hands on” guy, aren’t you?”

“If I don’t put my hands on it, it don’t get fixed.”

Bernadette brought a packet of tights from the back.

I took off my suit jacket.

I took off my tie.

I explained to Bernadette that If I get oil on a good shirt it is really hard to remove.

But my shirt is a short sleeve shirt so I am probably OK.

I fitted the tights as a replacement fan belt. By the time Mark and I had finished that the engine block had cooled a bit.

“If I open it now we will still lose a lot of water. Do you have any water, Bernadette?”

“Or we wait longer for the water to cool down.”

Bernadette has no water. Bernadette has lots of 2% beer! I said that we would sacrifice the drinking water that we had brought.

We might have to top up with the beer.

Using a cloth I very gently eased open the top of the radiator. We did not lose much water.

I topped up the water reservoir. While I was at it I checked the oil. That was too low.

Bernadette went into the back and she came back with some general purpose motor oil. I put that in.

We got under way.

I was checking the temperature indicator every few minutes.

At long last we arrived in Dry Gulch.

Dry Gulch is small. Really it is a large hamlet. There are fifty or sixty houses at most.

Mark and I unloaded the truck.

I reserved two pairs of tights in case Bernadette had to make running repairs on the way home. We refilled the water bottles and we put them in the truck.

While all this was going on Bernadette told Mr Davies the shop owner what we had done.

Bernadette has seen what I did with the fan belt and the radiator. Bernadette reckons she can struggle home. But Bernadette is going to wait until four before she begins her journey, because of the heat.

“Mr Davies, we have been told to report to Elder Arron Gaskell.”

“Could you tell us where he is please?”

“Arron?”

“Arron will be on his farm about six miles outside town.”

“Would it be possible to telephone him please?”

“There ain’t no telephones in Dry Gulch.”

“Even mobile telephones don’t work here.”

“Your best bet is to see Rachel Anders.

“Rachel is a Mormon.

“She lives in that house there. With the triangle hanging outside her door.”

So we wandered across.

Mark took the lead. By now I was dressed properly again.

Rachel Anders was pleased to see us.

It is just as well that we had not gone out to Elder Gaskell’s farm. We are staying with Dinah Telford.

Rachel walked with us to Dinah Telford’s house.

Dinah Telford is one of those thin weather-beaten women who could be anywhere between thirty-five and sixty.

“You are early!

“We were not expecting you until next week.

“Anyway, come on in.”

Rachel Anders excused herself and she left us.

Before dinner I had fixed three leaky taps and the toilet.

Mark told Dinah that we have had a long day and that we needed an early night.

Once Mark had me alone,

“Are you a Mormon missionary or are you a handyman?”

“What do you mean?”

“By the look of this town you could spend six months here as a handyman.

“But you are not a handyman. You are called by The Lord to be a missionary.”

“If I hadn’t fixed that truck we would be a pair of fried hungry missionaries by now.

“If I hadn’t fixed the toilet and the taps Dinah would be losing water all the time for no purpose. She is not a rich woman.

“I agree that we are here to serve The Lord as missionaries. I agree that comes first and second and third.

“But I am sure The Lord is not offended because I did some mechanicking and some plumbing.

“And tomorrow I am going to do some cooking. Dinah is a very nice lady but she is not a very good cook.”

When we were up in the morning I cooked bacon and eggs and fried bread. Dinah was very happy with my cooking.

Together we looked at Dinah’s store cupboards and refrigerator. We walked across to Mr Davies’ shop.

I bought a full box of supplies. I paid for it. Dinah did not protest very much.

“Dinah. We will settle up later.

“The Lord will not be offended if we eat reasonably well provided that we do not waste food.”

Dinah had not intended to charge us for anything but our food.

Mark and I have assessed that Dinah is financially struggling. I had agreed with Mark the line we would take.

I told Dinah what housekeeping I pay to Mr Hewson, translated into dollars. Dinah was very happy to accept that amount from each of us. It eases Dinah’s cash flow for us to pay weekly in advance.

Dinah told us that the Mormon community in Dry Gulch is very small. Dry Gulch is a dying town. There is a lot of poverty.

Half the teenagers in town have no education because their parents cannot afford for them to board in Wet Gulch.

The Mormon Church subsidises the Mormon children, so all the Mormon children may attend the high school.

Nobody has any money. Nobody can afford to pay for anything to be done.

If there was a handyman or mechanic in the town nobody could afford to pay him. There is no doctor or nurse nearer than Wet Gulch. There is no health insurance. People who get sick either die or live.

Forty years ago Dry Gulch was a prosperous agricultural community.

The irrigation system began to fail.

The problem with the irrigation system is that the original manufacturer went out of business forty-five years ago and you just can't get the parts. There are no compatible irrigation systems, and nobody can afford to replace a complete irrigation system.

People struggled. The banks foreclosed. Property values dropped so low that the banks now refuse to lend.

Components are my business.

We walked into the fields behind Dinah's house. The fields are now dry scrub.

Dinah showed me the deceased irrigation system. She showed me the junction that is the cause of all the trouble.

It is a "T" junction, perfectly normal except for the size of the pipe. Where the water coming down the "T" hits the end it has worn away the soft metal and created a leak. The metal is a soft and now corroded iron.

The main pipes themselves are sound. It is just these "T" junctions.

"If these "T" junctions could be replaced, are there any other problems?"

"The pumps are all seized up. Nobody here knows how to fix them."

So we looked at Dinah's pump. It is seized up.

I walked across to Mr Davis's store. I bought some motor oil.

Dinah was happy for me to disassemble the pump because it doesn't work anyway. It took me an hour to get the pump working.

"OK. Now we need some "T" junctions."

"They ain't made any more."

"Dinah. These are standard twenty-five millimetre T junctions. You can buy them by the hundred or by the thousand. I have serviced a machine that makes thirty thousand of these in a day."

"What is a millimetre?"

“A metre is a European measurement. It is the standard length that the French invented. It is just over a yard. A millimetre is one thousandth of a metre.”

“Twenty-five millimetres is a standard size. Buy them in copper or brass and they will last forever.”

Dinah frowned.

“You repair the pump. You have an irrigation system. Then you have to work hard to put the land back to growing crops.”

“Our trucks don’t work. The road is terrible. We could not get the crops to market.”

“You could if you fixed the road.”

“The road is a hundred and twenty miles long!”

“It can be done.”

“It is only a dirt track.”

“If you have no money you use the material by the side of the road to fix the road.

“You have people in this village with no work to do. You have a job that the community needs doing.

“What’s the problem?”

Dinah gave me one of those funny looks that people like Cecil and Mr Wong give me sometimes. Not the “Revelation” look but the “Hmmm” look.

We spent Friday and Saturday doing small handyman jobs for Mormons in Dry Gulch. I was happy to do these small jobs before Mark and I start our missionary work. Mark has virtually no experience of these handyman tasks so I gave him opportunities and guidance.

On Sunday the small congregation assembled. They meet in Rachel Anders’ house. As missionaries Mark and I were involved in the service but we were not involved in the meeting. We hung around outside in the shade of the house.

Elder Gaskell came out to us.

“Could you come in, please, Elders.”

We met the small community. The women were there, too. It is a very small Mormon community.

“Are you saying that you can fix the irrigation systems?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Can you fix everybody’s irrigation systems?”

“I can train people to do that, which would be even better for you.”

“Are you saying you can fix the road?”

“We can make it a lot better, yes.”

“We asked for missionaries because we hoped you could put some work into reviving our Mormon community.”

“We didn’t expect you to revive the whole town.”

“Mr Davies has been telling people that the Mormons have a mechanic.

“We have had eight people come to Dinah Telford’s house to ask for my services.

“I have said to all of them that we are here as a Mormon missionaries.

“I have told them all that they have to speak to you Elder Gaskell about our services.

“Once they learn we can fix the irrigation systems I expect a lot of people will be interested in learning about the Mormon faith.

“But Mark and I are just missionaries Elder Gaskell.

“We will do what you tell us.

“The Lord has sent you mechanics. What you do with us is your decision.”

We were ushered outside again.

After half an hour we were brought in again.

“This afternoon, Mark and Mark, we want you to go on the school bus to Wet Gulch. Jacob here will go with you.”

Jacob Turner is about sixteen years old. Jacob reminds me a lot of Elder George Smith. Jacob has a lot of meat on him, but no obvious fat. I could see Jacob wrestling a steer.

“Jacob will take you to the Townsends. They are the people who Jacob stays with.

“Find out over the Internet what a thousand of these joints will cost. Jacob will negotiate with the Wet Gulch Mormons to borrow the money.

Then order them.

“Have them delivered to Jacob at the Townsends and Jacob will bring them home at the weekend.

“Then you come back here and you report to Dinah.”

“Yes, sir.”

Mark said to me on the school bus,

“Do you go through life fixing problems?”

“I go through life and problems I can fix keep jumping up in front of me. I don’t go looking for problems.”

We met the Townsends.

We went on the Internet at the Townsends’ house.

At five dollars each, we were looking at five thousand dollars plus delivery charges to Wet Gulch. I suspected that raising five thousand two hundred dollars might be a challenge. I quietly paid for the order, along with two dozen tubes of sealant.

Mormon missionaries are not supposed to become so involved with a community that we put our own money into it. The Townsends were shocked and upset that I had paid for the goods we need.

I sensed that the Townsends were also slightly relieved.

For a community living in close to hardship finding over five thousand dollars would not be easy.

“Look,” I said.

“When I was working in England I was on a very good income as a catering manager. What I have paid out here is less than half a week’s wages. I don’t mind paying that now so we can get on with the job.

“The next job is to look at that road. Mark and I will do that again tomorrow.”

Wet Gulch has a cash machine, so I drew out all the money that my card would allow me to draw.

We stayed at the motel again. I paid the motel bill using my card.

We were up early again.

This time it was a truck carrying fertilizer and pesticides, driven by a man called Steve. Steve explained that the few properties around Dry Gulch that still have a working water supply are reasonably prosperous. Their problem is that the highway is terrible. The transport costs take most of their profit.

“This is a journey that should take two or three hours each way. It takes six hours each way. Imagine what that does to transport costs.

“And the transport costs of everything we carry to Dry Gulch are high, too.”

Mark looked at me sharply. I kept quiet.

I was watching the road. I was not looking for other traffic.

I was looking at what the road is made of, and what it would take to repair the road.

It is doable.

We are not talking highway standard here. We are talking a dirt cart track.

There is one really bad patch of about twenty miles that ideally needs a bulldozer.

When we returned we reported to Dinah.

Dinah told us that the Mormon community is conflicted. Mormon missionaries are here to spread the word of the Lord. The missionaries are not sent to be handymen and mechanics.

Mormons are severely practical. The Lord has sent the two Marks. The Marks have transferable skills.

So on Saturdays the Marks will be teaching the Mormon teenagers and some adults the basics of mechanicking.

On Sunday the Marks will attend the Mormon service and help to teach the Sunday School. The religious classes I used to attend on Saturday morning in Tryton are taught on Sunday afternoon before the children catch the school bus to Wet Gulch.

On Mondays we Marks have our rest day.

On Tuesdays and Wednesdays we will go canvassing until we have canvassed every property within ten miles of Dry Gulch.

On Thursdays and Fridays we will Minister through works, starting with the Mormon community.

Is there any possibility that we can borrow or buy a pick-up truck?

Dinah snorted. She has a pick-up in the barn. If we can get it to run we are welcome to use it. It has not run in ten years.

Does anyone in the community have engineering tools? Wrenches and so forth?

Dinah told us that Rachel's late father used to be a “tinkerer”. His workshop is behind Rachel's house. Dinah will speak to Rachel Anders for us.

I cooked a chicken casserole on rice that more than satisfied Dinah and Mark. And me. There was none left over.

There is half a chicken left to cook tomorrow.

“There are two Marks. You must have started to describe us. What are we?”

“English Mark and American Mark?”

Dinah laughed.

“You two boys are Talking Mark and Quiet Mark.”

Mark laughed.

“That is perfect. And so true!”

I was less amused.

I think I would prefer to be the Clever Eunuch again. There is possibly a message here.

“But we decided that would convey the wrong message to our teenagers and to our children.”

“So you are “Fair Mark” and “Dark Mark”.

The next day being Tuesday we put on our suits and we started knocking on doors. Every house we visited had heard about us.

“So you are the mechanics?”

“No. ma’am.

“We are Mormon missionaries. We would like to talk with you about Our Lord Jesus Christ.”

“Well, come in and have a cup of cawfee.”

We would have a glass of water.

I watched Mark trying to explain about The Lord Jesus Christ to one woman who basically wanted her shower fixed and to another who wanted her truck fixed. After two house visits we went back to Dinah and we explained what is happening.

“Well, you are two intelligent young men.

“What do you think the answer is?”

“Being invited into every house we enter is much better than most missionaries achieve. But it is for the wrong reasons.”

“Would you rather be invited in for the wrong reasons or not invited in?”

I did not say anything. It was not a question I had ever thought about before today.

The course at Provo had covered rejection, high failure rates, hostility, and everything dispiriting that happens to a Mormon missionary. It had not dealt with the situation that we are in.

“If nobody invites us in at all, we can get through the whole of Dry Gulch in a month easily. If we are invited into every house and spend an hour there, we would get through five houses in a day. We would still get through Dry Gulch in the six months we are here.

“So, on balance, I think we would like to be invited in.”

“OK.”

I could not work out whether Dinah genuinely does not know what we should do, or whether Dinah does know but she wants us to work it out for ourselves.

There was a silence.

I was silent because I did not know what to say. The other two were thinking.

Mark said

“Shall we pray for guidance?”

We all three thought that was a good idea so we all three prayed silently.

Then there was a further silence.

Mark said,

“I think that we say to the people that Elder Gaskell makes the decisions about what works we undertake. It is not in our gift.

“If they want something doing they must speak to Elder Gaskell. Elder Gaskell decides on priorities for our time.”

We liked that.

“So as soon as they mention their shower or their tractor we just say that Elder Gaskell is the person to talk to. We just talk about The Lord Jesus Christ.

“Happy?”

We had fried chicken and salad for lunch and then we went out again.

Dinah told us some houses to avoid. We did not ask why.

We were invited into every house. There is not a lot going on in Dry Gulch, and Dry Gulch does not have many visitors.

People were curious about us. We stuck to The Lord Jesus Christ.

Mark's line about Elder Gaskell being the person to talk to worked very well.

After three more houses we decided to call it a day.

On the Wednesday we were doing fine.

We were stopped in the street by a really big man of about twenty. For some reason he hated us.

I said to Mark,

"Mark, I have had martial arts training. If he goes for us, you just get out of the way."

"You got it!"

We ended up all three of us sitting in the shade while this man just cried.

He is twenty. He has had no education since the age of eleven.

His family are poor. They have no land.

They squat in a property that the bank seized a few years back.

His name is Kevin McPhee.

Kevin has no religion.

None of the girls in Dry Gulch want to know Kevin because Kevin has no prospect of ever being able to support a family.

Here are two good looking well dressed fancy city boys walking into Dry Gulch.

After less than a week half the teenage girls fancy one of us, and the other half fancy the other. And here Kevin is, a good and decent man, with no chance at all of marrying any of the girls in Dry Gulch.

So we told Kevin the good news. While we are on missionary service we are not allowed to get involved with the local girls.

Kevin brightened up.

We are only here for six months and then we will move on to some other town.

Kevin brightened up more.

I told Kevin the truth about my background. I am an orphan. My younger brothers and sisters are in the care of Meldon Social Services. The Lord looks after us.

I did not dwell on quite how well The Lord looks after us.

We agreed that tomorrow we will visit Kevin at the property in which his family squat.

Dinah was interested in our encounter with Kevin McPhee.

Kevin McPhee is ignorant white trash. Apart from that there is nothing wrong with him. Kevin is not a troublemaker or a drunk.

I asked if I could invite Kevin to the mechanicking classes I am running for the Mormon community on Saturdays.

Dinah said that if we think we can bring a soul to Jesus then we must try.

Kevin was really surprised at our offer. He did not know that I was running mechanicking classes for the Mormons. Yes Kevin would like to join in.

On Friday we spent a lot of time in the late Mr Anders' tinkering shed. We cleaned and we oiled the tools. I showed Mark how to oil the machinery.

So on Saturday morning we started our class in the tinkering shed. The late Mr Anders had a good selection of equipment.

I had a class of fifteen. Jacob Turner, Kevin McPhee, Rachel Anders, Dinah Telford, and the entire teenage Mormon population of Dry Gulch.

I started simply by introducing Mark and myself. I explained that I am in the middle of my apprenticeship but I have been allowed to take leave of absence to undertake my Mormon missionary service.

I worked through the tools, explaining how each tool works. I started with the vice.

I told the class that this is almost the only vice that we Mormons are allowed.

The class laughed.

Phoebe Gaskell asked what other vices are we allowed?

Phoebe is a great kid. Phoebe is fifteen and pretty and she knows it. Phoebe is full of herself as she should be at that age.

"My middle brother plays the bagpipes. Bagpipes curdle milk and they make you think that a cat is being strangled.

"I have been right through the Book of Mormon and I cannot find any ban on bagpipes.

"So you may play the bagpipes all you like."

The class laughed.

Then I explained about the furnace and the anvil. I explained that with a furnace, an anvil or a big rock, a hammer or a small rock, and a file you can make any tool you wish.

I said that in a later class we will fire up the furnace.

I asked the class to think about what the class would like to make. Horseshoes, a gate, a tool, a brooch?

I went through the late Mr Ander's hammers. I explained what each hammer is used for. I tried to make sure every class member physically held each tool.

Then I went through Mr Ander's saws.

Then I went through his screwdrivers.

I told the class that before I became a mechanic I had been a chef. I brought out a cardboard box containing sandwiches, pizzas, pretzels and biscuits that Mark and I had made earlier in the morning. Pretzels were Mark's contribution.

I also brought a couple of jugs of a non-alcoholic punch I made last night and that I had kept in the refrigerator overnight.

Jacob Turner had brought the T joints and sealant to Dry Gulch.

We went into Rachel Anders' back garden and we repaired Rachel's irrigation system right back to the pump. As well as replacing the T joints we unblocked any blocked irrigation pipes. I said that at the next class we would repair Rachel's pump and then we would test the system.

Class dismissed!

Sunday was interesting. Some lapsed Mormons brought their spouses and children.

The following day, Monday, was our day of rest.

Mark and I looked at Dinah Telford's pickup truck.

I made a list of what we needed. Battery, tyres, diesel fuel, fan belt, brake fluid, brake pads. More oil.

Some rubber pipes have perished. This is just the beginning!

On Wednesday Bernadette came on her weekly delivery run.

I gave Bernadette my shopping list and some money to pay for all the bits.

I commented that Bernadette's vehicle is running well. Bernadette said that she has gotten it properly serviced so that it does not break down again.

On Thursday and Friday Mark and I were busy making small repairs around Dry Gulch's Mormon community.

On Saturday morning every adult male Mormon in Dry Gulch was on hand to see me repair Rachel Ander's pump.

Then we went outside and we tested it.

We heard the gush of water coming out of the pump and into the reservoir that feeds the irrigation system.

There was a kind of craziness in the men. All the adults started hugging each other and then hugging Mark and me.

Normally you hand pump to the irrigation reservoir in the cool of the evening or the cool of the morning. Everyone wanted to hand pump some water into Rachel's irrigation reservoir immediately.

I reminded everyone that it is sensible to fix the outward tap on the reservoir before you fill it with water. It also makes sense to fix your irrigation system!

I showed the adults how to replace a T joint. Each adult needed between thirty and a hundred T joints and a tube or two of sealant. Elder Gaskell made a list of who took what, because once the people are producing crops for sale the loan from me will have to be repaid.

I had not expected this influx of adults but Rachel Anders had.

Rachel brought out fresh bread and slices of ham, and a terrific blueberry pie.

Added to what Mark and I had brought there was enough.

Rachel Anders is a much better cook than Dinah Telford.

After the extra adults had gone I worked through spanners, socket sets, and wrenches with the class. I also taught them about the care and maintenance of tools.

Next Saturday they are going to bring any tools they have at home that need fixing.

Dinah commented on Sunday that every lapsed Mormon in Dry Gulch has simultaneously felt the need for spiritual rejuvenation. The congregation is certainly larger.

On Monday I was still waiting for the vehicle parts.

Mark and I spent a few hours digging over part of Rachel Ander's garden so that Rachel can begin planting. Rachel did not ask us to do this. Mark suggested that we should and Rachel agreed.

Kevin McPhail was passing by and Kevin gave us a couple of hours.

We gave Kevin lunch.

After lunch we three dug over part of Dinah's garden.

On Tuesday and Wednesday we canvassed. I think most missionaries would envy our invitation rate, but of course we know why. There is one woman we will visit again next week.

Thursday was helping people who could not get their pumps to work, or who had hit some other problem.

On Friday we were back to small maintenance jobs.

On Saturday almost everybody brought power tools that were not functioning. In some cases it was only a fuse in the power plug that needed changing. I had suspected this would be the case. I had given Jacob Turner some cash and Jacob had bought a selection of standard fuses for me.

Sometimes it was the wiring of the plug that was faulty.

We opened some of the tools. Instead of fettling the tools myself I had the person who had brought the tool fix the tool. It took five times as long but there is nothing like "hands on" learning.

In a few cases the problem was that the brushes have broken. If their parents want the tools repaired they will have to pay for the spare parts. The kids are going to be in Wet Gulch during the week so they may order the parts over the Internet.

I announced that next week they could bring irons, vacuum cleaners, toasters and so forth.

On Sunday the congregation was slightly larger, the new people being relations of Mormons.

On Monday Mark and I spent all day on the pick-up truck. We even washed it. On the Monday evening we opened the garage doors and we brought it out.

Mark drove it.

Mark and Dinah and I went on a little drive around Dry Gulch. The speedometer and milometer do not work. The air conditioning does not work. The windscreen wipers need replacing.

On Tuesday and Wednesday we visited Kevin and his family, and Mrs Owens the lady from last week who had invited us back.

On Wednesday I ordered more parts through Bernadette. I gave Bernadette the money to pay for them.

Bernadette will deliver them to the Townsends for Jacob to bring at the weekend.

On Thursday Kevin and Mark and I went for a drive. We took spades and pickaxes and a wheel barrow with us. Every so often we stopped and we repaired the road. Basically it was levelling off humps or repairing hollows. The road near Dry Gulch was not too bad.

In the afternoon we were about a mile out of town when a big truck stopped.

Unusually for Dry Gulch the vehicle was new and clean.

The driver got out. He looks like he might have wrestled steers as a young man.

Maybe he was a linebacker.

He is still big and tall but his muscle is now mainly fat.

“What are you boys doing?”

Mark said,

“Fixing the road, Mister!”

“This road is a hundred and twenty miles long!”

“We have to start somewhere, Mister.

“We live here in Dry Gulch so we are working our way out to Wet Gulch. It will take a while!”

“It surely will.”

Then he said to Kevin,

“You are very quiet! Who are these two?”

“They are Mormon missionaries, Mr Wade. They are bringing me to The Lord Jesus Christ.”

“Well, if they can lead you to The Lord, Kevin McPhail, I am willing to believe they can fix this road.

“Are you seriously going to fix this road?”

“Well, we only have another five months here in Dry Gulch. I don’t think we will finish it. Even if we improve only part of the road, that is much better than just sitting around complaining about the road.”

“It surely is!

“Well, boys, good luck with it!”

He drove off.

“Who is that?”

“That is Mr Wade. He owns a ranch about ten miles the other side of Dry Gulch. He used to employ my dad before my dad died.

“After that my mother moved us off the ranch into town.

“That was about seven years ago.”

We spent two days on the road job, and we got almost two miles out of town. We are still in the easy part.

Saturday was fun. We repaired lots of household electrical appliances. Once again Mark and I held back and we encouraged the class to discuss and to perform each repair.

I told the class that next week we would fire up the furnace and do some metalwork. They are to bring anything that needs fixing.

Sunday was good. The McPhail family are coming to observe our service. We call people who come to services to observe “Investigators”.

On Monday I made the repairs to the pick-up. Yay!

Dinah and Mark and I went for a longer drive along the tracks leading out of Dry Gulch to various ranches around. We returned before it became dark.

Tuesday and Wednesday were canvassing again.

We have got really good at explaining that we can’t do mechanicking without authorisation from Elder Gaskell.

In one house after I said to a lady that I cannot do mechanicking.

“Do you see this switch at the wall where the plug fits into the socket?”

“Yes.”

“What happens when you press the switch down?”

She pressed the switch down. All the lights on her cooker came on.

“Glory be! Thank you so much!”

The Dry Gulch Mormons report that people they have known for years are asking about the Mormon religion.

On Friday Mark and Kevin and I were working on the road when Mr Wade pulled up.

“Boy. Do you know what a freeloader is?”

Mark looked at him.

“Yes.”

“Well I ain’t a freeloader.

“I have spoken to eight of the local farmers. They ain’t freeloaders either.

“We will give you one day a week for three months and then see where we are.

“What day would you like?”

Mark and I looked at each other.

“Thursdays.”

“OK. Thursdays it is. We farmers start our chores at five so we will be on the road here around eight or so. We will find where you are working. We will bring our own food and drink.

“See you next Thursday!”

Thursdays became interesting. Men from Dry Gulch would stand by the road with pickaxes and shovels or wheelbarrows. A farmer would pick them up and they would spend a day improving the road. Mark and I drove up and down the road checking on progress. In most cases It was obvious what needed doing and people were just getting on with it.

Mark did most of the driving because I have no insurance for driving in America.

In a few places there were streams flowing across the road. The farmers brought big pipes to pipe the stream through the road. Then the pipe could be covered.

It is going well.

Rachel Anders tells me that the community of Dry Gulch now has hope. That makes me feel good.

CHAPTER 19: Kevin Hanson

The Byram Willerton Brass Band is doing well. The new Director of Music Alf Thomas knows what he is doing. Alf is paid better than most High School Head Teachers, so he ought to know what he is doing.

Alf is also on a bonus for every time we rise in the rankings.

Alf wrote a music development plan for the band that the Committee has approved.

We already have forty children and teenagers learning brass band instruments.

My son says that the atmosphere within the band is really upbeat.

The band enjoyed filming in Manchester for "Terrible Tykes". Our band has never been on TV before.

The performance fee has being split among the band, the first time most of them have ever had any money from performing.

For our ex services ex prisoner project I am the person who interviews the candidates.

Every Army takes inexperienced young men as recruits. The Army immediately breaks down the recruits' human decency and civilian society's restraints. Once the young men are broken back to the human beast they are taught the new set of skills and attitudes that the Army requires them to have.

For example the Army trains a recruit to respond instantly with overwhelming force to any attack. As soon as you see that a fight is about to start you go in fast and hard to end the fight before you or your team might get hurt. A delay of ten seconds will lead to some of your unit being killed. So you respond instantly. The Army trains you not to take the time to think.

These guys went to Hell and back when serving in the Army. As teenagers and in their very early twenties they saw friends killed and maimed.

They were understandably very frightened at times.

Giving First Aid to a guy who has lost half a leg is a very distressing experience.

The experience is even more distressing for the patient, of course.

The guys bought themselves out or they misbehaved and they were discharged.

Then as new civilians they were generally suffering from undiagnosed Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. They had trouble and they ended up in prison.

The Army does not train combat soldiers to be proportionate in the use of violence. If a soldier has to use violence he wins or he dies. There is no such thing as a fair fight in warfare.

So in a pub brawl the frequent outcomes are manslaughter or grievous bodily harm.

Then these guys have had literally years living in prison cells and subject to the indignities and inconveniences of the life of a prison inmate. They had time to think at last.

A combat soldier generally has few transferable skills. Many of the guys have no qualifications or very few.

An ex-prisoner with a conviction or convictions for violence has little chance of a job. Prison can easily become a revolving door.

I was not a combat soldier. I was a Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers sergeant.

I know these boys. I know where they have come from. I know what they have been through.

The guys the Prison Service selected for Byrams Housing are a pretty steady bunch.

When I interviewed each one I set out the rules of the new unit.

Absolutely no violence.

Absolutely no theft.

Good manners and mutual respect, not the Army banter. No foul language.

Limited drinking. No lunchtime drinking.

The reputation of the unit rides on the shoulders of each man.

For each man, therapy with the unit psychiatrist is compulsory until the psychiatrist discharges you. Education is compulsory until the teacher discharges you.

You may leave the unit at any time but you will never be allowed to return.

If a man can accept this discipline then he will end up with a training and with qualifications and with a reference that will give him a chance of a career in civilian life.

These men will begin on minimum wage. As they hit milestones and tipping points their wages will increase until they are being paid construction union rate. Their time in education and therapy is paid time, like normal day release for apprentices. Once a week they will be bussed to Barnsley College for Construction Training. The first problem we hit was bank accounts. Most banks do not want a batch of ex-criminals fresh out of prison as customers.

I reported the problem to Georgina my line manager.

Cecil called me in. He asked me to explain the problem to him.

I did.

Then Cecil telephoned his bank manager.

“Fred, do you remember that you said your bank wished to help me?”

I only heard one side of the conversation. Cecil was meeting with a refusal.

“Fred. I fully understand that your bank has a policy.”

“I also have a policy.

“My policy is that if a bank will not help me when I need it then that bank will lose all my business to a bank that will help me.”

“So I will give you forty-eight hours to get permission to blow your nose. After that I will instruct my Financial Officer to find a bank branch that would like a ten billion pound a year increase in turnover and is prepared to be flexible to get it.

“Of course that means your branch will lose ten billion a year off your turnover.

“It is up to you.

“We have banked with you for over a century. I am trying to be reasonable. So you have forty-eight hours. Goodbye!”

Cecil told me that the bank will bend.

“As the Americans say, if you have them by the balls their hearts and minds will follow.”

Garth put out the word at Byram’s Neverthorpe factory. The lads all have accommodation arranged near the Neverthorpe factory with families or in other households that have some connection with Byrams. That is much better for the lads than lonely bed sits or shared houses.

I told Cecil that the Byram Willerton Brass Band had enjoyed recording for the “Terrible Tykes” Christmas Special.

Cecil had not heard about this.

I told Cecil that one of the Hewson children who plays with the Band is a “Tyke”. So Cecil’s Band will be on TV on Christmas afternoon.

Cecil was well pleased.

Cecil has never seen the “Terrible Tykes” but Cecil will make a point of watching one of their programs.

Cecil will have Karen show him how to watch a program that has recently been broadcast.

Cecil called in Mike Appleyard the Marketing manager and he asked Mike to find out about the cost of advertising on the TV alongside the band’s performance.

“I already have.

“Advertising during that afternoon is much more expensive than it usually is because the Christmas Special also has Dee Lishus appearing. Millions of women will be watching.

“All the advertising is already booked.”

“Our band is on the same program as Dee Lishus?”

“Yes.”

“That is very good!”

Cecil was as pleased as Punch.

“If you want to spend money you should think about Meldon United. Their major sponsor is withdrawing and they desperately need a sponsor.”

“How much do they want?”

“For half a million pounds you can have Byrams or Mings logo on their shirts. For a quarter of a million you can have your logo on the announcements board. For fifty thousand pounds you can have a board by the side of the pitch.”

“How often do they appear on TV?”

“Maybe fifteen times a year for a few seconds each time.”

“What would it cost to buy a football team?”

“The good ones are not for sale, The bad ones are close to free but you have to take on their debts.”

“Research this for me Mike and come back to me. Don’t bother with Christmas Day advertising.”

“Will you take a suggestion, Mr Byram?”

“I might do.”

“If your aim is advertising Byrams and Mings why don’t you set up a web site that will appeal to our customers and prospective customers. It will cost you a lot less than half a million pounds a year to set up and run.

“You can set up a web site for buttons. You can hire a journalist or two full time for less than a hundred thousand pounds. Your gain is exclusive advertising on the site.”

“Is that possible?”

“Yes.”

“What do you think, Mike?”

“I think that is a brilliant idea.”

“Within our team, who should I put on to this?”

“Well, Sahid Daar for the technical side. I think Carol for thinking out what we want and putting a plan together.”

“Do it. Have Carol see me next week with her plan. You too, obviously.”

“Make sure Carol talks with Kevin. It is Kevin’s idea.”

The telephone rang. The bank’s Regional Office has authorised the branch to have discretion to open new bank accounts.

Within the branch a Mrs Roberts will be dealing with the new accounts. We should book appointments with Mrs Roberts.

I am pleased that Cecil has cracked this problem.

I will be taking the new workers and buying them boots and work clothes. I will be giving them a non-returnable “welcome payment” that should ease any immediate cash problems.

All the guys will be as well set up as they can be.

The two building sites are ready for work to begin, but the guys need to be released from prison and to be trained.

The Prison Service has said that it is willing for the guys who have a bit longer to serve to be given daytime release to attend Barnsley College, attend therapy, and to begin working. They will come in a bus from the prison each morning and go back at night.

The project begins on Monday. A man from the Prison Service will come for the first few days just to ease over any issues. Then he will stop coming unless I ask for him.

All the men will wear "Byrams Housing" overalls from the outset.

Monday is a coach tour showing the two building sites, Byrams Willerton Headquarters, Neverthorpe village, Byrams Neverthorpe factory, Mings, and Barnsley College.

Lunch is in the Neverthorpe factory canteen – free of course. The guys will meet Georgina, Irene, and Cecil in the Neverthorpe canteen.

Irene is going to tell them the "Lions" story.

Irene is going to show the plans and artist images of the completed estates.

On Tuesday the guys start training at Barnsley College. Then on Wednesday the guys who are being released shortly will meet their new host families, the therapist, and the teacher.

So far, it all looks good.

CHAPTER 20: Ali Miah

Arthur and Steve were delighted with my barter deal.

The quickest way to obtain the construction machinery was to purchase the machinery in San Francisco and to ship it in containers straight to the Number Three Training School.

The archaeologists finished early. The entire artefact find appears to be a few arrowheads and a buckle from a horse harness.

I wrote my second cheque and we shook hands. We will have a little display case in the Departures lounge.

The following week the PLAAF training school moved in. The politics of this is that Arthur and I visit twice the terminal site each day. If we are happy we say so.

If we are not happy Arthur speaks to me in English. I phrase our concern as a question in Putonghua. When we next return the problem is rectified.

I know for a fact that at least two of the senior officers have reasonable English but we all pretend that they do not.

The earth that the PLAAF digs out is being used to create berms that reduce noise and screen all the operational activity that the passengers and visitors do not need to see. The berms will be covered in artificial turf to reduce maintenance costs.

The PLAAF guys are also building our roads including a few bridges and tunnels. And of course drains and our own electricity sub-station. We will have backup generators in case the mains electricity supply should fail.

Arthur is more than happy with the progress the PLAAF are making. The PLAAF are very happy with the new machinery and that we are paying for all the fuel they use.

We are not paying for wages so even with the cost of the equipment this is a good deal.

PLAAF wants to get the job done with this current set of trainees so the PLAAF is working long hours every day. I am assured that the trainees do each get a day a week off, but not all on the same day.

I had someone in London take advice on what spare parts are most often needed. I had a selection of spare parts shipped to Number Three Training School from San Francisco.

Each week the PLAAF maintenance workshops tell me what consumables they have used and I order more.

It would be ridiculous to have a half million dollar piece of equipment idle for days for lack of a hundred dollar part or consumable, but Arthur has seen that happen on other jobs . It should not happen to us.

Arthur and I had a discussion about the next phase, the construction of the terminal buildings and multi-storey car parks.

I have not told Arthur that General Lee is reading his emails. I wrote out a passage that I suggested Arthur should place in his next report to Steve.

“Apart from the steel that China exports to gain hard currency all the steel produced in China is ear-marked for the Reconstruction effort. Although our project is part of the Reconstruction effort we are at the back of the priorities queue. So we are going to have to import steel to China.

“It might even be steel originally exported from China!”

Then I listed exactly what steel we require.

“Please have someone source and price all this. Do not place any orders just yet as Ali knows someone who knows someone who owns a foundry in Shanghai. Ali is going to see if he can work any miracles.”

Arthur looked at me.

“What are you up to?”

“Arthur, you said that one day I might develop into a player.”

“That is what is happening.”

I gave General Lee forty-eight hours to read Arthur’s weekly report, in hopes that General Lee might produce an answer for me.

I also looked up Byram’s on the Internet. I timed my telephone call to catch Cecil in his office. I reminded Cecil that we had met in Mr Hewson’s house.

I explained that I am now in Beijing.

I explained the airline’s problem. I gave Cecil a list of what I need.

Cecil said that he would speak to Mr Wong. Cecil gave me Mr Wong’s contact details and Cecil took mine.

The following day Mr Wong telephoned me. He has had a word with a new foundry in Shanghai that can produce the steel I need more easily than Mr Wong can. As this steel is for an authorised Reconstruction project and is extra to normal production the second foundry can fill our order without legal difficulty. Mr Wong gave me the contact details of the owner.

The owner is a Ms Wen Dei Wong. I telephoned Wen Dei Wong and I spoke to her. It turns out that Wen Dei knows Mark Johnson!

It is a small world.

I emailed Wen Dei the delivery schedule I would like. Wen Dei sent me a quotation. I went to see Arthur. I gave Arthur the quotation. Arthur showed me the quotes he has received from London.

Wen Dei is cheaper because Chinese labour costs are lower and Wen Dei has no shipping costs to China. Wen Dei's delivery times are faster, too.

We flew to Shanghai. We visited Wen Dei Wong's foundry, and we signed contracts for the steel supply. We met Mr Wong.

Then I had Arthur include a passage in his next report,

"We have sorted out our steel supplies. Deliveries to our site begin next week. Our next problem is that we have no contractor in China who is able to do this work. We need experienced welders for this task. Please find contractors in Australia, USA, and anywhere else who can start work next week."

Arthur sent it.

The following day I had a telephone call from General Lee. It seems that a bridge is going to be built in Canton. The Reconstruction Ministry has run out of budget so work cannot begin until the next financial year begins in six months time.

The team who were ear-marked to build the bridge have nothing scheduled at the moment. The team would be very happy to work on my terminal.

I said that I must consult with Mr Miller.

"Ali, I was not born yesterday.

"You are having me put things in my reports and then the solutions miraculously appear.

"So who is reading my emails and why?"

"Arthur, are we ahead of schedule?"

"Yes. You know that we are."

"Would you like to stay ahead of schedule or maybe get further ahead?"

"Yes."

"Are we on or under budget?"

"Yes. Well under budget."

"You wanted me to be a player.

"I am a player.

"I know who is reading your emails.

"Just accept that someone is reading your emails and that they are sometimes in a position to be helpful."

Arthur grunted.

"So should I accept this fortuitous, unexpected, and amazingly well timed offer?"

"Yes."

"Oh. And do not say that you suspect someone is reading your emails."

Arthur Miller looked at me oddly.

After a moment Arthur said,

"If I had wanted a Boy Scout I would have specified for one."

"You are a "player" all right.

"Another six months of this and I will describe you as an "operator"."

I think that was a compliment.

We decided that the plane flight excursion would take place in late November.

Tommy Sherson organised with Headquarters in London for a plane to come to Beijing with a full crew, carrying passengers as normal. Then instead of returning straight away it will take our party for the excursion flight. Then the plane will return to London on the third day with passengers. To do that, though, another plane has to fly here with just its crew, to make the journey back to London with passengers on the excursion day. And on the day that the excursion plane returns to London a plane has to fly to Beijing with passengers, and then return to London empty.

I was puzzled by this. Why make life complicated?

It seems that for the flight attendants their commission from the duty free sales is an important part of their income. The flight attendants have no entitlement to compensation if they fly one way empty provided they fly the other way full. This cack-handed arrangement is cheaper for the airline because it transfers some of the cost of flying a plane to China from the airline to the flight attendants.

My next problem was the food. I did not want airplane food. I wanted to amaze the Chinese by them seeing whole joints of roast pork and roast beef being carved in front of their eyes. Seeing how the Chinese eat it seems likely that many of them have never seen let alone eaten great slices of meat.

Tommy did his best but eventually I had to intervene.

I had a conversation over Skype with the airline catering manager. This guy is fine with airplane food in airplanes. He is fine with buffet banquets on the ground. He was having huge difficulty with the concept of a buffet meal in the air.

“We will have a 737-900 with fewer than two hundred guests on it. There is plenty of room for a buffet.”

He did not know why I wanted the joints to marinate for three days before roasting.

I explained that from living in China I know what tastes and sauces the Chinese like. The recipes I have sent him are what the project needs.

He was still being obstructionist.

“Look. Is the problem that it is physically impossible for you to do this?”

“No.”

“Then what is the problem?”

It turns out that the airline has a costs schedule for buffet banquets and I am way over it. With the perfume and whiskey parting presents, and the requested quantities of booze for drinking, I am about thirty pounds per head over the highest allowances.

“So for two hundred guests that is six thousand pounds?”

“Yes.”

“If I send you that money today is there any other problem?”

“Yes.”

“What?”

“Compliance.”

“What?”

It seems that Britain has laws against giving bribes. Excessively lavish banquets for business contacts are in breach of this law.

“Who do I have to speak to?”

So I spoke to the Head of Compliance.

I explained that none of the guests ever give us money or buy from us. They are local contractors and contacts who can save us millions if they are co-operative. If

they are not co-operative they can cost us millions and weeks of time, and reputation.

It took about twenty minutes but eventually he saw my point. With an interest bill of four million pounds a month the cost of the banquet is nothing.

I told him to send an email to the Catering Manager with a copy to me, so I could resume my conversation with the Head of Catering.

“Mr Miah. Would you take some advice?”

“Of course.”

“Out in Beijing you are the highest ranking employee. I assume that when you speak to your staff you use the same tone of voice as you have used to me today.”

“Yes?”

“I would mention politely that both the Airline Head of Compliance and the Airline Catering Manager outrank you within the airline hierarchy.

“We are not used to lower ranking managers telling us our jobs.

“We do not like to be told our jobs in a tone of voice that conveys both irritation and contempt.

“Not only that, Mr Miah, but I suspect that your lower ranking staff would be even more co-operative if you took a more pleasant approach to them.”

I was very surprised.

I evaluated what the Head of Compliance had said to me.

“Mr Parsons. I am so grateful to you.

“I am a new manager. I am totally focussed on the job in hand. I have forgotten my manners.

“I don't like being spoken to the way I have been speaking to you.

“I do apologise.

“And I thank you for telling me what everyone is thinking but you are the first to tell me.

“May I telephone you again and start this conversation afresh?”

“There is no need Mr Miah. We were all new managers once. As you **request**, I will send an email to Mr Henderson the Catering Manager saying that we have had a

satisfactory conversation about the banquet and I am satisfied there are no compliance issues.”

Mr Henderson was unable to take my call as he is in a meeting. I apologised to Mr Henderson’s secretary and I booked an appointment to talk to Mr Henderson the following day.

I sent Mr Parsons a hand written note through the internal mail thanking him for his gracious approach.

I went to see Tommy.

I apologised to Tommy for the way I have been speaking to him. I am going to be “Mr Nice Guy” from now on.

Tommy laughed.

“We will need a new nickname for you.”

“What is my old nickname?”

“Genghis. For “Genghis Khan do anything he wants to do!””

“Ouch!

“I deserved that.”

“In some ways you do.

“Nobody in London can understand how a person can jump from second year undergraduate student to a very highly paid manager.”

“Nobody in London can figure out how you have persuaded the Chinese Army to work on your roads and your foundations and your berms.”

“You are ahead of all your targets for building the terminal.”

“You have been here in Beijing only a few months but you magically produce construction teams. You even produce a foundry with spare capacity from nowhere!

“You are miles under budget, too!

“Arthur Miller is famous in the industry. Arthur was behind schedule when you arrived. Within weeks you were ahead of schedule. Fairly or unfairly you are credited with turning the situation around.

“That speaks well for you.

“You are not a pleasant tactful manager but you are obtaining extraordinary results.

“You are in a job you should not have been appointed to and you are working miracles in it.

“There is a lot of curiosity about you.

“I just tell people that you are here to do a job and that you are doing it.

“I also say God help anyone who gets in your way.”

I filled Tommy in on my conversations that afternoon. Tommy was quite pleased that I am keeping him in the loop. I told Tommy that he can tell the others I am now a reformed character.

When I spoke to Mr Henderson the following day I apologised for my attitude. I was surprised when he laughed.

“Do you know what your nickname is here in London?”

“No?”

“Genghis, for Genghis Khan do anything he wants to do.”

I did not tell Mr Henderson that I had heard this before.

“I am surprised that they talk about me in London at all.”

“Mr Miah. When a student on an undergraduate course is plucked from obscurity to a very high paid managerial post ahead of forty thousand other people who work for the airline there is bound to be comment.

“The pilots are pleased because they like to see a pilot in charge of anything in this airline.

“The pilots love it that you telephone people like me and you give us a hard time.

“You don’t care who you offend!

“The flight attendants love you because of what you said about them on the plane coming into Manchester two years ago. You remember. “Be nice to the flight attendants” and “They are not paid enough”.

“That went round the airline at the time. It went round again when everyone heard of your elevation.

“The Engineers like it that an Engineer is going to be a Hub Manager.

“There are people here in London who are jealous of you. There is nobody here who is going to mess you around because nobody wants to be chewed out by the Chief Executive.

“Forget about the six thousand pounds you were going to send me. It will get lost in the wash.

“The rest of your menu and recipes and budget is fine.

“Can I help you further?”

“No. That is wonderful. Thank you so much Mr Henderson.”

I wrote a hand written letter to Mr Henderson.

When I told Arthur of my new approach to life, Arthur roared with laughter.

“You are a new manager.

“I had to get punched in the nose to teach me!

“You have got off lightly!”

“Arthur, why didn’t you tell me?”

“OK,

“Ali,

“You are from Cambridge so I will keep this simple.”

What a wonderful insult! I am sure I will use it myself sometime.

“Ali, why are you and I here in Beijing?”

“To build an airport terminal.”

“Who do you answer to?”

“You and Steve.”

“Who decides on your next promotion?”

“Steve.”

“What does Steve want?”

“Steve wants this terminal built on time and on budget.”

“So?”

I thought about that.

“So Steve does not care whether I am nice or nasty. He just wants the new terminal up and running as soon as possible.”

“What does that mean for you?”

“I go with the management style that works best. Be nice first but be prepared to get rough.”

“Why be nice first?”

“People prefer me to be pleasant and polite.”

“Why do you care what people prefer?”

I thought about that.

“If people like and respect me then on the margin they will wish to co-operate and to be helpful. If people don’t like me they will not rush to be helpful. For instance Mr Henderson did not take my second call that day because he was “in a meeting”.

“That cost me a day.”

“So?”

“So it costs me nothing to be pleasant and polite, I get some return from it. If people that know that I have the capacity to be unpleasant it just underlines that I am currently being nice. People would like me to stay nice.”

“So what do you think about losing the nickname “Genghis” and becoming “pussy”?”

So Arthur already knew that my nickname is “Genghis”.

“I don’t think I want to be “pussy”.”

“What single word would you like people to think of when they discuss Ali Miah?”

“I would like time to think on that.”

I think the word I would like is “effective”. But I will think on that.

I added officers from the construction training school, General Lee, and Wen Dei Wong to Arthur’s invitation list. There is a woman at the airport who is the airport’s link to the Communist Party. I invited her and I invited the airport manager. As soon as I know the Canton bridge team leaders I will invite them.

CHAPTER 21: Emma Hewson.

Don funded me to set up the theatre school.

I cannot think of a happier time in my life.

The children are each of them fine. Collectively they are some of the nicest children whom I have ever taught.

The parents are enormously supportive of their children and they are so positive towards the school.

I have a great team of part time teachers.

Rebecca Johnson is a rock.

Class sizes are very small. It is amazing to me how much faster we can get on in a very small class. The children have no wish to misbehave.

I follow the National Curriculum so that the children do not miss out on anything that they need. Then we spend time on ethics and conflict resolution and strategies for dealing with stress and unhappiness. The Theatre and Music and musical instrument lessons and Dance are all time consuming, but we have the time and the space and the staff.

Over half the children are filming at some point during the week.

When I am in Manchester with the "Tykes" the children who stay behind are studying languages and music and musical instruments and dance and art. Then when we return I teach English and Maths and History and Geography while the Tykes study languages and so forth.

Each child has an individual timetable.

Our Science teacher is gifted.

All of our teachers are good.

Rebecca's concept of a school dinner is several stages removed from the traditional school dinner.

Rebecca's catering budget is close to unlimited. The children and the teachers love Rebecca's cooking. A few of the older children have cookery classes with Rebecca.

The older Hewson children can already cook well.

Our physical education concentrates on fitness and suppleness and skills the children might need like climbing up ropes, vaulting, and gymnastics. Team games are taught, including the psychology of being a good team member.

To have a soccer game we need the entire school to play at once. We pay Tryton High School to use one of their pitches.

Acting can be physically hard work, so we try to build the children's physical and emotional stamina in readiness.

The children are happy. The parents are happy. The teachers are happy.

We have virtually no illness or absence among the children or among the staff.

Don is happy with the school. The school pays me the same wage as I had when I was a Deputy Head and the school still makes a profit. Don says that he has never known me to be so unstressed.

Don reckons that Susie is not going to be able to take her children back. If Susie does die Paul is not going to bring up four children on his own because that is just not compatible with the life that Paul has to lead.

We will be raising the Thornton children.

We will lose the Donkin children when they move to London.

The Miah boys are drifting away.

Mark Johnson is away and Rebecca Johnson is off to London next October. We will be down to five Grahams, five Hewsons, four Thorntons and three Johnsons. At some point we will lose Beverley.

Kali Daar stays with us during the week. As the oldest female Tyke Kali has maybe two years before she is "too old". Then we will lose Kali again.

Our sex life has quietened down to maybe two or three times a week, usually for forty minutes or so.

I know Don that loves me. I really enjoy Don being my lover.

I do not intend to have any more children.

I think that four children is enough.

Tohur telephoned us early one morning to say that the police have raided their house for drugs. The press were outside.

The police have found nothing because there is nothing to find. The police are surprised that there is no booze either. Not even cigarettes or tobacco.

The police were a bit bemused by David having a box containing a gross of condoms in his wardrobe, unopened.

David's comment to the police was "something for the weekend!"

David gave the police officers his lovely smile.

Gisela fortunately was not there. We have not met Gisela but we know of her.

The suspicious looking white powder in the kitchen is icing sugar. Apart from the laptops the police have not taken anything away.

Mr Driburg is handling the publicity and the discussions with the police. This telephone call is just so we know.

The boys are sixteen and seventeen so they are in a grey area so far as publicity is concerned.

On Mr Driburg's advice the boys changed into short sleeved T shirts and sports shorts.

The boys are very muscular. They have no needle tracks or injection marks on their exposed flesh.

Mr Driburg told the boys to invite the journalists outside to come into the house. Tohur explained that as a national judo junior squad member he has absolutely no interest in drugs. David told the press that he fought judo for Yorkshire as a child. David has no interest in drugs either.

The two lads then demonstrated one handed press-ups to illustrate that they are two very fit young men. The lads posed together bare-chested each supporting their entire body weight stood on one hand on the kitchen table.

The photo of the two smiling boys was an exciting photo opportunity for the journalists. The photo made several front pages. It also made any suggestion of drugs look ridiculous.

The house was clean and tidy. The boys were cheerful and relaxed and laughing after the raid.

A fat unkempt unshaven journalist with unpolished shabby shoes asked the lads, "This house is very clean. Are you gay?"

The boys did not answer at first.

In the silence, David looked at the journalist, examining him up and down slowly with wonderment and contempt.

David replied "No, thank you", which caused all the other journalists to crack up laughing.

The story fizzled.

Mr Driburg had a lawyer hassle the police about why the raid had taken place. Given that the "information received" was clearly wrong the lawyer pressed the police about the raid.

The police were very quick to return the lads' laptops.

Eventually the police put out a statement saying that they are satisfied that the information they had acted on was incorrect.

They are revising their procedures.

The police have no idea how the Press knew of the raid.

Mr Driburg has made the point that if the police did not tell the Press about the raid, then probably a journalist telephoned the police with an anonymous tip-off so that there would be a raid. This makes the police into patsies for the press.

Mr Driburg said to the boys that he could not push this too far as otherwise the police might feel the need to arrest the boys just to make a point.

Charlotte is enjoying her A Levels. Charlotte and Grace are studying the same subjects in the same class at College. The subjects are History, English, and Music.

Linda is studying Catering at College.

All the children are well.

My parents are happy. They have a couple of children living with them while their mother is in prison, but she has only about six months left to serve before she will be released on an electronic tag.

At half term the Tykes were not filming, which was good. They actually had a holiday!

Don organised a coach trip to the Colour Museum in Bradford, followed by curry and then ice skating in Bradford. Don organised a second trip to Chester Zoo, which is always a good outing. I went, too!

Usually I am too busy with school, but there was nothing that I had to do that could not wait. Yes, I am relaxed and unstressed!

Max went down to London to stay with Michelle Sayers for a few days. Beverley the nanny took Max to London with the Thornton children. Tohur met them at King's Cross and took Max to Staines. Tohur will bring Max back on Thursday

CHAPTER 22: Cecil Byram

I turned down the proposal that Mr Porteous sent me.

A very large European manufacturer of washing machines and similar goods had just about survived the tsunami induced crisis. It was financially squeezed but it could meet its debts as they fell due.

Some of its direct competitors had gone under during the crisis. The Board decided to increase production quickly to meet the supposed gap in the market. The Board decided that as its product would sell quickly there was no need to borrow money or to raise capital.

Raw materials and components are still a bit expensive but they stocked up and they went for broke.

Five weeks later they have found that they cannot sell their extra production. They had forgotten to factor in that we are in a deep recession.

The manufacturer has a very large stock of product that it cannot sell. The bills for the metal and the components are falling due, along with all their normal debts.

They need money urgently.

The banks will never lend to you if you need the money. The manufacturer wishes to raise capital quickly.

The manufacturer has to sell shares to investors. According to their figures they are giving away forty per cent of the company at half its real value. A bargain!

My thinking is that a company that is about to go bust has no value. If it has a problem that I can easily fix, like it needs brass or aluminium or copper that I have in my stockpiles, then I am prepared to consider investing.

This proposal makes no sense to me. Giving the company cash to keep it afloat does not solve its basic problems. A month from now or three months from now the manufacturer will still have a huge stock of product that it can't sell.

I have no reason to believe that this management is nimble enough to develop a different product very quickly or that it will discover an export market for their surplus product quickly. Without one or the other they are stuffed.

At best, with a cash injection, they will be limping for years.

Forty per cent of a limping company, even at half price, is not worth buying.

I told Mr Porteous that I do not want anything to do with it. I explained why.

Mr Porteous said that the industrial property and the machine tools have a substantial value.

I told Mr Porteous that just at the moment industrial property has close to no value. I do not know what the company has in the way of machine tools.

I said to Mr Porteous that when the manufacturer goes bust I might be interested in the carcass or in parts of the carcass.

I have heard nothing since. The money that I had reserved for that transaction is out on short term loans again.

When metal prices were high share prices were generally low. We used the cash to buy shares at a time when shares were cheap.

Now that metals are in ready supply again metal prices have crashed and share prices have risen. The shares we bought have risen over twenty per cent in less than a year.

For almost all of my adult life I have managed Byram's.

I recognise even more now that I did not do a very good job. All I did really was to run the business on the guidelines set by my father and my grandfather.

It was my good fortune to be at the helm when our family strategy paid off extremely well.

In the business press I am supposedly a modern capitalist hero because we did so well out of the Chinese tsunami.

There has been some positive news from China. The American President has reversed his Executive Order. American industry and commerce pointed out that the Executive Order is destroying America's export trade for capital goods such as foundries.

Japanese and German suppliers are invading traditional American markets because the Americans cannot supply and because the Americans cannot give firm delivery dates.

Mr Wong was contacted by the American foundry supplier. We agreed to take delivery of a turnkey modern foundry.

The modern foundry is installed now. Wen Dei manages the new foundry.

The Clever Eunuch Foundry is very profitable and it will continue to operate.

Irene and George are doing very well. Kevin Hanson has been to the open prison to interview the ex-services prisoners who are nearing the ends of their sentences. Kevin says that the Prison Service has more than kept its word. The quality of this first batch of potential recruits is very good. They each understand that this is the opportunity of a lifetime for them.

The men are desperate to join this project.

The first men will be released in three weeks time, with the others following over the following month.

We have planning permission for the brick wall at Ming City. The first half million bricks are on site. I bought the bricks cheap because I am buying in quantity and because I am happy to accept delivery of the remaining eight and a half million bricks over the winter when it is harder to sell bricks.

Three quarters of the site will be hidden by the brick wall. All that visitors will see will be the loading bays and the ready use stocks.

We have planning permission for sheltered housing on two of the empty storage sites. I have specialist demolition workers clearing the sites at the moment. There is not much to clear. Some of the bricks that I have ordered will be delivered to the cleared sites when they are needed.

Tony Hart says that in the metal stockholding business one is normally trying to avoid having excess stocks. Any business tries to obtain a reasonable return on capital, so the trick is to hold only the minimum stocks one needs.

One tries to keep purchases and sales in balance. One buys in relatively small quantities, just enough to meet customer need.

Buying in bulk should always be significantly cheaper than buying in small quantities.

As well as the cash to buy in bulk Tony says that we have one huge advantage. The salesmen who sell to Tony all have targets to meet. Towards month end and quarter end and year end they are sometimes desperate to meet their targets. Or sometimes the distributors have too much cash tied up and they must turn some of their stocks into cash.

Although Tony has time specific targets the salesmen do not know what they are or even that the targets exist.

Tony already has more than three month's stock on hand so Tony has no immediate need to buy any metal at all.

Tony normally will only buy if the price is very good. "Mings" is already known as a buyer that will buy any amount if the price is very keen.

Tony is being offered some exceptionally good deals.

Tony is also trying to go back in the supply chain, bypassing the salesmen.

Tony will do even better if he can buy directly from the foundries and the smelters rather than from the importers and the distributors.

Tony may have to buy thousands of tonnes at a time to obtain really keen prices, but I am fine with that.

The entire stockholding industry knows of Byrams' metal auctions which took place when every stockholder was empty and unable to re-supply.

The stockholding company that Tony had worked for had to close down because it literally could not buy more stocks.

Tony loves the idea of building a stockpile covering nearly two square miles.

Tony understands the philosophy of building stockpiles against an interruption of supply. Not many people can afford to do it.

Not many people have the patience to wait maybe fifty years to execute a strategy.

I have given Tony five years to assemble the stockpile.

"Ming's will always deliver." This is a very good advertising slogan!

Tony uses the same transport company that Byrams Engineering uses. We have dedicated some loading bays just for the transport company.

The transport company has access to Ming's systems so that it can monitor the orders that have paid for delivery.

The transport company works out its schedules. The transport company emails Ming City with lists of which loads are to go to each dedicated loading bay, and in what order. Their delivery lorries arrive all day to collect their loads.

Ming's also receives a commission or "kick back" from the transport company.

Bless Mark Johnson for suggesting that we should ask for "kick back".

Tony used Sahid Daar to market over the Internet. Ming's has become very well known to customers very quickly.

If Sahid Daar were thirty-six years old I would have no hesitation in paying Sahid what he is worth.

I am very aware that Sahid is only sixteen and that Sahid is already a millionaire at my expense.

Some hundreds of my millions are in part due to Sahid's expertise.

The labourer is worthy of his hire.

It does slightly get to me that Sahid is likely to pick up a million or more pounds a year from Ming's for the foreseeable future.

I know that I can employ a marketer much cheaper.

If the marketer is not as good as Sahid Daar then what I gain on paying the marketer less I lose ten times over or a hundred times over in profits from sales that don't happen. Seeing what Sahid did with the Byram's site before the tsunami I recognise that this young man is gifted.

I just bite the bullet and I pay.

Most of our competitors in the metal stockist industry are paying 14% or more on their borrowings. We are foregoing perhaps half a per cent of bank interest on the money we use.

It is not a fair fight.

Tony purchases metals very cheaply. Ming's then retails the metals at keener prices than Ming's competitors can offer.

We have a virtuous spiral because our lower prices and our higher profits make buying in bulk even more worthwhile.

Tony is purchasing hundreds of millions of pounds worth of metals each year.

It is inevitable that Tony is offered inducements to buy metals from one company rather than from any other.

Tony's "thank yous for the business" are on a different scale to Mark Johnson's catering thank yous.

Realistically I cannot stop people offering inducements to Tony.

We have dealt with that by Tony informing me every week of the inducements he is offered and that he receives.

If Tony is making me a lot of money then I have no issue with Tony making a bit on the side. "Thou shalt not bind the mouths of the kine that tread the grain."

My generation had religion in school. I don't think they do that nowadays. I am not sure that they even have the King James Bible in schools these days.

Firms that use our internet sites are always informed of our discounts for quantity. Byram's Engineering and Ming's Metals run a shared discount scheme that encourages the customers of one company to buy from both to increase their discounts.

We are sometimes selling to our competitors in the components business, but provided that we make our profits we do not worry about it.

Ours is a large industry.

The existence of the stockpiles is an inducement for customers to stay loyal to Byrams and for new customers to enter into long-term contracts.

Mike Appleyard is Sales Manager of Byram's Engineering Limited. Carol runs the Byrams Engineering internet marketing operation day to day, with Sahid Daar having a qualitative input.

The original Plan A included floating Byrams Engineering as a public company. I have now decided not to float Byram's Engineering as a public company.

The more I thought about the idea the less happy I was.

Byram's Engineering is not difficult to run. We have five factories all within three hours of each other, and all of them very profitable. The long-term contracts make planning and operations very easy.

Garth and Mike promoted one of our telephone sales people to stroke our twenty largest customers, and another telephone sales person to liaise with the next fifty customers.

We have ten guys, all time served engineers, telephoning other businesses that we know use components to try to sell to them.

We now have all of the factories working at close to full capacity. I have a few empty factories that we can staff and bring into production when we need more

manufacturing capacity. They were on my original list of factories, so I have contact details for the former production managers. Expansion is easy.

If our family sold out totally then we would have no connection with Byram's.

If after the sale Byram's laid people off or closed factories it would be nothing to do with us. We would still feel bad, but we could do nothing about it.

If we were minority shareholders then we would be fighting the other shareholders.

If we were majority shareholders then minority shareholders could complain if we did not attempt to maximise short term profit.

The easiest thing to do is to decide not to float Byram's Engineering.

We are supposedly missing out on the opportunity to sell a thriving business at twenty times profits. I would buy a Byrams type operation if I were offered it. So why sell the one that I have?

Particularly as Byrams Engineering is making very good profits and is expanding.

All of the family are in agreement that we should not sell.

The Chinese import trade is booming again. The Chinese depot of Byram's Engineering is physically located on the Ming's site because Ming City has enough space to take all the stock and all the containers that do not stand on customers' properties.

We have a line of huge sheds where all the stock is kept. There are customers who visit to collect stock, but almost all the stock is delivered.

Barney Stoker now runs the Chinese import operation.

Barney is trying to build stockpiles of the Chinese components. Barney has signed some large import contracts with my Chinese foundries and with some Chinese component manufacturers.

Barney negotiated very keen contracts that allow Barney to sell the Chinese products at a good profit but still at a cheap price. Barney is one of the cheapest suppliers in Britain so the Chinese goods fly out of his door as soon as they arrive. Barney is quite right to make profits on his ordinary operations so I am pleased with him.

We have nearly two thousand containers at sea at any one time and six hundred containers on customers' premises.

Barney struggles to maintain adequate stocks so Mr Wong is sourcing other suppliers for him.

We have three hundred new containers on order to help with transporting the additional imports. Wen Dei supplies the steel used to make the containers.

Mike hired a trio of journalists to create an online magazine that only carries advertisements for Byram's Engineering and for Ming's Metals.

Two freelance cartoonists produce wickedly funny cartoons about life in industry and commerce. One creates cartoons from an employer's perspective and the other from a worker's perspective.

The total cost of the exercise is less than twenty thousand pounds a month. The magazine already has a quarter of a million regular readers.

We have had approaches from potential advertisers but at the moment we just advertise our own businesses. Most of the magazine is video films about how to do various jobs or how to use our products, or how we make our products.

Our daughter Karen kicked Giles into touch a few weeks after Mark Johnson went off to the United States.

Irene and I can contain our disappointment. All one can say about Giles is that there was nothing obviously wrong with him.

Karen is between boyfriends at the moment.

Irene and I decided to take this opportunity while there is no boyfriend to explain to Karen how wealthy the family is.

Karen was very surprised.

Karen knew that the Byram family is wealthy but Karen had no idea of the scale of our wealth.

Karen thought that we had maybe ten or fifteen million pounds stashed abroad plus owning Byrams Engineering and Ming's. That the Byram family is worth well over three thousand million pounds was completely unexpected.

Karen is still coming to terms with the information.

"Does Mark know how rich I will be?"

"Mark knows that I am a billionaire and that you are my child.

"Mark may not know about the second and third billions."

I think that Karen still regrets parting from Mark.

Irene and I know that Karen will meet somebody sometime, either at university or soon after. Karen's best strategy is to keep quiet about our money and to try to find a man who loves her for herself.

I now have my own dedicated Tax Inspector. When one gets to a certain level of wealth HM Revenue and Customs assign one of their Tax Inspectors to follow your finances.

The young woman made an appointment to see me.

On the advice of my accountant I was completely honest. My accountant was with me for the interview but he barely spoke.

The young woman had with her about ten years of accounts for myself, my family, and Byram's Bearings.

I explained that we have recently set up and reorganised into Byrams Investments Limited, Byrams Engineering Limited, Ming's Metals Limited, and Byrams Housing Limited. Byrams Investments Limited is the holding company.

I told her that the family has offshore trusts that were set up a very long time ago, most of them before the Tax Inspector was born. I said that my understanding is that she is entitled to know that some trusts exist but that she is not entitled to know any more.

She said that that is a correct statement of the law.

HMRC is intensely curious about how a sleepy components manufacturer with significant debt suddenly blossomed into a cash rich high profit high investment income organisation.

I told her of my father's strategy and how the opportunity to cash in arose because of the Chinese tsunami.

"So for forty years your family has been investing heavily in a bet?"

"And that bet has now succeeded?"

"No. It never was a bet.

"It is a statistical certainty that once in a while there will be an interruption in metal supplies. There was a small interruption in 1967 and a very large one last year. We

were always investing on a certainty. War, tsunami, plague, strike – something will happen.

“We are building our stockpiles again, but larger. Once we have our stockpile assembled again we will just sit until there is another calamity. I may see it. I may not.

My daughter will probably see it. And if not, her children will see it.

“Turn it around.

“You are a young woman. Do you really believe that your generation and your children will get through the whole of your and your children’s lifetimes without a war or some other major calamity?

“You would be the first generation in history to be able to say that.”

She thought for a moment.

“I see your point. So you are betting millions on the next disaster?”

“Yes.”

“Investing, not betting.

“Eventually we will invest over a thousand million pounds in metal stocks. We are buying as and when because we do not wish to drive prices up.”

“That is impressive.”

She questioned why I take so little income out of the business. It seems incongruous for such a wealthy man.

“We own our house outright.”

“I save over a quarter of my income already. Why take more money out of the business when I have no use for it?”

“Mr Byram. You are a multi billionaire.

“Why do you come to work every day?

“Why are you not on a yacht in the Caribbean?”

That question had never occurred to me.

I thought about her question.

After a while I said,

“I have always come to work every day.

“There is nothing else that I wish to do.”

"I note that quite a lot of the shares are held abroad. Is there a significant foreign owner?"

I looked at my accountant. He nodded.

"There are no shares that are not held by family members or by family trusts."

"You do a lot of business with one foundry in China, the Clever Eunuch Foundry.

"Do you own it?"

"I think that that is a question that I need not answer."

"Do you deny that you own it?"

Clever!

"There is a Chinese partner."

"You have the potential for transfer pricing?"

Transfer pricing is where prices are artificially altered to make your profits in tax havens or low tax countries. For example Jersey grows no bananas but Jersey is the largest exporter of bananas in the world. Profits declared in Jersey are either not taxed or are barely taxed.

We could do transfer pricing, but at the moment we do not.

"We don't operate transfer pricing at the moment. You can see that from the prices that we pay.

"May I say something to you that you may find surprising?"

"Yes. Please do."

"The stockpiles were a legitimate commercial concept that incidentally allowed us to avoid a lot of tax."

"Yes."

"We have made a phenomenal amount of money through having the stockpiles."

"Yes."

"Much of the profit comes in essence from tax that we avoided in the past.

"I am not ecstatic about it, but I accept that I have to pay tax.

"I am not running around now like a mouse in a bucket trying to avoid tax. I know we will take a huge hit for tax. It can't be helped.

"Obviously I am trying to move money off-shore to avoid tax, and I am keeping money off-shore, but the fact is that I will have a large tax bill every year. So be it."

She nodded.

Then she changed the subject.

“I am puzzled by one of your workers. He is barely eighteen years old but he has been earning more money as a Catering Manager for one factory than your Group Production Manager earns for running five factories.

“Suddenly his earnings have stopped, but you seem not to have issued a P45 or a leaving certificate.

“What is going on?”

I explained Mark’s situation. Mark is on leave of absence for his Mormon missionary service.

“Is Mark going to continue in this Catering Manager role?”

“I don’t know.

“Mark should finish his apprenticeship. I have told Mark that I will fund him to study management.

“Mark is a natural manager.

“Mark has already made millions for me.

Mark is still only eighteen.

“I really do not wish to lose Mark.

“I have some thoughts for what to do with him when he returns, but I will decide nearer the time.”

After Byram’s Engineering and Ming’s Metals our next major business is the management of all the investments.

I take advice from Mr Porteous on the investment policy.

David Taylor has two clerks operating the book-keeping and administration of the investments. There are two clerks so that there is cover during holidays and illness.

The clerks double as “Group” finance clerks. They also help the Brass Band and the Music Academy.

Byrams Investments Ltd still holds three hundred million pounds as a corporate rescue fund or bargain purchase fund. This money is always out on three day loans to twenty different banks.

The fourth business is Byrams Housing. Georgina Arron runs this, supervised by my wife Irene. Irene is bouncing and happy like she used to be before we lost little Sam.

I would have paid anything to achieve that.

Kevin Hanson has morphed into building foreman and personnel officer, freeing up Georgina for more outward facing activity. Kevin says that he is in a traditional sergeant role with Georgina as the officer and Irene as the colonel.

Kevin is also our link to the Byram Willerton Brass Band and its Music Academy. Both are thriving.

There is a hostel for battered women in Meldon. The hostel was in the local newspaper because Meldon Council was cutting its grant yet again. There comes a point below which you cannot run an operation, and the hostel was at that point.

The hostel announced that it was going to have to close.

Irene and Karen and my mother Marjorie went to see them.

Irene gave the hostel a cash injection to lift the hostel out of the mire. Irene agreed a monthly standing order to meet its running costs.

We have promised to fund the hostel for the next five years. Should we cease funding the hostel in the future we will give the hostel a year's warning to allow it to seek other funding.

Karen is our liaison with the hostel. It will be good for Karen to see the rough end of life without having to experience it personally. Karen is eighteen now. She needs to know how the world works.

We asked the hostel to try to keep our support confidential because we do not wish for every needy group in Yorkshire to target Byrams Group as a source of funding.

Karen has come to terms with the fact that we are an extraordinarily wealthy family.

Karen has decided to keep quiet about money and just to look for a good man.

As good men are few and far between Karen intends to build a career.

Karen is going to move away from Byrams because Karen wishes to be her own person rather than to spend decades in my shadow. Really that is fine by me.

I think even more of Karen for that.

I spent most of my life waiting for “the big hit”. Having made the big hit rather spectacularly, I do not know what to do next.

Putting some money into preparing for the next opportunity was a no-brainer. Consolidating all the stockpiling onto one site made a significant saving in security costs. Mark Johnson’s suggestion to set up the business that became “Ming’s Metals” turned an expenses outflow into a significant profit centre.

I have a personal staff of two. One is Daniel my number cruncher and analyst. Part of Daniel’s remit is to prepare an action plan for the next supply crisis.

Kelly is my personal secretary. Irene was involved in the selection process for Kelly. Kelly is unflappable and extremely efficient, and she is not pretty enough for Irene to worry about.

It has gradually dawned on me that Kelly has a partner, and that the partner is female. Even less reason for Irene to worry!

I normally go straight to Meldon University in the morning for lectures and seminars. On some days I have no classes.

I visit every site unannounced once a month.

By the time I arrive at the Willerton office Kelly has opened my mail and my e-mails, has booked appointments for those few people who need to see me, and Kelly has reserved two hours for me to read reports and to read accounts.

On Wednesdays I normally do not go anywhere. I sit at home and I think.

I telephone Kelly when it is convenient for me.

Kelly would telephone me if there were something that could not wait, but there never is.

I really appreciate Wednesdays.

About every six months I visit Mr Wong and we tour our investments.

Irene went to China with me last time. After the working part of the holiday we had two weeks just as tourists.

Mr Wong assigned a bright young woman to us to be our guide and our driver.

So many of our foreign investments pay dividends in Euros that Byram’s needed a Euro account, which is also used for Byrams sales. Byrams also has a US dollar

account. We reinvest those income flows into European and American investments.

Mr Porteous says that he often has requests from businesses that wish to be bought because the owning family has feuds, or the businesses have some major opportunity or a major problem that requires either cash input or some other input. I do not have the spare managers to take on a company in trouble. Even an asset stripping exercise needs more managerial time than we have available.

I can get over my concerns about possibly purchasing a lemon, but I do not have spare managers. One of the reasons for embarking on the MBA course is for the opportunity to meet competent managers.

I do not mind owning firms that other people manage.

I intend to avoid a situation where I own a grab bag of say sixty businesses that all require time and attention.

I cannot see an industry I wish to enter.

When I saw how much money our transport company takes from us each year, I asked Daniel to research whether a transport company would be a good investment. Daniel reported that the haulage business has very thin margins. The haulage business has constant managerial issues.

Our transport company already pays us in commissions more than half its profit from transporting our goods.

Daniel says that it is up to me but Daniel's advice is to stay out of the haulage business.

Daniel has come up with two suggestions. One is to set up a second "Ming's" operation on the Continent. Daniel suggests somewhere near Dusseldorf.

The second suggestion is to invest in renewable energy. Solar panels are Daniel's front running idea. Daniel suggests buying a mountain in France or Spain or Portugal, and then setting up a factory to manufacture solar panels. We would not sell solar panels but just make them and erect them.

Logically we should buy a few mountains while they are cheap, to use after we have filled the first mountain. We would sell power to the country's National Grid.

I have given Daniel a month off normal analysis to go to research his two ideas and to meet people in Europe.

Our Industrial Research company is finding consultants for Daniel to talk to.

I just don't have enough managers. The cohort of managers I have in training will be a few years yet before they are contributing significantly.

David and Garth and I will shortly appoint a Finance Officer for Byram's Engineering Ltd to free up David Taylor to be a full time Group Finance Manager for Byram's.

I have a personal accountant who looks after the family's personal and overseas wealth. I would not wish for David Taylor to think that he knows everything.

CHAPTER 23: Ali Miah

The joyride flight went fine. I had budgeted on a bottle of whiskey for each male passenger. We had a tureen of Committee Punch for the adults who do not like whiskey, and supplies of our First Class white and red wines. We had a variety of soft drinks for the children.

We had a Putonghua and Cantonese speaking stewardess in the cockpit with the children. The children were allowed to touch the controls and to sit in a pilot's seat. The plane was on automatic pilot at the time, obviously.

General Lee has a very intelligent wife.

Mrs Lee offered to introduce me to a nice Chinese Muslim girl. That was nice of her, but I declined.

I told Mrs Lee that I have a girl in England whom I intend to marry. She smiled and she accepted the situation.

The food made a terrific impression. The electric carving knives twinkled down the great joints, slicing off thin or thick slices. The slices were then halved as otherwise they would be too large for the plates. The Chinese had most of them never seen roast joints like this. They were hugely impressed. The salads were not Chinese style but they were traditional English salads. We also had gherkins and pickled onions and piccalilli and horseradish and apple sauce and mashed potato and chips.

The sherry trifle I am told was excellent.

These folk were largely from Beijing. Most of them had never seen the Gobi Desert or the Great Wall or the Chinese coast from the air.

When we landed there was a fleet of taxis to take the guests home or to their hotels clutching their whiskey and perfume and toy aeroplanes or flight simulator games.

The whole exercise cost less than half a million pounds. I am sure that it paid for itself.

I thanked the pilots and flight attendants.

I noticed that some of the booze and food had disappeared, presumably for a party tonight. Good for them!

I pretended not to notice.

I gave the cleanup crew a tip.

Arthur congratulated me.

I told Arthur that I was very pleased with how the event had gone.

Arthur was three weeks behind schedule when I arrived. We are now three months ahead.

Arthur is pleased.

When I worked out my likely bonus I was pleased, too.

Steve did not originally tell me this but on reading my letter of appointment I see that I will also have a tenth of the bonus that Arthur will receive for being under budget.

Running ahead of schedule has caused some hiccoughs, but nothing unmanageable.

The machinery has now arrived from the USA and Europe for all the conveyor belts, generators, heating and air conditioning and internal communications. In normal times much of the equipment would normally have been bought in China but Chinese industry lost a lot of capacity in the tsunami.

The terminal floors are now a forest of stoothing to support walls. The electricians and the plumbers are in.

Next week all the sliding doors arrive. The lifts arrive next week and the technicians to assemble them a week later.

The carpets are being made in China but we do not want them until near the end.

The erectors have moved on to building the multi-storey car parks.

We have had what Arthur assures me are normal problems. An unexpected underground stream had to be diverted.

There was a temporary shortage of cement that cost us a week.

We had to borrow a couple of our cement mixing trucks from our friends at the Number Three Training School. One of the crates of whiskey that I had stashed from the banquet accompanied the cement mixing trucks when we returned them.

A few weeks of rain slowed the outside work.

It was the first time that I had met problems like this.

Arthur has seen the wheel round a few times so Arthur was much calmer than I was about the delays.

Christmas was quiet. Almost all the Chinese ignore Christmas.

Children love Christmas but with no children around I cannot be bothered.

Arthur and I took Christmas Day and Boxing Day off but otherwise we worked normally.

I have found a source for halal meat in Beijing.

I will not have alcohol in my flat. I cooked Arthur a Christmas Dinner which we ate in Arthur's flat so that Arthur could drink beer.

For most of Christmas I just studied.

Arthur drank and slept.

Arthur has been pretty good about letting me have Wednesdays and Sundays off.

I am ahead of the lecture schedule at Cambridge.

I have even found a research project.

Cement is a powder that mixes with water and sand to make concrete. A lot of people put washing up liquid into the mix to help the concrete mix faster and to flow more easily. There are also commercially supplied plasticisers.

I researched the literature and I could not find any indication of exactly how much washing up liquid or plasticiser to put in.

It is known that at some point between one per cent by weight and two per cent by weight plasticiser actually weakens cement. So what is the optimum weight? Is there a formula?

Arthur gave me a quiet corner of the site to conduct my researches. Arthur even hired a portable cabin for me to work in.

Cements are not all the same, but I confined my research to the cement we were using to build the Terminal. I analysed its content every which way.

Water is not all the same. I bought a quantity of bottled water all with the same batch number and I analysed that. The sand I also analysed.

I bought eight different washing up liquids, all slightly different. I also used two commercial plasticisers designed for use with cement

I used identical quantities of sand cement water and one per cent by weight washing up liquid or plasticiser across each, save that one batch had additional water instead of washing up liquid and the tenth batch had no additional water.

Then I did it all again with one and a half per cent of each washing up liquid and two per cent of each washing up liquid. I borrowed a cement mixer so that I could be consistent with the length of time I mixed each mix.

Then once the concretes had dried I analysed each concrete.

Not surprisingly the two purpose made cement plasticisers showed the best results. The graphs showed the washing up liquids to be all over the place. I took the best and the worst of the washing up liquids and I compared their chemical composition.

Then I analysed the others on the belts and braces principle.

I wrote a report on my researches.

It took a lot of slog but I produced a formula that appeared to explain all the findings. Deducing the formula was a real pain. There is software you can use where you put the numbers in and a formula will come out.

I used the Cambridge University computer remotely. The formula is logarithmic, which I had not expected.

Then with the formula now known I had to work out why I had obtained these results.

For future research the experiment should be continued using different cements and sands, or possibly different quantities of plasticiser. I can do that research for next year's Master's Degree if I wish.

I will do something different!

Maybe research into how long it takes for paint to dry. That cannot be any more boring than analysing cement!

CHAPTER 24: Don Hewson

Sally Thornton is developing into a really nice child. Sally has got over her culture shock from moving into our very different household.

Sally is old enough to understand that her mother Susie may die.

Sally understands that whatever happens with Susie the Thornton siblings will never live with their parents like they used to do.

Sally has had good cries with Rebecca and with Charlotte, who lived for years knowing that their mother was very ill. They eventually lost their mother.

Freda Graham saw her mother killed. Freda and Sally have cried together, too.

The posh private school that the three older Thornton children attend is a fine school. There are no poor children there, or at least no obviously poor children.

If you may exclude or expel any child who causes difficulty, if you have parents who value education, and if from the fees paid by the parents you can provide small classes and good resources then it ought to be a good school.

Sally has kudos from the other children in the school because Sally lives with many of the Tykes and Sally cooks with Robert Graham.

Sally Thornton has very rich Daddy.

Sally has always been treated as socially superior to everyone around her because her Daddy is rich.

Sally had to adjust to the egalitarian nature of our household.

It was rough for Sally Thornton because Sally Johnson and Georgina Donkin and Janine Wilkins and Fulesa Miah and Margaret Graham were quite unable to understand the concept of anyone as socially superior to them.

They and the other children were not physically violent but they were quite vocal in helping Sally to understand that she is only an equal. In fact, as at first Sally could not cook very well, Sally was not even an equal.

We have come through that.

Sally is one of the gang, but Sally is still a probationary member of the gang.

Sally Thornton recently asked her parents if she could transfer to Tryton Theatre School.

Paul and Susie agreed, but Emma is reluctant to admit Sally.

Emma says that all of the children in the Theatre School are career focussed, hard working, and determined.

Sally is not in our house displaying that she can stick at anything very much.

At the moment Emma thinks that Sally is better off at a school for rich kids.

“You do not practice the piano unless someone chivvies you to practice.”

“You do not turn up for your kitchen rota when you should. Somebody always has to fetch you.”

“You are not responsible enough or self motivated enough for the Theatre School.”

“You need to grow up a bit.”

I do not think that Sally has ever been rejected or found wanting before. Emma’s rejection really got Sally’s attention!

During the immediate tantrum Emma told Sally that this behaviour is precisely why Emma is not admitting Sally to the school.

The tantrum stopped instantly.

Emma told Sally to think for a week and then to approach Emma again with a different attitude.

Sally and Emma have done a deal that when Sally passes Grade Four on the piano Sally may enter the Theatre School. Sally passed Grade Two just before she came to us.

Paul is greatly pleased that Sally is being required to work her butt off to gain the further opportunity to work her butt off. Paul is in full support of Emma’s attitude.

Beverley I think is quietly pleased. Working with a spoiled little madam cannot be easy.

The Tykes are able to do their school work, their performing, their learning and their rehearsals without undue pressure.

The Donkin children now live with their mother and grandmother in London. Tohur has found an imam in London to replace our local Bengali imam. The religious recordings and podcasts continue.

Tohur takes Derek and Colin to their local mosque in London once a week. Colin has given up playing in a brass band. Linda has also given up playing because she now works part time in a restaurant.

Carlo visits the Donkins early on Saturday mornings to check the quality of performances and that the lines have been learned.

Carlo visits our house late on Saturday afternoons to check the quality of performances and that the lines have been learned.

Kali arrives fairly late on Sunday afternoons because she spends her weekends at her home in Doncaster. Carlo visits every Sunday for Kali. Carlo usually has Sunday dinner with us.

Carlo is with us on Monday in Manchester for filming. Carlo meets the Donkin children on Monday evening and minds them overnight. Carlo films with us on Tuesday. Carlo normally drives the Donkin children back to London.

Carlo has Wednesdays and Thursday mornings off.

Gerald Butler was overall fourth in his class of twenty-two, so Gerald is content. Gerald showed off his one armed push ups and one armed hand stands at school so Gerald's playground credibility is high.

The four dancers still eat with us on Sunday nights. They are hovering on the edge of being selected to dance for Great Britain. They are very excited that this could happen to them.

Amal and Olivia are too young to compete internationally, but the way they are developing they are virtual certainties for the national team when they reach their late teens and early twenties.

Dennis did not win a place to read Engineering at Manchester University. He will read Engineering at Meldon University instead.

Abdullah is off to China with Shakoora for a week in January to stay with Ali Miah.

Max had an adventure in Staines. The adventure has forced Max to grow up quickly.

Max went to Staines for the November half term.

Michelle Sayers was in the same film as Max. Max and Michelle are very young but they are sweet on each other. At their age there is not much likelihood of much happening so I did not discuss relationships with Max before he left for Staines. I will do that when I see the need.

Max and Michelle were walking on the towpath beside the River Thames. Just beside Penton Hook Lock four louts aged fourteen or so approaching from the other direction started to give them a hard time. The louts recognised Max from "Terrible Tykes".

The louts threatened the kids.

Then the louts rushed at Max.

Max has learned "special deliveries" from Tohur Miah.

Max punched one lad very hard and the lad fell down on the towpath. The next lad Max also hit very hard. Going backwards the second lout tripped over the first lout. The second lout fell about ten feet down into Penton Hook Lock.

The other two louts lost their enthusiasm.

Max and Michelle turned around and they ran away from the incident.

None of the louts could swim.

The lout who fell into the lock swallowed a lot of Thames river water. He ended up being taken to hospital.

The police were brought in.

The Staines police contacted Dower Productions who gave the police Max's address in Tryton.

The Meldon police visited our house to be told that Max was in Staines. We gave the police Michelle's address.

Emma telephoned Michelle's mother.

Michelle's mother already knew about the attack because Michelle and Max had told her about it.

Through Mr Driburg we hired a high powered criminal lawyer in London. The lawyer telephoned the police in Staines.

As Max was about to return to Yorkshire a meeting at Staines police station was arranged for the following afternoon.

Max was interviewed under caution. By then I was down in Staines.

Michelle was also interviewed.

The police said that four bigger lads attacking a smaller lad is not good. Max had used only proportionate force to defend himself and to defend Michelle.

It is very unlikely that Max will be charged, but the police have a few more enquiries to make.

Max was on police bail for about four weeks before the police confirmed that Max will not be charged.

It was a fright for Max.

Max was not punished for getting into a fight because in part Max was protecting Michelle. The whole experience was already distressing for Max.

That bloody Jes Holt woman wrote a piece in the Sunday Scandal, but even she admitted that Max was only defending himself and Michelle. There was no libel.

The London libel lawyers told me that Max could not sue.

CHAPTER 25: Mark Johnson

The Dry Gulch Mormon Christmas Party was fun. Mark and I have been brought up as Mormons so we can both sing reasonably well.

I was amazed to see a Charlotte Johnson DVD given to someone as a present. I did not say anything.

We had a quiet Christmas at Dinah's house.

I cooked Christmas Dinner. Rachel Anders joined us for the Christmas meal.

I could not telephone home because there is no phone line and no mobile phone coverage in Dry Gulch.

After New Year it was back to work.

The Nevada winter was pretty short this year. The road to Wet Gulch was only blocked for a week.

We were doing pretty well on the road.

About a third of the way through our six month missionary stint one of the farmers, Mr Holland, spoke to me.

“I hear you are a pretty good mechanic?”

“That is what I am trained for.”

“Could you fix a bulldozer?”

“I can fix most things.”

“I have a bulldozer that hasn’t moved in six years. If you can get it moving it would help a lot with fixing this road.”

“It surely would.

“That sounds wonderful. Thank you.”

“I have to obtain approval from the Church Elders on Sunday. If they approve I will come to your ranch on Monday.”

The Church Elders told me that Mr Holland is a reasonably honest man. If he makes a deal he will stick to it. So I have permission to fix Mr Holland’s bulldozer. On Monday Mark and I went to Mr Holland’s farm in Dinah’s pickup. I took quite a few tools with me.

The battery was shot of course.

Using the battery from the pickup I found that the electrical circuitry was fine. The engine was not happy but changing the oil and cleaning the sparkplugs and the carburettor and the filters made quite a difference.

I emptied the fuel tank and I put in some clean diesel fuel. I checked the fuel line. I oiled everywhere that I could find.

I was surprised that there was not more wrong with the bulldozer. The Nevada air is drier than the air in England.

Fortunately Mr Holland had some hydraulics liquid.

Shortly after lunch I was running the bulldozer in Mr Holland’s yard.

Mr Holland said,

“You don’t waste time, do you son?”

“I am on my day off, Mr Holland. I don’t waste time anyway. I am not going to waste my own time!”

Mr Holland laughed at that.

The bulldozer was too heavy to load on our pickup. Someone will have to drive the bulldozer to the job.

We agreed that late on Wednesday afternoon I will collect the bulldozer and fit a new battery and drive it to Dinah's house. On Thursday morning I will take it and drive it to the bad part of the road where it is really needed.

I have never before driven a bulldozer. After driving it for about seventy miles I will be an expert.

Mark is going to follow me in the pickup with fuel and water and oil and tools.

Mr Holland will operate the bulldozer because he knows how to do that.

Mr Holland will park up the bulldozer near the job and remove the battery each night to stop anyone stealing the bulldozer. When the road is finished Mr Holland will have a working bulldozer.

Mr Holland is driving into Wet Gulch tomorrow. He will pick up a new battery and more lubricating oil and more diesel fuel.

I am not insured to drive in the United States. On the other hand I have never seen a police officer or a police vehicle in Dry Gulch in the months that I have been here.

CHAPTER 26: Emma Hewson

Christmas was great fun this year. The school Christmas Concert was a "friends and family" event rather than a showcase event.

Robert and Rebecca catered.

Janet Addie produced a whole school tap dancing extract from "River Dance".

The Tykes contributed pieces of music that they had already performed for their series. The other children all performed music.

Two of our youngsters wrote their own comic skit purporting to be me explaining to Don how I had lost the school's gym. There were pointed comments about how rarely I visit the gym!

Cheeky monkeys!

The lad had Don's mannerisms down to a "T".

I recognised some of my mannerisms in the girl. The audience recognised more!

It was a good do.

Christmas was as quiet as any Hewson Christmas ever is. We had no new children!

The mince pies were made this year by Charlotte, Sally Thornton, and Max. Rebecca Johnson had a new Daar dress. Charlotte had a makeover with a friend. Sally had a Daar dress. Andrew and Mike had “shoot ‘em up” computer games. Mark of course is in Nevada somewhere.

Freda Graham had a Daar dress. Robert had a sound system for the gym. Margaret had a small harp and music and lessons. Simeon had “shoot ‘em up” computer games interchangeable with those for Andrew and Mike. Jenny had a child sized guitar.

Sally Thornton had a Daar dress. Rupert had “shoot ‘em up”, Lucinda had a recorder. Guy had a sit-on toy tractor.

Tohur had a book about Art appreciation. Ali is in Beijing.

Max had a martial arts week similar to the one Tohur had a few years ago. Alice had a violin. Damien had art materials. Arthur had a tricycle and helmet. Kate had a doll.

Essentially the children were all given what they had requested.

With so many people trying to learn piano or to practise on the study piano Don and I decided to purchase a second piano. The only logical place for the piano is in the living room. So Santa bought Don a reconditioned piano which was delivered a few days before Christmas.

Boxing Day was the normal black and white pudding breakfast for Don, but with the surprise addition of purple and green puddings. Tohur had fashioned the purple pudding from red cabbage and beetroot and paprika. The green pudding was made from spinach and Brussels sprouts and green chilli. The bed was shredded carrot instead of shredded lettuce.

Tohur led the cooking for the Reunion, but everyone brought food to share. The Sachs brought gefilte fish and babka. Lionel and Greta had been involved in preparing them.

The Daars brought Shish kebabs and jelabi. The Wilkins family brought halal meatloaf and apple tarts. The Donkins brought savoury snacks and gingerbread. The Kelners and Andy brought fried chicken and satay sauce and Christmas cake made without alcohol for dessert. The Butlers brought a vegetarian nut roast and a cold well spiced rice pudding.

Tohur put on an extravaganza of things that Tohur has learned to make on the Cordon Bleu course, full of taste sensations and unexpected combinations.

We all ate very well.

Everyone was there. Everyone is happy and thriving.

Diana Green is going to be in the next set of advertisements as the girl who is told by Amy to switch to the sanitary towels that Amy uses. The four dancers are winning virtually every competition that they enter. They know they are on the edge of joining the national ballroom dancing team.

Amal and Olivia are vacuuming up all the ballroom dancing prizes in their age range. Amal Daar is still so gorgeous!

Nigel Williams is going to study Business Management at Meldon University.

Andria Wilkins and her boyfriend Sam are looking for somewhere to live together.

The Sal Hewson Trust will buy a house and rent it to them. After they have been living together for six months the Trust will advance them the money to buy the house on an affordable mortgage.

Helen and Martin are on the same arrangement. They will start to buy their house in February.

Since Andria began receiving maintenance allowance and later earning wages

Andria has been paying housekeeping.

Andria did not know that Helen had quietly been banking the housekeeping money.

As Andria and Sam are starting to set up house Helen gave Andria the thousands of pounds that Andria has paid as housekeeping over the years.

Andria was surprised and astonished and tearful.

Little Angela gets on great with Sam.

David Wilkins will give Andria a monthly payment as maintenance for Angela so that Sam will not feel Angela to be a financial burden. David says that it is great that Angela has a Dad. David is happy to pay.

Angela's biological father Kenneth has not been seen for years. He has never been asked for money and he has never paid any.

The Wilkins' parents are gradually adjusting to prosperity, but they are still twitchy that it might all disappear overnight.

David Wilkins has stashed money in a trust fund for his family so that David's family are secure whatever happens to David.

David is quite embarrassed about his break up with Gisela.

David was working really hard on ghost writing Dennis' autobiography, preparing his book on cooking for low cholesterol, preparing the raft of TV programs to film in early February, his College work, and in researching the American stock market because David has offshore money to invest.

It dawned on David that he had not seen Gisela for a while.

David telephoned Gisela.

Gisela asked David how long it had been since they had last seen each other.

David thought.

"About ten days?"

"Try three weeks!"

"The problem is David that you do not have time for a girlfriend. When you have time phone me and I will see what I am doing!"

Gisela put the phone down.

David did not telephone Gisela straight away because David needed to think about what Gisela had said.

The next time David thought about Gisela was three weeks later! Whoops!

David decided that he was not being fair on Gisela to ask Gisela to fit into David's timetable. So the relationship is over.

Sally Thornton has changed her mind about the Tryton Theatre School.

Sally says that because of her father's wealth Sally will be a wealthy young woman when she grows up. Sally will never have to work for a living.

Sally now has no intention of being an actor or a professional musician.

What Sally wants is a first class academic education.

Sally is simply not interested in learning art or music or other non-essential stuff.

Sally wants very high qualifications at A* level so that Sally may confidently apply to any university for any course.

Sally says that she does not wish to attend Tryton High. Sally wants to be stretched and to be made to work very hard.

Sally does not wish to attend a boarding school.

Sally has asked her teachers for advice.

The teachers say that Bradford Girls Grammar School is best for Sally.

Sally says that Paul can afford the fees and Paul can afford a twice daily contract taxi. Problem solved!

Sally is still working hard for her Grade 4 at Piano to make it clear that Sally is choosing not to attend Tryton Theatre School rather than that Sally cannot gain entry.

We asked Max where he would like to go to school once he leaves “Terrible Tykes”.

His answer was interesting.

“I don’t want to go to Manchester Grammar School because I am not really clever like Gerald.”

“I don’t want to go to a boarding school.”

“I think I would be bored crazy at Tryton High.”

“What I think is that when I leave Tryton Theatre School I should go to a Theatre School in London.”

“If I am in London there is more acting work available. And if I don’t get any acting work it doesn’t matter. I will be taught in small classes and I will do well.”

“If I stay with Tohur and David and Rebecca I won’t starve!”

CHAPTER 27: Ali Miah

I am still known as “Genghis” across the airline despite my attempts to be nicer.

I am known across Beijing Airport as “Genghis”, too. There is nothing sensible that I can do about it.

“Genghis” carries more respect than “Pussy”.

I had nearly finished writing the research report when Shakoora and Abdullah arrived. I had booked First Class seats for them.

First Class is such a contrast to tourist class! They loved it.

They look well.

I had booked eight days off because this is as long as they are staying.

First we went to my apartment to dump their luggage and to freshen up and change. They admired my apartment.

We went out on the balcony to see what we could see. Beijing is a big city. We were looking towards the outskirts. We could see planes taking off from Beijing Airport.

We sat around talking for a couple of hours.

Shakoora and Abdullah told me that the “Terrible Tykes” Christmas Special was incredibly good.

The Special opened with some of the children including my sister Fulesa standing around saying that Colin’s character has been saying that he really can play the trombone.

Colin’s character had said that he is going to prove it today. He is not there, so he has bottled out.

Then the Byram Willerton Brass Band march in, playing “Oh Why Are We Waiting?”

Near the back of the band is Colin Donkin in band uniform. Colin winks at the camera as he marches in. When the first piece of music finishes Colin walks to the front. Colin holds the trombone every which way until eventually Colin is holding the trombone correctly. Then Linda Donkin comes forward and she drags Colin back to his correct place in the band.

Colin and the band play “Frosty The Snowman” with Colin playing the trombone solo. Then the band plays “Silent Night”.

Then all the children sing "Good King Wenceslas" with the band accompanying them.

Later on in the program there is banter about what the Max Hewson character will look like when he grows up. There is a barrage of rude suggestions.

The Max character says that he is going to look like Dee Lishus, except even better looking.

"In your dreams!" is the general chorus.

The screen goes slightly fuzzy to indicate a dream sequence. Dee Lishus walks in carrying a pair of accordions.

Dee gives an accordion to Max.

Not many people know that Dee Lishus or Max Hewson can play the accordion.

Their accordion duet was a great surprise and it went very well.

Dee sings "Your Loving Lips" with Max on piano.

Then Derek Donkin came on stage.

Dee and Derek sang a duet about an older man giving love advice to a younger man. That was good.

Dee and Kali Daar sang together. Not a romantic song because Kali is so young.

Carlo Stewart had commissioned a duet where a teenager is arguing with her father about whether she can go to a dance.

All the issues of what he had been doing at that age, double standards, love, anger, and tantrums.

Kali is a right little toad, stamping her foot, crossing her arms, and often with her back to Dee.

Max is still on the piano and Max accompanies.

When finally father says that the daughter may go to the dance Kali announces that she doesn't want to go.

What?

Kali had wished to establish the principle that she could go to the dance. She does not actually wish to go!

Then all four sang "I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas".

The program had a huge audience because of all the women who wished to see Dee Lishus.

The Daars told me that Sahid has another huge contract from the Byrams group, this time marketing a new metals stockist called "Ming's".

Seeing Shakoora again I am utterly sure that I wish to marry Shakoora. I must be careful not to rush her.

I have located and sampled some Islamic restaurants in Beijing so we took a taxi to one. I had ordered the meal and it was excellent.

We took a taxi home.

And so to bed!

In the morning I gave Shakoora and Abdullah a choice between the Beijing Aquarium, the Summer Palace, or fashion shopping. They decided on the Aquarium.

We took a taxi to Beijing Aquarium.

It was a crisp January day with virtually no wind. Beijing Aquarium is one of the largest Aquariums in the world. Beijing Zoo is very good, too, but we have all seen zoos before.

The Aquarium is a terrific tourist attraction.

After about twenty minutes Abdullah announced that his feet hurt. Abdullah is going to sit in a café for a while but we should walk around together.

We walked around the Aquarium together as a young couple getting to know each other better.

We started with talking about Shakoora's fashion business. Shakoora gave me a detailed account of the last year or so, including her trips to Paris and New York. I told Shakoora how my job is going. I left out all the Intelligence stuff. I might have to tell Shakoora about this later.

I told Shakoora that we are almost a year ahead of schedule. We are close to the point where I will be hiring and organising training for local Beijing employees.

Some Chinese aircraft mechanics for example will be sent to Seattle to qualify as Boeing aircraft mechanics. If they do not have good English they will need intensive English lessons first.

We invest quite a lot of money in each mechanic.

These guys must be appointed a year ahead of when they will be needed, so that they are trained and ready on time.

Six months before we open Tommy Sherson and his current operation will come under me.

Four months before the Hub opens we will need to beef up staffing levels and train check-in staff, caterers, baggage handlers, cleaners, security staff, and lots of other specialist staff. All these people have to be recruited and appointed and trained.

Arthur had built some additional time into his estimates because there are always problems. There have been fewer problems than usual.

On top of that we have made terrific progress. Arthur has told me not to get too cocky yet because there is still plenty of opportunity for things to go wrong.

We are so close now to opening that the airline has promoted me from Hub Manager Designate to Hub Manager.

“Is that more money?”

“Yes it is more money.

“But I am not spending any money.

“My flat and my maid are paid for and I have a huge expenses payment each month. I work fourteen hours a day five days a week and I study for my degree the other two days.

“I have no time to spend money.”

“What will happen to you if you decide to share your life with someone else?”

“That does worry me.

“If I found the right person, and if we married say over the summer, then I would have to work shorter hours.

“My boss says that by September I should be down to a ten hour day. As a manager I will probably never have less than a ten hour day. The Airport is only twenty minutes away, fortunately.

“In theory it will only be a five day week. Don't believe that. But there will be days when I do not go in at all.”

“So how do you see things working for your wife?”

“I do not see my wife sitting in the apartment all the time waiting for me to come home. Any woman intelligent enough and strong enough to marry me will not stand for that!”

Shakoora nodded.

“I would find someone to show my wife all the sights of Beijing, teach you Putonghua, and help you to set up a business.

“Paid work in China is very poorly paid unless you have special skills. Setting up your own business and employing people is the way to go.”

“If it is me whom you marry?”

“Yes.

“You are the person I wish to marry.”

So we kissed.

A gaggle of Chinese children started to laugh at us. Kissing in public is very unusual in China.

I said to them in Putonghua, a bit crossly,

“One day you will meet the person of your dreams.

“When you have your first kiss with them I hope that a bunch of rude children will come and spoil it for you.”

The children were mortified and apologetic.

To rub it in, their teacher scolded them. The whole group moved away.

“Tomorrow we will spend going round fashion stores. If you work on the internet tonight and you make a list of the addresses then we will plan a route. If we don't visit everywhere today then we will take a second day.”

Shakoora and I were holding hands. We found Abdullah.

Abdullah was speaking to some American girls who had recognised Abdullah from his television advertisements.

Abdullah showed no signs of wishing to be rescued.

We had a cup of tea at another table and we watched Abdullah interacting with the girls.

Abdullah demonstrated one handed press ups to the girls. Abdullah tried to teach each girl how to do the one armed press ups. Each girl collapsed giggling into Abdullah!

When they got to the point of exchanging e-mail addresses we let Abdullah know that we were there.

There was still an orgy of taking photos with Abdullah.

The girls were from Duluth.

I have no idea where Duluth is, except that it is somewhere in the United States.

Then we went home.

After about an hour Abdullah tactfully decided to go out for a walk to buy some milk, for which we were grateful.

The following day we went fashion shopping.

Shakoora was very happy.

Abdullah and I followed Shakoora around the shops.

Eventually we put Abdullah in a taxi to the apartment with all of the shopping so far.

Then Shakoora and I had lunch and we carried on shopping.

“What are you looking for?”

“If, and I say if, I come to Beijing, what work will I do? My experience and my qualifications are in the fashion industry.

“So I am looking at what is here. And I am looking for what is not here.

“To run a business in fashion you need something different or better to offer. I need to see what is already on offer here.”

Shakoora found a Fashion Exhibition that was on in Beijing. It had never occurred to me to look for one.

We spent two days going around that exhibition.

Abdullah usually gets tired after twenty minutes so the lucky man gets to sit and drink coffee while I am interpreting for Shakoora.

I noticed that Abdullah was not so tired that he could not speak with attractive young women.

At a fashion exhibition most of the young women are attractive.

Shakoora found about twenty exhibitors who offered Western wedding dresses and bridesmaids' dresses. They all had laptops at their stalls.

They looked at the Daar fashion web site. They all promised to send Shakoora quotations for manufacturing a container load of wedding dresses and bridesmaid dresses. As Shakoora filled a plastic bag with business cards and freebies she passed it to me to carry.

Shakoora was discussing possible permutations with the exhibitors. One is that the Chinese factories should make Daar dresses. The other is that Daar Fashions should market wedding dresses for Chinese manufacturers either using the Daar label or using the Chinese manufacturer's label.

Abdullah somehow found the strength to come to listen to these conversations. We took a flight over the Great Wall.

We visited a fashion college.

Abdullah says that the logical way forward is twofold. One is to source a lot of the current Daar dresses from suppliers in China.

The Daars could take maybe a dozen of the best Chinese dress ranges and buy those as well. The Daars would sell them as Daar dresses.

The second proposal is that Shakoora should set up a dress making business in Beijing to service the wealthy Chinese customers. Shakoora would run the business rather than doing the sewing. If Shakoora's business has spare capacity then Shakoora can send her excess to Doncaster for sale.

On the last evening of their stay I asked Shakoora to marry me and Shakoora agreed.

While Shakoora was in flight to China I had asked Tohur to ask Amina what Shakoora's ring size is. I had already chosen the diamond engagement ring and I just needed the ring size. When Shakoora agreed to marry me I asked Shakoora to close her eyes. I placed the ring on Shakoora's finger. Shakoora was very happy with the ring.

We told Abdullah of our engagement. Abdullah was congratulatory to both of us. The next day I saw them to their plane and then I had to go back to work!

CHAPTER 28: Amina Daar

We were so pleased and happy when Shakoora and Abdullah came back from China.

Shakoora's diamond engagement ring is beautiful!

Ali must have spent hours choosing it.

Finding somewhere to host a large wedding is in one sense easy because there are so few possible venues for over a thousand people.

There is a large hotel in Doncaster that is licensed for weddings. They are used to Muslim weddings. They take all the alcohol out of the bar in the wedding room.

The hotel organises the halal catering for the wedding reception. The hotel has everything very well organised. The hotel is not cheap, but the hotel takes much of the work off us.

Their first free Saturday is on the fifteenth of September so we have booked it. We have also booked the Registrar and the Imam.

The halal caterers have been told that among the guests will be three TV chefs including Tohur Miah. We have negotiated for the caterer's top rate of wedding food and drink.

The caterer had not tasted Robert Graham's punch before but he has agreed to provide Robert's punch at the reception.

Ali Miah flies to England on 3rd September. Ali comes to our Mosque in Doncaster on 7th and 14th September.

I showed Shakoora my early preparation for her wedding clothing.

My design is a cream silk costume with a gold embroidery shawl. I have had one of our workers hand-embroidering in real gold thread since Shakoora set off for China. Shakoora loves it.

Shakoora and I have done a lot of embracing and crying since Shakoora returned.

Shakoora does so want to be married with Ali Miah but Shakoora knows she will miss all of us hugely.

Ali says that Shakoora will be entitled to free first class air travel, and that Ali will happily pay for any of us to visit Ali and Shakoora in Beijing.

Abdullah and Sahid have been going through all the twenty quotations from suppliers in China to try to produce a short list to discuss.

Chinese suppliers are going to enter the market anyway.

With Sahid's marketing skills we could become the largest importer of Chinese wedding goods in the country. We can freeze out the competition if we are well established quickly.

We have enough capital. We do not need to borrow.

We had a telephone call from California.

Candice Gumm was the leading actress in the film that Max Hewson and Michelle Sayers were in. Shakoor met Candice in New York.

The reason for the call is that Candice is in difficulties. The Oscars are in late February. The woman who normally makes Candice's red carpet dresses has developed a degenerative disease. The woman had kept quiet about her medical condition for fear of losing business but she has now accepted that she must retire. Candice is left in the lurch.

The few wonderful dressmakers in California are already working flat out on dresses for the Oscars and simply cannot help Candice. Can we help?

We said "yes".

Shakoor really wants to be in England for a while. So I will fly to Los Angeles.

I will go to London to apply for an American visa.

Candice will telephone her Senator to ask him to make sure my visa application goes smoothly.

Tohur said that I was very welcome to stay with him overnight. Tohur will take the day off college to accompany me to the American Embassy.

In the morning we got up very early to be near the front of the queue at the American Embassy.

The Embassy experience was a bit odd. We had to queue to pass through a security tent. The security tent was largely staffed by British people, presumably so that if there were to be an explosion no-one important would be killed.

Tohur and I not being white we were naturally objects of suspicion.

Tohur is very muscular. Tohur's chest and arm and leg muscles bulge!

Tohur was asked to open his shirt front in case Tohur was wearing explosives around his chest. The security man was impressed by Tohur's physique.

"Do you do weights?"

"I only do half an hour of exercises each morning.

"I run over a hundred miles a week.

"I am a judo fighter so I fight about three nights a week and most weekends.

"I am fit."

"You sure are!"

After that we went to an immigration queue, what the Americans call a "line".

I had downloaded the forms at Tohur's house, and I had completed them already.

I handed in the forms and I paid the fee. Then I had to wait.

Presumably the Embassy workers were checking to see if I am on any lists of bad people.

It seemed an eternity before we were called forward.

I explained why I was going to America.

The lady clerk was a bit suspicious. I invited her to look at our Daar web site, and the photos of Shakoora and Emma Hewson and Karen Wilbey and young Michelle Sayer.

"Is that you?" pointing to Shakoora.

"No, she is my cousin.

"We look very similar."

"Why isn't your cousin going?"

"She is just back from China.

"She needs some time at home because she has just got engaged to a British man in China.

"His brother."

The woman looked at Tohur. If Tohur were taller Tohur would be a "hunk". The family joke is that Tohur looks more like a cuboid refrigerator.

"Are you Tohur Miah the chef?"

"Yes."

"What does your brother do in China?"

“He is supervising the building of an airport terminal.”

Her eyebrows rose.

“Wait here please.”

She was back in twenty minutes. She gave me my passport with the visa endorsed.

We went back to Tohur’s apartment. We collected my suitcase and we charged off to Heathrow hoping to catch any flight to the United States.

There were spaces in a plane to Los Angeles, but only in the First Class accommodation.

I travelled First Class for the first time in my life.

It was wonderful!

On the plane I was looking at photos of Candice Gumm on the Internet, looking to see what styles Candice looked best in.

Another passenger commented on what I was doing.

I explained that I have been called from England to make a red carpet dress for Candice.

By the time we landed in Los Angeles I had four orders to make dresses for fellow passengers. They all understood that Candice takes priority but they would love to have the same dress maker as Candice Gumm. I have all their email addresses.

When I am free I will contact them.

I had agreed with Tohur that he would book me into a good hotel in Los Angeles.

There would be a text message on my mobile telephone.

There was.

I took a taxi to the hotel.

When I saw the hotel building my first thought was to be grateful that Candice was paying all expenses!

I telephoned Candice to say I was at the hotel.

Candice’s butler said that I was to come to Candice’s house at five in the morning so Candice could see me before she started filming. He gave me the address.

I told the concierge the address. The concierge confirmed he would have a taxi ready for me at four in the morning. I will be called at a quarter past three!

I decided to dine in the hotel's dining room, and then to go to bed.

I had a quiet table. I placed my order.

Fish, of course.

To my surprise a white man of about thirty came over to me. He had spent a lot on his teeth.

He thought he was just wonderful.

"May I join you?"

"No.

"I wish to dine alone."

He sat down.

"If you do not go away I will ask the waiters to remove you."

"Don't be like that, sugar."

I stood up.

I said very loudly to a waiter.

"Could I have another table please? There is a piece of shit landed on this table."

Everyone turned to look. The man looked embarrassed.

I stalked away.

I am not normally confrontational, but that man had asked for it.

The waiter sat me at another table at the other end of the room. Meanwhile a man in a suit spoke to the man who had bothered me. They left the dining room together.

After some time the man in the suit came to speak to me.

"I am so sorry Ms Daar.

"I am the duty security manager. That man has been spoken to.

"He will not bother you again.

"Just to make sure that you are safe I would like to assign you one of my staff to look after you."

He nodded and a Mexican American woman came over.

"Hi, I am Juanita."

Juanita sat down and the duty security manager left us.

Juanita explained that the hotel has found from experience that once this kind of thing has happened it tends to happen again. So Juanita is here to make sure it does not happen again.

“It is just part of the cost of running a good hotel. Don’t worry about it.

“We will not be charging you for this security.”

Juanita said that I did not have to speak to Juanita unless I wished to.

After dinner we went up to my room.

I was told that from three in the morning there will be a security guard outside my door.

In the morning there was a smiling black man in a suit stood outside my door. He was roughly twice the height of Tohur and with much the same build.

He smiled, and he escorted me to my taxi. He told me that I would have a female taxi driver.

The taxi took me to Candice’s house and it dropped me outside.

Candice Gumm is a really lovely person.

From my researches on the plane I had seen that Candice seems to have no “pattern” to her clothing.

I showed Candice the Daar web site. I asked Candice what effect she wishes to achieve.

We discussed in general terms what Candice wishes. We agreed I would come tomorrow morning with some sketches.

Candice had to go off to filming.

Candice’s butler organised a taxi for me.

The taxi driver tried to come on to me.

I said,

“Look, mate. I am not in the least interested in you. Take me to the hotel or let me out, but fucking well leave me alone.”

Back at the hotel I told the concierge what had happened.

A bit later the duty security manager telephoned me.

Tomorrow morning my chauffeur both ways will be Juanita, using a hotel car.

I was happy with that.

I said that Juanita might have a two hour wait. He said that was fine.

I went back to bed.

When I woke I had room service bring food to my room.

I spent all day sketching on the computer. We always sketch on the computer these days, because it is so easy to incorporate alterations. Then from the computer we can prepare cutting instructions for the laser cutter or print off paper patterns.

I decided to go down to dinner.

My cheerful male security guard was in the hall near the reception desk. He quietly took up station in the dining room where he could observe me without being in any sense oppressive.

The guy who had sat at my table the previous evening was dining alone. There was a thick necked twenty plus stone obvious security man in a suit standing near him. The guy deliberately did not look at me.

After dinner I went to bed.

As I left my room just before four the next morning Juanita was outside my door ready to escort me. Juanita had satellite navigation and she just drove me to Candice's house.

Once again Candice and I had a terrific discussion. I had about fifteen different sketches that I had printed out at the hotel. We came down to three that met Candice's ideas.

I said to Candice that I felt guilty stopping in the expensive hotel at Candice's expense.

Apparently I am tax deductible, so don't worry about it!

Again Candice left before I did.

I came outside.

Juanita had not known whom I was visiting.

"Is that Candy Gumm?" she asked.

"I call her Candice, but yes."

"Wow!"

Juanita was really pleased.

Again I had some sleep, had some food from room service, and I made many more sketches firming up our discussions.

I had dinner in the restaurant. My guard was visible from where I sat, but he kept his distance.

In the lift going up one of the other guests commented that I appeared to have security. Am I famous?

I said "no."

The woman kept on and eventually the security man pressed the "stop" button on the lift. We stepped out, and we caught another lift.

The security man said something interesting. He said that because I am so beautiful, and I am so well dressed, people think that I must be either a movie star or a hooker.

I am not a movie star.

In England we have a sport called rugby. There is a position called "hooker" which is the man in the middle of the front row of the scrum. Hookers are usually tall and big and heavy. The big prop forwards on either side of the hooker are trying to propel him forwards. The hooker is trying to touch the ball with his feet and hook or kick the ball backwards behind him so that his side can gain possession of the ball. The security guard obviously did not mean this.

I am on the petite side of medium height and I am beautiful. I do not look like a rugby player.

"What is a "hooker"?" I asked.

The security guard was really embarrassed.

"I will get someone to explain it to you", he said.

About ten minutes later there was a knock on the door. It was a female security officer.

She explained what "hooker" means!

Then she gave me a cheap wedding ring.

She said that hookers do not wear wedding rings. I will look like a trophy wife, but that is better than being mistaken for a hooker.

The only down side is that should I meet a decent man he would be put off by the wedding ring.

“But don’t worry about that, honey. Most of the good looking men in Los Angeles are gay, anyway!”

“I have been here years, and I have met no decent single men. If you are only staying here a few weeks you have no chance! “

“Particularly if you hide in your hotel room all the time!”

I was surprised the effect that the wedding ring had. It really cut down interest in me. That was good.

The next morning after we had discussed designs a bit more Candice showed me the previous day’s newspaper.

The piece said that Candice had imported a beautiful mystery woman from Europe to make Candice’s dress.

I was appalled and apologetic. I had not thought that the people on the plane would talk to the press. I was so sorry!

Candice laughed.

Candice explained that in the run up to the Oscars the Los Angeles press and the show business columns are full of titbits about small issues like who is making dresses, who is escorting whom, and all the bitchy comments some people make. Candice had decided not to put out a press release about me but to leak the information to a show business journalist as an exclusive piece of news.

In today’s papers the journalists will be following up on their rivals’ exclusive.

Then tomorrow Candice’s journalist will publish information about the Daar fashion business.

We are down to two dresses that Candice loves. I am to make both dresses. After I have made the dresses we need to find accessories. First we will look to see what Candice already has that might be appropriate.

Juanita took me to the hotel where I had breakfast and then I went out looking for fabrics.

CHAPTER 29: Carlo Stuart

I have been in the music industry all my working life.

The work is almost always time limited because of the nature of the industry but I have hardly ever been unemployed.

I have performed classical music but most of my work has been in rock and pop and films and television.

I have no objection to folk music or to comic songs but I have never worked in those areas.

I just missed out on being chosen to join several rock and pop bands that later became famous.

Many of the guys who beat me to those jobs are dead now, so I am probably ahead of the game.

I used to use drugs a bit but apart from the occasional joint of cannabis I have not used drugs for years.

I have known Malc Dow for about twenty-five years. When I first met Malc we both had long hair!

A few years ago Malc asked me to become involved in a project he was setting up. About a year later Malc asked me to plan the music for the series that became "Terrible Tykes".

I now run the "Terrible Tykes" series.

We adults involved with the "Terrible Tykes" series are privileged to be involved in a series that has won industry awards and looks set to win even more industry awards.

The program revolves around the characters and the abilities of the children.

The scripts are terrific! Emily the chief script writer and I are a good team.

The "Tykes" are a great bunch of child musicians.

I cannot fault the "Tykes" musical competence or their work ethic. I really like these children. They are nice youngsters.

I like Mr Hewson.

Mr Hewson is rightly very protective of the children.

Mr Hewson intentionally keeps the "Tykes" performers ignorant about money.

Mr Hewson has told me to tell the children nothing about financial matters.

Mr Hewson has also told me never to give money or to lend money to the children. I am working with wholesome children who really have no idea that they are all millionaires or near millionaires.

Sometimes a child tells me in general conversation that they have spent their pocket money and so the child cannot purchase any sweets until the next pocket money pay day which is on Saturday.

I may not tell the child that he or she is rich.

Some of the older children have some idea that they probably have money, but how much money they might have is not something that they seem to think about. Mr Driburg is a brilliant agent for these children. The deals Mr Driburg negotiates are very well structured. Everybody wins.

I recognise that one day each of these children will be “too old” for Tykes. I am impressed and pleased that Tom Driburg has designed an exit strategy to help each child to build a career afterwards.

I give each child advice about the areas of music they are interested in developing as their future. My main reason is that I like these children and I feel that I should help them.

A secondary reason is that if someone else was their source of information about music it would reduce my influence with the children.

The “Charlotte and Sally Jackson Entertain” program on Easter Sunday was highly controversial. Charlotte said that she wanted the program to be “edgy”. It certainly was!

The filming took place in a London theatre on the afternoon of Good Friday. As a “thank you” gesture to the solicitors who had helped Charlotte in her libel case against the Sunday Scandal, the solicitors were allowed to run a charity event for the Save The Children Fund. Tickets were £150 a head. The theatre was packed! The lights were down.

Spotlights picked out Max Hewson and Dan Wilbey creeping furtively onto the stage. Dan Wilbey and Max were wearing ruffed shirts and bow ties. They both have fairly long blond hair. Both boys are beautiful.

Max looked around theatrically.

Max said,

“They’re not here yet.

“Go for it!”

Max sat at the piano and he began to play Mendelssohn’s “Oh For The Wings Of A Dove”.

Dan Wilbey has a tremendous voice. As the notes soared I felt a wave of emotion from the audience.

All the women just wanted to embrace Dan Wilbey because Dan is beautiful and Dan is a beautiful singer.

I have heard a recording of the famous rendition by Master Ernest Lough and I have to say that Dan’s performance was as good.

When they finished there was a standing ovation.

As the lights came up we realised that Charlotte was standing there.

Charlotte thanked Dan and Max.

“Dan will be back later!”

Max began playing “Jerusalem” which Charlotte sang. That was very good.

Max played “All things Bright and Beautiful” which Charlotte sang. Very good.

Charlotte played and sang her own composition “Bless These Nails”. It could stand beside the music that had already been played.

Abdullah came on and played “The Lord Loves Us” which Charlotte sang.

There was a conversation about whether Abdullah can sing.

Everyone recognised Abdullah from the advertisements but nobody had ever heard Abdullah sing.

Charlotte played “Old Man River”.

Abdullah’s deep bass voice sang the first few verses of “Old Man River”.

One of the verses of the song mentions drinking alcohol but Abdullah stopped singing before that verse was reached.

I have heard a recording of Paul Robeson singing “Old Man River”. Abdullah was as good or possibly better.

There was a second standing ovation.

Charlotte played and Abdullah sang “Close The Coalhouse Door”.

Abdullah played and Charlotte sang "Where have All The Flowers Gone?"

Then curtains rolled back and the audience saw huge photographs of women steelworkers taken many years ago.

Charlotte explained that during World War Two there was such a shortage of labour that women began working in the steel mills in the North of England.

While Charlotte was speaking Derek Donkin pushed a wheelchair onto the stage. In the wheelchair was an old lady.

Positioned in front of a huge photo of a woman in dungarees and a head scarf one could see that the old lady was the woman from the photograph!

Charlotte introduced Annie Smith. Annie confirmed that she was the woman in the photograph. The years working in the steelworks had been the best years of her life.

Annie explained that her husband had died in Burma during the War but she did not learn for definite that he was dead until a year after the War had ended.

There was silence across the entire theatre!

The youngsters sang "Women of Steel" by John Reilly. They sang it to Annie. It is a song about those Northern women steelworkers.

There was a standing ovation, the third of the evening.

As Annie was wheeled off there was huge applause for her.

There was an intermission.

During the intermission the auction for a signed and dated photo of Dan Wilbey reached £1,300!

One of Charlotte's satin Daar dresses raised £2,500.

Merchandise sales were well over £70,000. The kids and Dower Productions are giving whatever goods sell, to bump up the charity's income.

In the second half Sally Johnson sang "White Cliffs of Dover" and "Rule Britannia" with Gerald Butler accompanying.

Dan Wilbey came on to immediate applause.

Dan sang "Tipperary" and "Pack Up Your Troubles In Your Old Kit Bag" with Derek Donkin accompanying.

Derek played "And The Band Played Waltzing Matilda" with Abdullah singing.

Sally came on and sang "I Saw His Face". Virtually no-one knew this hymn but it went down well. Charlotte played.

Charlotte played and Sally sang "Two Little Boys".

Charlotte played and Sally sang a song that Sally and Charlotte had composed. "I Left My Leg in Helmand" on one level is a very patriotic song and on another level is an anti war song. No-one was quite sure which way Sally and Charlotte intended it. That was definitely "edgy".

The cast all came on for "God Save The Queen". The audience virtually all stood. The critics who had attended the recording all wrote about the show. Some critics argued about the show on television.

The controversies were over the use of "Close The Coal House Door" and the more obviously anti war songs.

"I Left My Leg In Helmand" had critics divided on whether it was "patriotic" or "anti war".

Annie Smith and the women steel workers were not known about in the South of England so that part of the show was a surprise. It was nice to see children bringing an old lady onto their program.

After all this publicity the viewing figures on Easter Sunday were enormous!

There were a lot of downloads.

The charity made huge amounts of money.

A company in the Cayman Islands had paid for the charity to advertise during each commercial break. The pleas for money came from Dennis Wilkins and Amy Waters. The charity gained tens of thousands of monthly payments.

One spin off from the program is that Sally Johnson now meets maimed former soldiers roughly once every six weeks. Sally has become a mascot for paraplegic veterans.

Sally is now very knowledgeable about these injuries and about prosthetics. Sally knows what prosthetics cost to make, what they are made from, and about the technological issues involved. It is odd to see a child so young interested in technical issues like this.

The media love showing Sally and the maimed soldiers because Sally is famous and pretty.

Sally is very clear when she speaks. Sally is so blunt and direct and passionate that Sally generates wonderful sound bites.

Sally never comments on the politics of the wars that caused the soldiers to lose limbs.

Abdullah is now having invitations to appear as a guest on television shows. Apart from being good looking and musical Abdullah has a very good sense of humour and Abdullah has terrific timing. Abdullah is a great guest. Abdullah is usually introduced as a man who has helped to make millions of women happy!

Derek Donkin's voice is breaking, so sadly we have had to drop Derek from "Terrible Tykes".

Derek is continuing to attend a Theatre School in London but now Derek attends at his own expense. On my calculations Derek is a millionaire at least, so "Terrible Tykes" has been good for Derek.

Derek still has no idea how wealthy he is.

We have been incredibly fortunate to secure the famous actress Candice Gumm for the Terrible Tykes Christmas Special this autumn. Apparently Dee Lishus had told Candice that the Terrible Tykes Christmas Special is great fun. Candice's agent contacted us!

Chapter 30: Mark Johnson

Once Mr Holland's bulldozer was working it speeded up the whole operation. There is still a huge amount of work to do, but with about a quarter of Dry Gulch helping on Thursdays it is amazing how much progress is being made. Mr Holland wants his bulldozer for another job so Mr Holland is working six days a week with the bulldozer to get the job finished.

We are in sight of the road being fixed. The six hour journey now takes three hours, which pleases the whole of Dry Gulch. We reckon we will have the journey down to two and a half hours when Mr Holland finishes using his bulldozer.

Kevin McPhail and his mother have joined the Church of Christ of Latter Day Saints. The family are still living in the house that the bank seized.

Mr Wade has bought the property from the bank. Mr Wade lets the McPhails live there.

Kevin now works for Mr Wade. Kevin travels to work on an old motorcycle that Mr Wade's son gave him. Kevin and I had to bring it back to life, which took Kevin most of three days.

The Mormon community are now all producing crops. Bernadette takes the crops to Wet Gulch for sale. Some crops go on the school bus to Wet Gulch on Sunday afternoons.

Mark's practical engineering skills have increased incredibly.

Mark is so pleased to have become a "hands on" engineer before he begins his engineering degree..

Mark and I are now visiting the outlying properties around Dry Gulch. It often takes us an entire day just to visit one or two ranches.

We were very surprised after visiting two of these ranches to come home and to find Elder Gaskell sat in the kitchen with Dinah.

Dinah had been crying. We were concerned!

"Mark and Mark. I don't understand this.

"I have never heard of this happening before.

"You have only a month to run on your stay here, but you have both been called away suddenly.

"Dark Mark, you are so close to the end of your missionary service that you are not going to be assigned again. You are going to help the Mission President in Las Vegas until your time is up.

"Fair Mark, you are ordered to report to President Sexton in Salt Lake City. Why, I don't know."

"Who is President Sexton, sir?"

"I have no idea.

"I looked him up this afternoon. All I can say is that President Sexton is one of our full time Presidents. He is not in Treasury or Buildings or Missionaries or Disaster

Relief or Publications or Doctrine. He is in Administration, the general running of the Mormon Church organisation.

“I can’t think of any reason why a President in Administration would require you.

“Obviously he does.

“So tomorrow morning you two and Dinah and the pickup will drive to Wet Gulch.”

“Dinah will drive it back.

“I want to thank you young men for your service. You have brought two families back to being active in the Church, and you have brought the McPhail family in as converts. You have had a tremendous effect on our Mormon community and on the whole of Dry Gulch.

“For you, Dark Mark, it is a happy final ending to your missionary service.

“For you, Fair Mark, it has been a wonderful beginning.

“You young men will always be welcome in Dry Gulch.

“If we had had more notice we would have organised a social event for everyone to say goodbye to you. All I can do is to shake your hands and thank you on behalf of everyone.”

Elder Gaskell left.

Dinah was in tears.

Mark and I were just stunned.

We know that if a Missionary misbehaves he might be sent home, but neither of us has misbehaved.

Mark and I have had no great disputes with each other. We have not upset any Mormons in Dry Gulch or anywhere else.

“So”, Mark said.

“It is nothing that either of us has done or not done.

“If we had done something wrong we would be chewed out by the Mission President in Las Vegas.

“If you had done something so terrible that you had to go to Salt Lake City to be chewed out, you would not be reporting to President Sexton because he is not in the Missionaries Department.

"I have only a month left, so I am on make-work with the Mission President until my time is up.

"I don't think it can relate to me.

"That really narrows it down!

"Is there anything that you would like to confess?"

I thought about that.

"I don't think it can be a death in the family, because Elder Gaskell or the Mission President would tell me.

"There would be no need for me to go to Salt Lake City.

"If there is anything special about me I would expect to report to a President in the Missionaries Department, not to President Sexton.

"I don't know."

I was really puzzled!

We set off at five.

Mark drove the pickup to Wet Gulch. Dinah will drive it back.

At Wet Gulch we were just in time to catch a bus to a city that has a coach service to Las Vegas.

And happily there is a coach that will get us to Las Vegas tonight!

Mark telephoned the Mission President. The Mission President said that he would book us both into the hotel tonight. We should take a taxi from the Las Vegas coach station when we arrive.

Over a late dinner at the hotel Mark and I told the Mission President about all our doings.

He was pleased with us for having canvassed the whole of Dry Gulch.

He was pleased that we have brought a new family to the Lord. And also that two families had become active Mormons again.

In respect of our other activities, had it occurred to us at any point to telephone our Mission President and to seek his guidance? When we told him that Dry Gulch is so remote that it does not have telephones or Internet he seemed surprised.

Prior to us improving the road it was a six hour road journey each way. Now it is a three hour road journey each way.

“Are you young men able to write?”

That was rough!

“Yes, sir.

“We just didn’t think to write, sir.

“Events were moving too fast.”

“What about repayment for the T joints?”

I told the Mission President that Dinah has my bank account details. As soon as the Dry Gulch Mormons have the money saved up they will pay me, I trust them. I am well enough off that the immediate repayment of five thousand dollars is not an issue for me.”

“That’s nice.”

Then the Mission President said,

“Elder Gaskell can write.”

Ouch!

“Elder Gaskell wrote to me once a week about you young men.”

Crikey! We had not known that!

“Elder Gaskell says that he and the Mormon community is very happy with you Elders.

“Elder Gaskell says that you Elders have raised the reputation of the Mormons in Dry Gulch.”

So why have we been recalled?

The Mission President said that Mark Johnson has been called to Salt Lake City. The instruction came from President Raymond who deals with Missionaries. Mark Walker had to be recalled because a Mormon Missionary cannot operate on his or her own.

There is no suggestion that Mark Johnson has been a bad boy. There is no information at all.

It is very unusual for a Missionary to be called to Salt Lake City. Presumably there is a need for me. I will know by this time tomorrow.

Does he know President Sexton? The Mission President said that he has met President Sexton but he has no idea what President Sexton does within the Mormon Church.

We agreed that I would fly to Salt Lake City in the morning. There is a flight at eleven. The Mission President booked a ticket and he paid for it. He also reimbursed us for our bus and coach fares.

We went to bed.

CHAPTER 31: Cecil Byram

Daniel reported back after his trip to Europe. He says that the new Ming's operation should be located in Belgium rather than in Germany.

Daniel says that in a time of crisis any German government, of whatever colour, will simply seize the stockpiles. In Belgium the Government is always a coalition government that finds it difficult to make decisions or to take decisive action.

Provided that Belgian industry will be supplied the Belgian government will probably not seize the stockpiles.

Daniel has located two possible sites in Belgium for the continental Ming's.

One is a quarry with only one road as access. Security is pretty easy. The other is a disused Army base on a main road with thick forest on three sides. It is a better location but we will have to build a wall along the road. The quarry has an alternative use as landfill and so it is more expensive.

Daniel says we should go with the former Army base.

Daniel says that we should not call the business "Ming's" because we might wish to sell it one day.

Daniel says that the planning authority for the Army base has agreed in principle to a Ming's type operation.

The solar power project presents a really interesting set of interconnected problems.

Almost all European mountains are in National Parks, so although they are cheap to buy there are restrictions on usage. Outside the National Parks there is a lot of

not very useful land that can be bought cheaply. It tends to be in smaller plots of maybe only a couple of square miles or so.

Daniel would like permission to commission the industrial research company to locate large pieces of land along existing power lines with a view to buying the land.

Daniel says that the big problem in obtaining planning permission is that an array of solar panels is a major change to the landscape. If instead of a solar panel we use a different collection technique that might be better.

It is possible to harvest sunlight with a material that looks like a long pile shaggy carpet. It can be coloured brown or any dark colour. It can be laid like a carpet down a mountain side or on any flat surface. The mountain does not look any different.

If we were to set up a factory to make this stuff we should pay a University to do the research to make sure we are at the cutting edge when we first manufacture. We should fund further research so that we are always cutting edge. We want patents! I said that I would think about this.

The Engineering Union Chief Steward of the old Byram's, Charlie Kent, has become the Convenor of the Engineering Union across our five factories. Charlie Kent is an intelligent guy.

My father tried to recruit Charlie into management, and I have tried a few times. Charlie won't play!

With being a Labour Councillor on Meldon Council and being a magistrate, and Charlie's trade union activities Charlie was always missing days from work.

When Charlie was elected Convenor for the Byrams Group Garth and I decided to make Convenor a secondment position.

Charlie is paid his normal basic pay but Charlie is not expected to work for Byrams. Should Charlie cease to be Convenor for the Engineering Union then Charlie will go back to being an ordinary factory worker.

Charlie made a request to Garth which Garth rightly forwarded to me.

The Engineering Union has half a dozen members who are approved by the Engineering Union to become Labour Parliamentary candidates. They are all

socialists of course. If any of them were to be selected for a Parliamentary seat the Engineering Union would give them a lot of help and as much funding as is legally possible.

Any other Engineering Union member who might be selected as a Labour candidate would have some help from the Union, but not on the same scale.

The General Secretary of the Engineering Union has noticed that the Industry Minister in any Government rarely stays there for more than fifteen months. Most of the people appointed to be Industry Minister have no knowledge of industry. The General Secretary thought it would be a good idea for the Engineering Union prospective MPs to learn more about the Engineering Industry. If appointed as Industry Minister they would be more effective than most new Industry Ministers. These guys have all worked on the shop floor but none of them have any management experience.

Julian Jenkins has been selected to be the candidate in one of those seats where Labour always wins over sixty per cent of the vote. Julian has the time to prepare himself for Parliament.

The request is for Julian to spend two weeks shadowing me, to understand how a manager or an entrepreneur thinks and operates.

My immediate thought was that I do not wish to help the Labour Party.

I regard the Labour Party as a well meaning incompetent ignorant shower. I do not wish to support them.

If one of the Labour Party prospective MPs wishes to be not quite so ignorant and a bit less incompetent I suppose I ought to applaud that.

Julian will be elected to Parliament at the next election for a certainty. When the political pendulum swings, and when the Labour Party gets in again, it would be good if Labour has an Industry Minister who is not totally incompetent.

I cannot remember the last time there was an Industry Minister of any party whom I could respect.

I usually do not even know their names!

So I agreed that Julian could spend time shadowing me.

I said to Daniel that I am taking him off being a research officer for me.

Daniel is to run the proposed solar power project, with me as his line manager. Daniel has to organise the research, set up a factory to make the new material, and purchase an enormous amount of land in maybe ten European Union countries. When Daniel needs help I will appoint people to help him.

I told Kelly to liaise with Daniel and to advertise for Daniel's successor.

Tony and I will appoint someone to set up Ming's in Belgium.

Julian Jenkins appeared.

We agreed the ground rules, which are that nothing Julian learns is fed to the engineering union without my approval.

So Julian shadowed me for two weeks.

Julian is much sharper than I am. I can see that Julian could become a leading politician in time and with good fortune.

Julian was surprised that I have given an inexperienced and relatively junior manager permission to spend six million pounds on research, fifteen million pounds on setting up a factory, and seventy million pounds to buy land.

I explained to Julian that I trust Daniel.

I have set the policy and I trust Daniel to follow my policy.

Julian is used to the normal time scales in a manufacturing company. Julian was quite taken aback by the time scales that I work to.

Julian had not realised that "Ming's" is part of the Byram Group.

My forty year time scale at Ming's for another "big hit" was very surprising to Julian.

Julian was fascinated by the way that Garth and I interact.

I said to Julian that it is stupid to have a dog and then to bark yourself. Garth is highly competent. I trust Garth. I give Garth the time Garth needs. Then I stand back and I let Garth do his job.

I will only become more involved if there is need.

Julian asked why I keep the three hundred million pounds out on short term loans.

Julian understood that opportunities arise where having the cash available instantly is a necessity. It is thinking on a significantly larger financial scale than Julian is used to.

Julian was interested in my cohort of home grown managers whom I am training up. Why do I not just go into the market place and buy a dozen MBA graduates? I explained that my cohort of Byrams' junior managers has been carefully selected. They have all worked for their present line managers for at least three years. They were known quantities before they were selected to join the cohort of trainees. The cohort all live near their respective factories. They have their social and family networks locally.

Provided that I treat these managers right they are unlikely to wish to leave Yorkshire. So Byrams will have most of them for life.

If I were to hire a dozen MBAs straight out of college it is unlikely that ten years later I would still have any of them with me.

Julian has never thought of these problems, or about the development of managers in industry.

It is the time scale on which I think that is so new to Julian.

Job security in manufacturing industry is precarious these days.

At Neverthorpe we have people who are fifth generation "Byrams". Over half the female apprentices are "Byrams". One apprentice is sixth generation "Byrams". "Byrams" is a label that people have put on themselves. All the workers that Julian spoke to at Neverthorpe said that they would encourage their children to work for Byrams.

Julian says that Byrams is like a time warp from the 1950s.

I told Julian that the Byram family has always taken relatively little money out of the business.

The business has always had good financial reserves. We have been insulated from the ups and downs of interest rates. We have never gone to outsiders for money. We have never had to lay off staff. We have not had short time during my working life.

We have a rolling program of upgrading our manufacturing plant.

The experience of the workers at Neverthorpe is that their jobs have always been safe.

"So if I were Industry Minister, what would you like me to do?"

“Ideally, nothing!

“Running a business is hard work. Anything you do is likely to make management’s work more difficult. So don’t do anything, please!

“The worst thing is half baked ideas.

“As an example, Garth has brought in female apprentices, and Garth expects to move to a forty per cent female workforce over the next ten years.

“Garth prepared the ground incredibly well. Next autumn we have female apprentices starting in each of our factories.

“Each factory has been prepared for the change. People know that Garth really will sack men who abuse our female apprentices.

“Because the men know that Garth really will sack abusive men, and because they know the Engineering Union sides with Garth on this issue, Garth will probably not have to sack anyone.

“But don’t go thinking that you can just legislate for 50% female apprentices. Many companies will be so afraid of sex discrimination cases that they will simply stop taking apprentices.

“That would be an own goal!

“For any Government I have two requests. One is to subsidise technical education including Engineering. The other is to increase the minimum wage.”

“The first one I understand.”

“Why does an employer wish to raise the minimum wage?”

“Increasing the minimum wage puts more money in the pockets of the poorest.

“They still cannot afford foreign holidays so they will spend their extra money in Britain. They will buy products. I make components that go into products. So I gain from an increase in the minimum wage.

“Yes I know the Engineering Union will ask for an increase in pay, but you will do that anyway!”

CHAPTER 32: Mark Johnson

Mark and the Mission President took me to the airport. They saw me collect my ticket and go to the Departure lounge. Then presumably they left the airport.

It was an unexciting flight.

I was sat with some Mormons who work in Las Vegas. They were just going home for a holiday.

I explained that I am a missionary.

For some reason I have been called to Salt Lake City.

They said that they had never heard of this happening before, but no doubt there is a reason.

I decided to have lunch at the Airport. It was the first good meal I have had since Provo that I have not had to cook for myself. Steak and chips is not difficult to cook but it is astonishing how many restaurants serve bad food.

Then I caught the bus to Salt Lake City.

Our headquarters building is signposted. I walked to our headquarters office building.

At Reception I introduced myself and I asked for President Sexton's office. They telephoned that office. I was given a Visitor pass and I was sent to the elevators. As the elevator opened on the fifth floor I was greeted by Elder George Smith or George FromIdaho as Don Hewson always calls him. We knew George when he was a Mormon missionary in Tryton about four years ago.

George took me to a little room.

George explained that I am Called for an unusual task. It is all George's doing.

George and The Lord. And Rebecca!

I will know from my time in China that religious proselytising for any religion is illegal in China. I know that.

I do not know how Elder George knows that I have been in China, but obviously Elder George does know.

The Mormons maintain a very small office in Beijing to administer to the relatively few Chinese Mormons and the relatively few non-Chinese Mormons in China. I know that.

It is very important to our Church that our office in China should continue to function.

The man who is operating as Administrator (not Bishop or Stake President) does it on the side of his main job. His wife does not work, so she sits in the Mormon office to answer the telephone. If there are any telephone queries she emails her husband and he emails back to her telling her what to answer. She has a degree in Chinese and she spends her time writing academic articles about Chinese literature and culture.

The Administrator's company has promoted him to Chicago at very short notice. He has to go to Chicago at the end of this month. His wife will return to the United States with him.

So the Mormons had only twelve days to find someone to replace the Administrator.

The Mormons had found nobody suitable.

It cannot be a Chinese Mormon because the person and his family would come under pressure from the Chinese authorities.

It has to be a Putonghua speaker. If a Chinese Government official contacts the Mormon office he expects to converse in Putonghua.

Very few Mormons have excellent Putonghua, even those working in Beijing.

Some competent and capable Putonghua speaking Mormons were killed in the tsunami.

Very few Mormon women speak Putonghua.

Of the Mormons currently in China there is nobody who is appropriate to mind the office, let alone to be an Administrator.

We Mormons must continue to maintain a presence in Beijing.

The Administrator currently in post says that he is prepared to continue as a remote Administrator, but we still need a Putonghua speaking body to sit in the office. Once in a blue moon that person may need to attend a function or make some telephone calls to help a Mormon in distress. Or perhaps he might be called upon to administer the Administration to the Sick.

Elder George Smith is working as an intern in President Sexton's office.

Among many other tasks President Sexton has oversight of the Chinese office.

President Sexton and his office thought that they knew every non-Chinese

Putonghua speaker there is in the Church. It is very unlikely that there will be a non-Chinese Putonghua speaker that they do not know about.

It never occurred to them to look at the missionaries, because the missionaries are too young to become Administrators.

So they chewed around ideas. There are retired Mormons who could be asked to go over there, but there is no way that any of them can learn Putonghua in the time available.

President Sexton said that it was time to go home. Would everyone pray tonight please, and perhaps the answer would be forthcoming in the morning.

When George arrived home George looked at his e-mails as usual. There was an e-mail from my sister Rebecca. Rebecca was getting in touch with George after about two years of silence.

Rebecca gave George a detailed account of her missionary service and of her activities since her return. Then Rebecca worked down the family in order, so the next person was me, coming in half way down page three.

Rebecca told George about me living in China for three months and me speaking Putonghua well enough to supervise and to teach workers. Rebecca said that I can read and write Putonghua!

I am a missionary in Nevada.

George printed off Rebecca's e-mail. George highlighted the relevant part.

The next morning President Sexton asked if anyone had had an answer to their prayers.

Nobody spoke.

There was a silence.

George explained that when he arrived home last night he had opened an e-mail from a young woman whom George had met when he was a missionary in England. It was the first that George had heard from any of us in Tryton in more than two years.

Other than George, no-one in the room had ever heard of Tryton.

Then George read the highlighted passage out loud, President Sexton took the email from George. President Sexton read the highlighted passage, too.

“A missionary?

“He has lived in China and he has good Putonghua. And he has eighteen months to serve!

“This e-mail was sent to you yesterday.

“This e-mail was sent within minutes of my asking everyone to pray tonight and to see if the Lord would send us an answer.

“I think the timing of this email has to be The Lord giving us a steer!

“George. I am going to walk along to President Raymond. I will explain how we are fixed.

“Quite a while later, President Sexton came back.

“President Sexton had a copy of your application to be a missionary, and a copy of your tithing records.

“President Sexton asked me,

“George, Is this young man for real?

“Why, sir?

“President Sexton showed me the documents.

“I read them.

“You are very impressive on paper, Mark. Mother Theresa meets Rambo and then becomes Apprentice of the Year!

“I said to President Sexton,

“Mark has said this.

“Bishop Singleton has endorsed it.

“Mark’s tithing records confirm some of what Mark says.

“I knew Mark as a Teacher. He was a very solid young man then.

“You may remember that Mark met President Henderson a few years ago after catching a criminal in a mall in Florida. He is the teenager who said “a little righteous violence is sometimes necessary”.

“President Sexton nodded.

“If Mark Johnson has said all this in his application then it will be true.

“Mark Johnson seems to be very impressive. Can he really work as an office boy?

"I have not seen Mark since he came to Salt Lake City three years ago. I think we have to ask him.

"So here you are."

I sat for a bit. I looked at George but mainly I looked inwardly.

"This is a lot to take in."

"Yes it is.

"That is why President Sexton decided that I should brief you before you see him."

"I have committed to giving two years service to the Church. Everyone does it as a missionary. I will be doing a period where I am not an active missionary."

I was quiet for a minute, gathering my thoughts.

"How long will you wish me to serve in Beijing?"

"We don't know. Certainly three months. Probably longer. You will be doing good service for the Church. It is God's work."

George said,

"It is God's will."

"We really do think that the Lord has Called you."

"It is not what I expected to do. If this service is the best service I can do for the Church, then that is it."

I thought my time as a missionary would be interesting. How little I knew!

After a break for me to pray alone George took me along to President Sexton's office. There was just President Sexton and me.

Bishop Ted Singleton has presence. Stake President David Swift is impressive.

President Sexton is in a different league.

President Sexton is very impressive and he is incredibly focussed.

"So you speak Putonghua?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you speak it well?"

"Well enough to teach and supervise workers, sir. I can read the Hanzi script."

"George has explained what is involved?"

"Yes, sir, but I would prefer to hear it from you."

President Sexton explained again. My job title will be “Assistant Administrator” rather than “office boy”.

“You want me to twiddle my thumbs, water the plants, and answer the phone three times a day?”

“Yes.”

“And you want me to not do anything interesting?”

“Yes.

“That is very important.

“I know you expected to be a missionary but this transfer has President Raymond’s blessing. Your service is important to the Church.

“We need the office manned from nine until five Monday to Friday. And obviously you will go to services on Sunday mornings and activities on Sunday afternoons. In fact you will go to all Mormon events.

“You would do, anyway. But if you do not go I will have complaints!

“You will also be on call for emergencies at all times. There rarely are any emergencies.”

“This really is not what I expected.

“It certainly isn’t what I want.”

President Sexton was a bit sharp.

“You do not go on missionary service to do what you want.

“You go on missionary service to serve The Lord.

“The Lord wants you in Beijing!”

I was not in a position to argue with either President Sexton or with The Lord.

President Sexton said,

“I need that office manned by a Putonghua speaker who is intelligent and competent.

“The Lord in His Wisdom has selected you.”

I have the impression that without the guidance of The Lord President Sexton might not have selected me.

Perhaps I am being over sensitive.

Or maybe I am being too self critical again. Can I be self critical about being self critical? You go round and round in circles if you do that.

“You are on missionary service.

“I have to find something missionary related that you can do in the office. The only thing I can think of at the moment is Indexing.”

Indexing is a major project that many of us Mormons are involved in.

We are a convert Church. Once we are members of the Church we can baptise deceased relations, even those who perhaps died before the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints was founded. To do that each of us needs to research our family tree.

We have hundreds of millions of entries of births deaths and marriages in our record systems.

If I know that Bert Johnson was born in Scunthorpe in 1899 I can look him up on our existing systems and I can print out a copy of his birth certificate.

If I know that Bert Johnson was born in England around 1900 then finding a record of his birth is very difficult. There is no way that I can list the Albert Johnsons, Herbert Johnsons, and Bert Johnsons born five years either side of 1900. If I could, then I could begin to eliminate them by looking at census records for 1901 and 1911.

If I know that Bert had an older sister Mary then the search process and the elimination process becomes much easier.

The project is to create a Master Index from which I may enter the parameters I choose, be it “Great Britain”, “England”, “Lincolnshire” or “Scunthorpe”, and whatever range of years I choose. I will be able to print out lists for Bert, Herbert, and Albert.

I will be able to look for “Mary and Bert”, “Mary and Herbert” and so forth.

Then I can view census records and death records for all these names and use them to eliminate some of my list.

To compile the Master Index somebody has to transcribe the hundreds of millions of names, and the accompanying information, and to enter all this information into the new system. It is careful work, and you have to keep your wits about you.

It is all done online.

It is exactly the kind of job one can do sat at a desk or in an armchair.

For an active young man like me Indexing will be like Purgatory.

We Mormons do not believe in Purgatory. We believe in the Spirit World where no-one has been judged yet. There is a process of education until one is finally judged. In Purgatory, which the Catholics believe in, one will eventually go to Heaven but first one is punished for one's sins. Or to Hell, in which case it is punishment everlasting.

Indexing will be like Purgatory for months and months! Possibly for eighteen months!

"You cannot be a missionary on your own. I will ask President Raymond to find a missionary to accompany you."

"I have a friend who was posted to Beijing in September. He should have a spare bedroom in his apartment. Is it acceptable to you if we stay with him?"

"Is he a Mormon?"

"No, sir.

"He is a Muslim."

President Sexton's eyebrows shot up.

After a short silence,

"I have no problem with that.

"You wrote a piece "Living with Muslims". Is he one of them?"

"No, sir. That was a different family. But he and I and his brother shared a bedroom for the last two years before I went on missionary service."

"I was going to say that we will put you up at a cheapish hotel and then see if anyone in the Mormon community can take you in or find you an apartment. But if you have a friend to stay with, that's fine in the circumstances.

"I hope it won't be for long."

I sent Ali Miah an email.

Ali replied that he has two spare bedrooms. I and another missionary are very welcome.

Ali is getting decorators in before he marries. Ali is getting married in September so we will have to move out in early August.

Ali has not told me who he is marrying!

Typical Ali!

And maybe I do not know the person anyway. The last I knew George Arron had kicked Ali into touch. That was more than a year ago.

I had to go to Los Angeles to apply for a visa. It took about a week to process.

I was off to China again!

By then Paul Winfield had been selected to accompany me. Paul will join me in Beijing as soon as his visa comes through. Beijing will be Paul's final placement as a missionary.

I was introduced to Paul. Paul is a skinny little guy who was born into the Mormon faith like me. Paul is a computer nerd and a guitarist.

"What did you do to be selected for Beijing?"

"I have spent eighteen months as a Mormon missionary here in California without once coming anywhere near finding a convert.

"I think President Raymond decided that he could cope with the loss of my services."

Poor Paul!

I know how desperate Rebecca was after only five months without a single prospect.

"The real reason is that I have bad legs.

"It has been tough serving as a missionary.

"A sedentary job is ideal for me."

Paul could have used his bad legs as a reason why he could not perform missionary service. Nobody would have criticised Paul.

Knowing that he would be in pain every day Paul had still insisted on serving as a missionary.

That takes a lot of courage. It takes a lot of commitment.

Paul Winfield has my respect already and I barely know him.

Paul is senior to me so Paul will be the Assistant Administrator for China. I am demoted to Deputy Assistant Administrator for China. I will wash the cups and water the plants while Paul supervises me.

Paul and I will administer the Beijing Mormon community meetings on Sunday, setting out chairs and putting them away again.

There are two men who run the Beijing congregation with their wives. Everyone else is happy to let them.

The obvious question is why neither of these men are the Administrator?

Neither couple has much Putonghua. One man never did his missionary service because he is an adult convert. The other had a drink problem a few years ago. He is still rebuilding his self respect and his respect in the Mormon community. Just at the moment neither of them is right for the Administrator job.

There is nothing wrong with the other people but for a job like Administrator in Beijing you need somebody better than “nothing wrong”. So our Administrator is in Chicago while President Sexton finds someone suitable to take up the position. Normally Paul and I would travel together but President Sexton needs me in Beijing immediately so there is continuity of operation.

Missionaries should never operate solo, but this situation is only for a few days until Paul arrives.

CHAPTER 33: Amina Daar

I spoke to the hotel receptionist. He telephoned around and he found out where I should go to look for fabrics, threads and trimmings. I took a taxi.

In Los Angeles everything is spread out over a big distance. Traffic is horrible and parking is difficult. It is like London with sunshine and without such good public transport. So I take taxis.

I was not that impressed with the range of fabrics on offer. Although Los Angeles is a major city in America the range of fabrics on offer is no better than in Bradford.

After six hours of shopping it was time to sit down.

I found a coffee shop. The coffee shop was crowded so I had to sit at a table with a young man who looked like a student. He smiled when I asked to sit at his table.

He is a student. His name is Abdul.

Abdul is about three years older than me. I think Abdul is attractive.

Abdul is polite and respectful and friendly.

Abdul is studying computer science at University of California Los Angeles. This naturally led on to discussing Sahid and looking at the web sites that Sahid manages.

Of course that led on to what I do and why I am in Los Angeles.

Abdul asked what my husband does.

I smiled.

I explained why I wear a wedding ring.

Abdul was impressed.

“Well, I am not hitting on you, but would you like to see the Lebanese restaurant my family runs?”

“If I collect you one evening we could enjoy a meal.

“My family think I am gay. They would be so pleased to see me with a young woman.”

“Are you gay?”

“No. I am just slow with women as a good Muslim should be.”

“Is that genuine or is that a “come on” line?”

“It works well either way.”

We both smiled. Abdul smiles with his eyes.

I do, too.

I have spent hours with Shakoora smiling into mirrors with our eyes.

“I understand computers very well but I just do not understand women.”

“The important thing to remember is that we do not have an “undo” button or an “escape” button.”

Abdul nodded.

“You have to press the right buttons every time.

“So far you have.”

Abdul smiled.

Abdul is a good looking young man. Abdul is not effeminate. I can see how Abdul being smooth might be perceived as gay, particularly in Los Angeles.

We agreed that the following evening Abdul will collect me from the hotel at eight.

Abdul had to go home because he is cheffing in the family restaurant tonight. Abdul gave me a card for his restaurant.

I had to get back to shopping.

The following day I was up early again to see Candice. I had eight swatches of cloth to show Candice. I spent eight hours to find these eight swatches!

Candice liked one swatch. We decided to make one dress in this swatch. I will have to find more swatches!

So that day was hunting for fabrics. I shopped for eight hours and I found three swatches.

Then I went back to the hotel.

I took off the wedding ring.

I had a shower and I dressed to go out. I always dress well because really I am an advertisement for our own product.

The big security guard smiled at me appreciatively.

“Who is the lucky fella?”

I told him about Abdul.

He looked at the card. He photocopied the card and he checked from the telephone book that the restaurant exists.

He said that he would have the doorman record the vehicle licence plate number.

He gave me a small aerosol of incapacitating spray to use if Abdul turned out not to be safe.

Abdul appeared to collect me. I saw the security guard discreetly photograph Abdul.

I had thought that Don Hewson was paranoid about his girls!

Abdul’s family restaurant is a small, friendly, check tablecloth restaurant. It serves wine and beer because this is California.

I ended up in the kitchen making the non alcoholic punch that Robert Graham discovered. The “Amina Non-alcoholic Punch” went straight on their menu.

Abdul and I are interested in each other.

I can tell that Abdul's mother approves of me.

Abdul said that I am the first girl whom Abdul has brought home since Abdul was eight years old. Even allowing for that, Abdul's mother approves of me.

Abdul took me back to the hotel. Abdul was perfectly behaved. We did not kiss. We do like each other.

In the morning I was up early again. Candice liked two of the swatches. Candice decided that I would make three dresses instead of two. We decided which dress would be made out of which swatch.

When I returned to the hotel I rushed straight out and I bought the fabrics and the threads that I would need.

The hotel had organised for me to use the facilities of a clothing factory that is owned by a relative of a member of the kitchen staff.

I cut the fabric for all three dresses on the factory's laser cutter.

I started working on the first dress.

In the evening I took Abdul out.

There is a Somali restaurant in Los Angeles. I was pleased that Abdul will not drink products made by the [name deleted] company because of their ethics. I won't either.

We had fruit juices that were very good.

Abdul and I like each other enough to talk about our futures.

Abdul says that he is pleased that I am forging a career. Would I like to live in Los Angeles?

I said that with Shakoora going off to Beijing in September it would be unfair on Mina to ask her to run the business.

For the moment I have to live in Doncaster.

When Abdul graduates he intends to work in Silicon Valley. Abdul has completed an internship with a company there and Abdul has another lined up.

Would Sahid like to work in Silicon Valley?

I said that Sahid is already earning good money in England. But I will ask Sahid.

Abdul says that his family approve of me.

My non-alcoholic punch is selling well already.

The family are happy to see Abdul looking happy.

I said that I am enjoying California more for having met Abdul.

I have responsibilities in England, particularly my father, the family, and the business. I am here until after the Oscars and then I must go home.

The clothing factory was closed at the weekend. I borrowed a sewing machine from the hotel and I worked long hours on the dresses both Saturday and Sunday. Abdul is working Friday night and Saturday night so I had two nights off. I stopped machine sewing at nine each night.

On Sunday evenings the Lebanese restaurant is closed.

I was invited to the regular family meal on Sunday night.

Ahmed is the eldest in the family. Like me Abdul has gorgeous younger brothers and very pretty sisters.

For the family meal there were aunts and uncles and cousins. The whole family were understandably curious about me.

I could tell that the family are approving.

I approve of Abdul's family.

Would I marry Abdul? I need to know Abdul better.

So far I like what I see.

CHAPTER 34: Mark Johnson

Ali Miah met me at Beijing Airport.

Ali's flat is terrific! Each of the bedrooms is as big as a Hewson bedroom.

I explained that Paul and I are required to share a bedroom.

Ali and I moved one of the beds from one spare bedroom into the other. Sorted!

Ali took me to a restaurant for a meal. The restaurant is in the front room of someone's apartment! The chef is better than Mrs Shah who is a really terrific chef.

So who is Ali Miah going to marry?

Shakoora Daar is an impressive young woman. Congratulations to both of them!

Ali flies to England in early September so he needs us out in August to have the apartment decorated before Ali goes to England.

Ali says that if I cook for him most nights Ali will not bother to charge me rent or board. That is a good deal because as Mormon missionaries I and my partner will normally cook for ourselves anyway.

Ali had kindly bought me a Chinese mobile phone. Ali had put some money on the telephone for me.

Ali gave me some Chinese notes and coins.

In the morning Ali guided me on the Beijing buses to the Mormon Administrator's office.

Mrs Administrator was there. We three had a brief conversation and then Ali went off to work.

Mrs Administrator is called Olivia Warrenner. Her husband Chuck Warrenner is the Administrator. Olivia says that most of the telephone calls and faxes are routine. The importance of Olivia's job is that once in a blue moon an urgent response is needed. Then Olivia has to decide whether to telephone her husband or what. For example there had been a situation in Shanghai before the tsunami where a visiting Mormon businessman needed Administration For The Sick. Mrs Warrenner telephoned a Mormon priest in Shanghai who performed the Administration.

That had been the last emergency, and that was two years ago now.

Mrs Warrenner remembered my query from Shanghai about the little girl.

I confirmed that I had followed Mr Warrenner's instructions.

Mrs Warrenner introduced me around the building including our immediate neighbours and the building caretaker.

Then we went through Mrs Warrenner's filing cabinet and systems. That took maybe an hour.

Mrs Warrenner is leaving me a Book of Mormon translated into Chinese. I can read Hanzi script but by the time I can read the Book of Mormon in Chinese I will be an even better reader!

There is also a stack of Mormon literature in Chinese, and a shelf of books in Chinese and a bilingual dictionary.

I did not tell Mrs Warrenner that I only read in English when I have to!

My most important job is to make sure that no Mormon attempts to spread our religion in China.

Every Mormon I meet must be given the hard word immediately.

There are half a dozen hotels in Beijing where probably ninety per cent of the visiting Mormons stay. I need to know where those hotels are.

Our Sunday gatherings are at the Moroni Hotel. That is not the hotel's real name but it is a kind of code.

Only a Mormon is likely to have heard of the Angel Moroni. So I can have a sign in English at the tourist hotels that says

“Good service at the Angel Moroni Hotel on Sundays. Phone xxxxx for details”

Most Mormons who travel to China have our contact details. Those who are in Beijing on a Sunday will wish to attend a service. All I have to do when they telephone is to check that they are Mormons and then tell them when and where we meet.

Mrs Warrenner and her husband are flying to Chicago tomorrow afternoon, so I have arrived just in time. We will be having dinner together at a hotel. I will meet Chuck Warrenner.

Over the afternoon Olivia Warrenner briefed me about the current Mormon congregation.

Beijing is often regarded as a hardship post so people with children tend to leave them at home with granny. There are a few older couples where there are no children or where the children are grown up and independent. The Warrenners have adult children and a few grandchildren, but none in China.

The Mormon women are often bored. They are prohibited from doing good works because the Chinese government might view good works as attempting to spread the Mormon religion.

Once a week the women come to the office for Putonghua classes – they are that bored! We have a Chinese female teacher who comes in to teach. She is not a Mormon.

That night Chuck briefed me in detail about the delicate position of the Mormon Church in China.

There is no formal agreement governing us being in China. Informally, we may maintain an office provided that we are seen to prevent any of our people trying to spread our religion.

We have to accept segregation between ethnic Chinese Mormons and other Mormons.

All our telephones and emails are probably tapped from time to time.

When the tsunami struck the Mormon relief organisation sent supplies to China.

That was noted favourably by the Chinese government.

The Chinese accepted only a handful of our people, though. The relief specialists have long since gone back to the United States.

I was ceremoniously given the Mormon telephone. It has to be kept fully charged.

The reason there is so much money on the telephone is so one can make lengthy long distance telephone calls should there be need.

I wished the Warreners well in Chicago. I have their contact details.

I took a taxi home.

Ali had already gone to bed.

In the morning I prayed and exercised and showered and dressed. I made breakfast for both of us. It was only cereal and hot chocolate.

Then I caught a bus towards the city centre. I got off at the right stop, and I walked about a quarter of a mile to the office.

CHAPTER 35: Don Hewson

I sat down with Derek Donkin and Linda Donkin and Elizabeth Mountford to talk about Derek's financial situation.

Derek's money is tied up until Derek is eighteen years old. Derek's capital is invested in a dozen leading UK companies. I reinvest the dividends as they come in.

None of Derek's companies are involved with alcohol or with other controversial activities.

Derek's largest source of income was the "Terrible Tykes" Christmas goods, followed by the supermarket clothing money.

Derek's acting fees were more than a High School Head Teacher earns, so they were not insignificant. They were dwarfed by the Christmas Goods and the supermarket monies.

The acting fees were followed by Derek's downloads, and then followed by Derek's share of the income from Sahid's web site.

Derek had to pay tax on his income when Derek received it.

Derek had to pay board while he was living with me because social services require children who are earning a lot of money to pay board.

Still, Derek has well over one million pounds in capital.

Derek has left "Terrible Tykes" so all that income has stopped. Derek's after tax income from investments is over a hundred and ten thousand pounds a year.

Derek beseeched me to continue to mind his money until Derek is old enough to manage it.

Granny Donkin is quite well off. Granny is happy to support Deborah and the Donkin children. The only money that Derek needs at the moment is the fees for the theatre school in London.

Linda Donkin is enjoying her catering course. There are always catering jobs available in London so Linda is happy about her future. Linda is seeing a young man but Linda says that it is not a serious relationship yet.

Colin Donkin and Eric play computer warfare games together online, and they chat on Skype every weekend.

Eric is still doing ballroom dancing and Eric spends a lot of time at our house.

Eric is going to visit Colin in London.

Tohur Miah still takes Derek and Colin to Mosque once a week.

Both boys are still doing their religious lessons that are then turned into podcasts.

Both boys are doing well at their theatre school in London.

As Derek and Colin have parts in the most popular program on children's TV they have great respect among the other pupils.

Derek is now retired from "Tykes" but Derek still has great respect for having been in "Tykes". Derek being repeatedly shortlisted for "Best Actor" is also a tremendous plus for him.

Sahid had a great idea.

Sahid says that there are many people who would like to know more about Islam. There are many people who cannot afford a madressa (religious school) for their children, or who live too far from a madressa.

Sahid set up a new web site that just contains the podcasts of Derek and Colin. Thousands of people watch the podcasts every week. Sahid allows advertisements from religious bookshops. Sahid says that it would not be right for Sahid to make a personal profit from this web site. Once a quarter Sahid donates the profits to his local mosque.

Georgina Donkin is enjoying "Terrible Tykes".

Little Annie Donkin is learning piano and she is having singing lessons in hopes of eventually joining the program.

We see Tohur once every few weeks. Tohur visits the younger Miahs and he checks in with me.

Tohur will turn eighteen in late May. Tohur will take over responsibility for his personal finances when he becomes an adult.

Tohur is clear that he does not wish the younger Miah children to join him in London. Tohur says that London is no place to bring up children.

Tohur says that everyone is very pleased that Shakoora Daar and Ali are to marry. I am pleased. They are both great people.

The Daar family are fine.

Shakoora is running the clothing business.

Amina is in Los Angeles making a dress for the actress Candice Gumm to wear at the Oscars ceremony.

Abdullah sits his A levels this year.

Mina sits her GCSEs.

Amal still enjoys his dancing.

Amal had a playground issue about ballroom dancing being an indicator of homosexuality in males. Amal let the other lad hit him first.

Amal gave the lad a thorough beating culminating in an unnecessary special delivery.

Amal says that the lads in his Doncaster inner city high school are much tougher than the boys in Tryton. Amal says that it was necessary for Amal to inflict very significant damage upon his opponent to deter further ignoramuses.

The wording that Amal used was “ignorant fuckers”.

Amal was suspended from high school for a week.

Sahid can afford to send Amal to a fee paying school.

Amal says that he will see how things go. So far there is no sign that any of the other lads in the school wishes to have a bad beating.

The lad whom Amal beat up is keeping his distance from Amal.

Rebecca Johnson is still visiting London virtually every weekend.

Mark says that he is now manning the Mormons’ Beijing office and lodging with Ali Miah. This is only temporary apparently until the Mormons can find a more mature Putonghua speaker to take charge in Beijing. Then Mark will be back to Nevada to complete his time as a missionary.

Charlotte and Mr Driburg’s team are working with the Mormons to maximise the value to the Mormons of Charlotte’s time on missionary service. Large arenas have been booked in a dozen large American cities, South America, South Africa, and Australia and New Zealand.

Tom Driburg is not charging for his time on this.

Tom’s view is that with a client like Charlotte Johnson one is in a process of swings and roundabouts. Some things one does without payment.

The plan is that Charlotte will work with many children groups and amateur choirs as well as with professional musicians.

Charlotte will have a significant number of TV and radio interviews at each location mentioning that Charlotte is a Mormon and how this tour is a missionary activity. It works out at roughly a concert a month.

Charlotte cannot apply to perform missionary service yet because she is too young. The Mormons have accepted that Charlotte will perform her missionary service in this manner.

Sally Johnson is visiting her maimed ex servicemen. Sally has booked to spend a week over the summer working in a small factory in London that makes

prosthetics. Sally is thinking that she may do this work when she grows up. Sally will stay in Tohur and David's house with Rebecca looking after her.

Andrew Johnson is bouncing and happy. After guitar, bagpipes, and piano Andrew is currently learning the accordion.

Mike Johnson is happy. We are giving Mike piano lessons and singing lessons.

Freda Graham is happy and well. Freda attracts teenage lads because Freda has a gorgeous personality and Freda is very attractive.

Freda says that she has no boyfriend because apart from Mark Johnson and Jacob Grundy Freda has not met a lad worthy of Freda's interest. Freda has GCSEs this summer.

Children change in appearance over time. Freda still does her sketches of the "Terrible Tykes" cast every three months. Freda is building up a nice nest egg. It has been agreed that in a couple of years Dower Productions will publish a book of Freda's sketches as Christmas goods.

Freda does not intend a career as a professional illustrator.

Robert Graham is attracting young ladies.

Robert is good looking, very fit, immensely strong, and hugely positive. Robert spends three hours every night exercising in the gym.

Stoke Mandeville Hospital is pleased with Robert.

Robert will probably have another operation in July.

Robert thinks that July is the right time to stand down from his cookery slot, before he is fired for being too old.

Mr Vincent has agreed.

Robert and Mr Driburg took Mr Vincent some samples of Sally's cooking. Mr Vincent was impressed.

Mr Vincent was taken aback when he learned who the proposed new chef is.

Mr Vincent asked for time to think.

We are waiting on Mr Vincent thinking!

Margaret Graham is happy. Margaret enjoys her work as a "Tyke".

Simeon Graham is bouncing and happy.

Jenny Graham is fine.

Our son Max is looking very well at the moment.

Max still has long hair. We both know there is nothing that I can do about it. I give Max hugs.

Peter Wilkins and Max often play guitar together, having a fun session in the study surrounded by admiring girls. The girls are friends of Sally and Janine but I see how some of the girls look at Max!

Some of the girls prefer Peter.

Max enjoys his ballroom dancing but Max will not make a career of it.

Emma had a chat with Max about girls because Emma decided it was time.

Max still has a tenderness or “tendresse” for Michelle in Staines.

Our Alice is beautiful.

Alice has the most gorgeous red hair. Alice is as intelligent as Emma and like Emma Alice is very strong minded.

Emma says Alice’s wilfulness comes from me, but I see flashes of Emma in Alice.

Alice has passed Grade 2 on piano.

Alice has assumed ownership of Max’s child size guitar. Max has been teaching Alice how to play. Alice has a good singing voice.

I can see Alice storming into “Terrible Tykes” when there is a vacancy.

Damien has calmed down. Damien has a slightly wild side that Emma and I agree comes from me. I love the lad.

Damien’s heart is on his sleeve and Damien will do anything for anyone.

Arthur is a nice little lad. Arthur idolises Max.

Kate is a great toddler. Kate is full of fun and mischief.

Kate worships the ground that Damien walks on. We often find Kate asleep in Damien’s bed.

Damien does not mind. I think Damien encourages it.

Sally Thornton is just waiting to start at Bradford Girls Grammar School. Sally has read most of the high school textbooks that are in the house.

Sally has passed Grade 3 on the piano. Sally is working towards Grade 4.

Sally is on the road to become a leading something or other.

Rupert Thornton is fine. Rupert and Mike Johnson and our dog Heinz are still the Three Musketeers.

Lucinda Thornton is tremendous fun. Lucinda loves wrestling games with all the older boys, who always let Lucinda win.

Guy Thornton is just a sweetie.

Emma is so happy and proud.

Emma is running a school that provides a terrific education for the children and is fun to teach at. Emma says that she has never been happier in her life.

I am happy. The children who are not living at home seem to be fine.

The Inland Revenue raises no queries on the tax returns that I make for the children.

CHAPTER 36: Mark Johnson

My first morning at the Mormon office in Beijing went well. The mail and emails took me almost fifteen minutes to process.

Most of the mail went in the bin. Most of the e-mails went to Archive, and some emails I could delete.

I reported in to President Sexton and to Chuck Warrenner by e-mail.

I started to read the Book of Mormon in Chinese.

I was surprised how much Chinese I already know. I did use the dictionary but already knowing the English text helped a lot.

The Mormon mobile telephone rang.

I was surprised that the person spoke to me in Putonghua. According to Mrs Warrenner almost all the calls would be in English.

He asked fairly harshly who I am.

I gave my name.

I had given him the correct name for our organisation "The Church of Christ of Latter Day Saints". Clearly he had never heard of us.

He is a rather cross Detective Lieutenant of the Beijing Police.

A gajin (non Chinese) has been found in an alley in central Beijing. The man was close to death when he was found. The man is unconscious. The man has no wallet or identification papers.

In the man's pocket is a folded scrap of paper with my telephone number on it.
So who am I?

I explained that we are a foreign religious organisation. I am manning the office. We agreed I would go to the hospital to meet Detective Lieutenant Sen by the bedside of the injured man.

I thought the circumstances justified taking a taxi, so I took a taxi to the hospital. Detective Lieutenant Sen is in his thirties.

Given that a gajin has been attacked a relatively senior police officer is involved. I looked at the injured man. I have never seen him before.

I said to Detective Lieutenant Sen that I assume he does not believe in religion. He agreed.

I said that I would like to say a prayer over the man. In my religion it is called "Administration to the Sick".

With Detective Lieutenant's permission I will pray in English, because if the man hears me he will understand in English. Also, I have not yet found a translation into Putonghua for this prayer.

Mr Sen said he was leaving me now. The officer in the corner of the room will let me do whatever I wish within reason. The officer does not speak English so I cannot corrupt him.

"No speak English" the officer confirmed helpfully but untruthfully.

Mr Sen departed.

I administered the "Administration For The Sick".

What to do now?

I telephoned Harvey Jones, one of the two men who run the Mormon congregation.

I described the injured person.

Harvey said that this does not sound like any member of the Beijing congregation.

It does not sound like any Mormon in China whom Harvey knows of.

Harvey will be along at about seven tonight to look at the injured person.

There is an argument that I should go back to the office, log on to the Indexing site, and get started with Indexing.

There is a much better argument that I should sit with a grievously injured fellow Mormon in his hour of need.

So I sat.

I prayed from time to time, and I contemplated.

I can trace being here in China as a fairly logical consequence of my opening my big mouth at Cecil Byram's house. I told Cecil that Cecil could move his Cleckheaton foundry to China. As a direct consequence of that I was required to learn Putonghua, which has led me to being here in Beijing today.

So was it The Lord's doing that I opened my mouth that evening?

Was it the Lord's doing that I met Karen Byram, which led to me working for Cecil Byram?

Karen and Cecil Byram are not Mormons. The Lord does sometimes use people who are not Mormons to influence us Mormons.

We Mormons believe that The Lord has a huge influence on our lives. We Johnsons struck lucky with the Hewsons when we went into care. I accept that the social services placement with the Hewsons was God's Will.

The Lord does not share his thinking with us mortals. Even some of our Presidents go through their time as President without a single Revelation.

So why me?

Why have I been called to be here on the other side of the world?

I am not worthy.

If I am not worthy perhaps I am here to become worthy?

Now there is a thought!

A uniformed technician came in. He explained that he is ordered to take fingerprints of the injured man. These will be passed to the FBI officer in the American Embassy to run through all the American databanks.

Everyone assumes that the man is an American.

Doctors came in and looked at the man. I had been told by Chuck Warrenner that the hospital workers who deal directly with an injured person should be tipped, so I tipped the workers whom I met.

The police shift changed. The officer who claimed not to speak English departed. His replacement did not speak English I was pretty sure.

I told the officer in Putonghua that I was going for lunch. I will visit my office, have lunch and then return to the ward.

At the office I send an email to Chuck Warrenner explaining the situation.

I popped out for a little lunch and then I came back to the office.

No answer from Chuck Warrenner. Presumably Chuck Warrenner does not monitor his emails after midnight in Chicago.

When I returned to the ward I thought for a moment that my mystery was solved.

An attractive woman in her thirties was sat in my chair.

She is Amelia Jones, the wife of Harvey Jones. Harvey is tied up at work on the far side of Beijing so Amelia has come in to see if she can identify the injured man.

All Amelia can say is that she has never seen this man before.

Amelia is a nice person.

Amelia asked me about my history and thoughts.

My history is pretty simple. I have no great thoughts beyond completing my apprenticeship. No thoughts that I am going to share with a stranger.

Our conversation passed the time.

I think that possibly Amelia has few people whom she feels she can speak to freely. Amelia told me about the battle she and Harvey have had with Harvey's cravings for alcohol.

There have been good times. At the moment they are in a good time. Harvey has not touched a drop in three and a half years.

Amelia told me about our Beijing Mormon congregation. There are number of really great people. There are some less great people. There are a few unhelpful people.

The congregation sounds like every Mormon congregation I have ever heard described.

The first odd aspect about the Beijing congregation is the very small number of children. The second is that whereas many congregations have few eligible bachelors and a fair number of single women Beijing is the other way around. There is a significant surplus of marriageable men.

I shall have to tell Rebecca!

We also have no female divorcees and no single parents.

We do not have any widows and we have no people over seventy.

So the demography of the Beijing congregation is very odd indeed.

The congregation runs well. Everyone brings food to share on Sunday. A good time is had by all. This Sunday as a newcomer and as a missionary I will be the main entertainment!

CHAPTER 37: Cecil Byram

Our daughter Karen has been affected by what she sees at the hostel for battered wives that we support.

New committee members and new volunteers such as Karen are required to train. Part of the training is a board game fashioned on “Monopoly®” where almost every property you land on is a bill to pay. It might be the television licence or new shoes for a child or just a replacement light bulb. The “Chance” and “Community Chest” cards are largely bad. There is no opportunity to go to prison, but instead you get social workers who criticise your housekeeping while eating your biscuits!

After listening to the women whom the hostel helps Karen comes home incandescent with rage at least once a week.

The amounts of money that people on social security have to live on with their children are grossly inadequate.

The Council accommodation on offer is frequently poor.

Often women cannot move out of the hostel because they cannot afford a deposit on a rented house.

Karen wants Byram Housing to build an estate of housing for the battered women to move into, which would free up places in the hostels.

Karen wants me to give the women jobs at Byrams so they can earn their own livings and they can walk tall.

Garth Stead is willing to take the women as and when appropriate jobs become open. However we have a "fair hiring" agreement with the Engineering Union. The union branch is taking advice from their Head Office because of the danger of creating a precedent for breaching "fair hiring".

Karen is busy devising a plan for the old Clickworth site. Clickworth has a good bus service to Neverthorpe and is close to a supermarket and to decent schools.

Karen wants a community centre where some of the mothers can run a crèche and an after school club.

Karen says that the site security workers must be women.

Karen has slightly changed her mind about her future. Karen was going to read Marketing with French. Karen has now decided she wishes to read Production Engineering with Spanish.

For Production Engineering Karen needs A Level Maths and A Level Physics and Chemistry.

Karen finishes her current A levels this May.

Karen intends to spend the summer in Spain learning Spanish at an intensive Spanish language school.

From September Karen will attend a private tutorial college to study A level Maths, Physics, and Chemistry in one year.

Karen is one of the youngest in her year group so losing a year makes very little difference to her.

If Karen takes three years to obtain seven A levels and to learn Spanish that will not be damaging to her Curriculum Vitae.

Karen intends to attend INSEAD, one of the leading Management training institutions in the world. Before Karen can attend INSEAD she needs a good degree and a few years work experience.

Karen says that she will try to find employment on her own merits. Karen may ask for my help to have summer placements with some of our customers.

Garth Stead has dropped a bombshell on me.

Our Engineering Union Convenor Charlie Kent has been selected by the Labour Party to be their candidate in Meldon South constituency.

Meldon South constituency covers our factory in Neverthorpe and our Headquarters in Willerton. It covers villages like Tryton and the edge of Meldon. It is a seat that changes back and forth pretty often.

Charlie Kent is second generation "Byrams".

I know that Charlie is a socialist, but if there is to be a Labour government next time I would rather have Charlie Kent as an MP than the current Conservative.

The current Conservative MP is a cardboard cut out from Conservative Central Office. He has made no impression locally at all.

He will not be missed.

I asked Garth to bring Charlie to see me.

I congratulated Charlie.

"You are a socialist."

"Yes."

"I have known you Charlie since I was ten years old. You were a good man then and you are a good man now.

"Even if you are a socialist."

Charlie smiled.

"Would it offend your socialist principles if I or Byrams were to make a financial contribution to your campaign?"

Charlie looked a bit surprised.

"No."

"I thought not.

"If you were standing in the Conservative interest I would make a large donation.

"I would be significantly helpful."

Charlie nodded.

"Then I thought about it.

"I have decided that whether you are Conservative or whether you are Labour you are essentially "Byrams"."

Charlie said nothing.

“So I am offering you the same support that I would give a second generation “Byrams” man standing as a Conservative in a marginal constituency.”

Charlie looked surprised.

“You will be paid your normal wage up to the day of the General Election.”

Charlie looked pleased.

“If you lose then you just come back to work.”

Charlie nodded.

“If you win you are on unpaid leave of absence until you lose the seat. Then you may come back to work if you wish.”

Charlie nodded again.

“I assume that in the election week you will want your posters up on the Neverthorpe and Willerton buildings?”

Charlie was surprised.

“Yes, please!”

“Do you have premises?”

“Not yet.”

“We are not starting work at Clickworth until after the General Election. We don’t have the plans yet let alone the planning permission.

“I will rent you the Clickworth site for ten pounds a week, and I will pay the business rate.

“You pay for your own electricity and water.

“The advantage of Clickworth is that it has plenty of parking. There is a temporary office on the site at present. If the office is not large enough I will install as many more temporary offices as you need.

“This envelope contains a significant cheque. If you need more money come back to me.

“Garth, anyone who wishes to take unpaid leave to help Charlie, just let them do it.”

“You don’t do things by halves, do you?”

“If I back a man I back him. I would rather have Charlie Kent as an MP than anyone else I can think of.

“Charlie is honest and hard working and intelligent. The country could do far worse.

“I am not trying to buy an MP.

“No-one can buy Charlie Kent. That is why I am backing him.”

I think that a candidate is allowed to spend about £50,000 on a campaign. I have given Charlie a cheque for half of that. It is a good start to his campaign.

I hope that Charlie wins because he is a good man.

Fortunately I live in Meldon West constituency so I do not have to bring myself to vote Labour.

Daniel Mason has bought the land we need for the solar power project. Daniel has bought land along national power grids in Portugal Spain France Italy Austria Croatia Greece Austria and Hungary.

Daniel is at the University once a week for progress meetings.

Daniel has bought a site for manufacturing the “fabric” as we call it. Daniel has bought a second factory near the first factory to manufacture the equipment to make the fabric.

Daniel’s second factory has an export order to fill as soon as the first factory is up and running.

Byrams China Limited which we set up recently has bought a piece of land about the size of Greater London alongside the Chinese national power grid.

Byrams China has built a factory near the edge of the land it has bought. The equipment we make in Britain will be installed in China. Its first use will be to manufacture “fabric” to cover the six hundred square miles of land that we have bought. The Reconstruction Ministry has given all the permissions needed.

I know the Chinese will copy whatever we do. I decided to manufacture in China myself and make the profit. This is a Byrams project rather than me personally.

Kevin Hanson has pointed out that the new factories in England could be staffed by ex military ex prisoner workers without upsetting anyone. Provided they join the Engineering Union everyone should be happy.

Irene is very strong for this. Georgina says that it is entirely up to me.

Daniel and Georgina and Charlie Kent are going to see the Engineering Union Regional Officer next week. I can’t see the Engineering Union not supporting the rehabilitation of former soldiers.

Georgina has spoken to the senior civil servant from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP). He says that in principle the DWP has no issue with social housing for formerly battered women.

The DWP sticking point is about a service charge to pay for security. If the women want that they must pay for it themselves.

Or the landlord Byram Housing would have to charge higher rents out of which Byram Housing could pay for security.

So the rents will be higher to incorporate the service charge.

Irene and my mother and I are amused to see the change in Karen from her involvement in the battered women hostel.

Karen is now seeing some of the dirty end of the stick of life and Karen is cross about it. Karen's eyes are now open.

So, unfortunately, is Karen's mouth.

Karen bends my ear about the iniquities of life whenever she sees me.

Irene tells me that this concern about social justice is just a phase that Karen is going through. We will see.

CHAPTER 38: David Wilkins

I am very surprised by the success of Dennis's autobiography that I ghost wrote. I had hoped to sell a hundred thousand or so. We have over two million sales and rising!

We have photos of Dennis as a child, Dennis and me in the Hewsons' kitchen, and Dennis and Tohur as rascallions. We have a great photo of Mr Hewson swinging Dennis by the ears. We have photos of Dennis in Menorca and in the Algarve, and Dennis dancing with Charlotte Johnson, Amy Waters and Diana Green.

For story lines we have our parents and their drugs bust, going into care, reuniting at the Hewsons, Dennis's fights, Dennis's cooking, Dennis as mechanic and as a gardener, Alan's death, and Andria's baby.

Dennis could be any good looking working class lad who strikes lucky.

Helen said that Dennis' book is a book for people who do not read books!

Most books sell to people who read books.

Dennis's book is mainly bought by people who normally do not read books either to read themselves or to give to other people who do not normally read books. There are many millions of people who do not normally buy books but some of them are buying this book.

Mr Driburg's publicity campaign was and is terrific.

The Sunday Scandal does not normally serialise books. The Sunday Scandal's sales rose seven per cent during the three weeks that they serialised Dennis' autobiography.

Dennis was already famous because of the advertisements for sanitary towels.

Dennis is a ballroom dancer on the national scene.

Dennis is my brother.

Publicity about the sales of Dennis's autobiography has made Dennis even more famous.

Having Dennis and Amy asking people to donate money for the Save The Children Fund helped to raise a lot of money for the charity.

In the three weeks after Easter Sunday Dennis sold a lot more books!

Helen and I had arranged for the book to be bought from Dennis before publication by a Cayman Islands company which is really Dennis.

Dennis has paid no income tax on his book sales and Dennis now has ten million pounds stashed offshore.

Mr Hewson manages Dennis' and my onshore money. I manage our offshore money.

Dennis is now almost as rich as I am. I told Dennis that the book was a lightning strike. Dennis is unlikely to earn a huge amount of money again. Dennis must preserve his capital.

I would not let Dennis buy a sports car or an aeroplane because he does not need one.

Don Hewson and Helen agree with me.

Strictly speaking an eighteen year old does not need a car, but a millionaire should not be stood getting wet at a bus stop.

Don still has a good relationship with his garage mechanic, Chris. Together Don and Chris bought Dennis a second hand respectable saloon car to drive.

Dennis has his A levels soon. Dennis has only a small income for daily expenses because that is all Dennis needs.

Don has agreed to mind Dennis' on-shore money until Dennis is twenty-five, because Dennis has no idea about money. I expect that Helen and I will be managing Dennis' money for ever.

Dennis lives at home. I support our home.

Peter and Janine are millionaires. They hardly ever travel by bus because they are famous and people always want to talk to them.

Peter is beginning to realise that he is wealthy.

I explained to Peter the concept of preserving capital.

Peter is good with the idea of just stacking money until he needs it. Peter does not know how wealthy he is. That innocence is Don Hewson's policy.

Andria and Sam are very happy living together. Little Angela is so happy to have Sam as her father. I pay maintenance for Angela just so Sam does not feel Angela to be a financial burden.

My parents are now mentally comfortable that nothing will go wrong financially.

My parents do not become involved in the finances of us children because they are not mentally equipped to understand millions of pounds of money.

Helen is the head of the family. Helen manages the household.

Helen and Martin Jenkins are happily married. They have a nil interest mortgage from the Sal Hewson Memorial Fund and they are gradually paying down the mortgage. Helen loves teaching.

Martin would prefer to be an engineer but there are very few jobs in Engineering at the moment. Martin has had a promotion at work so Martin is earning a few more buttons. Together they have a decent income.

Here in London I have a girlfriend. Annette Edwards is crackingly beautiful with a tremendous figure and gorgeous black hair. The light in Annette's eyes just lifts me.

Annette is a student at The London School of Fashion. Annette will probably make a future in the fashion industry.

We met at a party. Annette is about two years older than me.

Amazingly Annette's parents approve of me!

I had no idea that Annette or Annette's parents had money until Annette took me to meet her parents.

The first clue was that at the lodge a security man had us open the car boot even though Annette is the daughter of the house.

I have never been to a house that had a lodge. I have never been to a house that had a security man.

It turns out that Annette's family have significant money.

Annette's father Gerald Edwards inherited this modest twelve bedroom sixteen acre country property near Reigate from an uncle. Gerald never bothered to buy anything better even when he could afford to buy something better.

This house alone is worth more than I am.

Gerald was a younger son, so Gerald had to go into the City of London and earn money.

A stockjobber is the man who buys shares from and sells shares to stockbrokers. As Gerald says, a stockjobber in a normally rising stock market ought to be able to make money.

Gerald is one of the largest stockjobbers in London. Gerald's turnover has more digits than an overseas telephone number. Gerald's profits are in nine digits – at the lower end he says.

What Gerald likes about me is that I have made my own money and I am still not eighteen yet. I am not after Annette's money!

I said that I had not realised that Annette has money.

Gerald said that it is family policy not to disclose that they have money.

Gerald loves it that I love Annette for herself.

Annette has two brothers. The elder brother Chris is in the Army passing the time until Gerald dies and Chris inherits. Chris will make Captain soon.

Chris is not married yet. Chris will probably be a colonel or a general before he inherits.

John attends Marlborough College, a famous public school. John will read Accountancy and then John will go into the City like Gerald.

So how does Annette have money?

When Annette was born Gerald's mother settled some money into a trust fund for Annette. Gerald's mother put money into the fund every year for ten years. Now the fund is just growing.

Annette is not as rich as me, but Annette will never starve!

Gerald and his wife Cath have both read Dennis' autobiography.

If I had a daughter who might be prey to a fortune hunter I would check out her first serious boyfriend.

Gerald has obviously had a researcher working on me. I am not offended.

Why did I sell all my shares in the supermarket that funds me? The share prices have gone up since!

I told Gerald that should I one day break up with the supermarket the share price will probably fall. I am so modest!

If I sell the shares just before I leave the supermarket that might be deemed insider trading. So it is easier just not to have shares there.

Gerald accepted this.

Gerald's mother is still alive, but she retired to Monaco when properties there were affordable. Gerald's mother rarely comes to England.

Annette's mother is gorgeous! I can see where Annette's good looks come from.

Cath is a very sharp woman. Cath has a tremendous fashion sense. Cath could pass for thirty-five.

Their chef had been warned that he would be cooking for me. Lunch was light, but terrific! You cannot go wrong with cold salmon and salads and boiled potatoes.

You can go wrong with mayonnaise but he didn't.

Over lunch and during the afternoon Gerald plied me with white wine. This white wine was significantly better than anything that I have ever drunk before. I dread to think what this wine must cost by the bottle.

Gerald owns the vineyard where the wine is made, so the wine is cheap for Gerald.

Despite my best efforts I must have drunk over a bottle of that wine.

Gerald and I discussed investment strategies. I learned a lot!

Annette sat through this.

I sensed that Annette was not interested in the topic of conversation, but Annette was pleased that Gerald and I were getting on so well.

Cath came into the room.

Cath scolded Gerald for the wine that Gerald had selected.

Cath lifted the telephone and Cath ordered a different wine.

The second wine left the first wine standing.

Apparently Gerald did a big favour for a Rothschild once by advising the Rothschild not to make a proposed investment. His "thank you" is two crates a year of a wine that the Rothschilds keep for themselves and which they never sell.

The second wine was a bottle of the Rothschild wine.

Annette says that the significance of ordering up the Rothschild wine is that both of Annette's parents approve of me highly.

We went back to London before dinner.

Annette said that Gerald is impressed that I am a multimillionaire at an age when Gerald was still at school.

Gerald likes my understanding of investment strategies.

There is a concept among rich people of living not upon your annual interest, but only living on the interest upon the interest. So if your wealth is ten million pounds, seven per cent interest on that is seven hundred thousand pounds. Seven per cent interest upon the interest is forty-nine thousand pounds. So if you have ten million pounds you live on forty-nine thousand pounds a year or less.

My wealth exceeds ten million pounds. My existing investments generate over a million pounds a year.

I earn more than three million pounds a year from the cookery books, the Christmas goods, the supermarket deal, the kitchen goods I sponsor, and the weekly television program.

Based on four million pounds a year income, the interest upon the interest upon four million pounds indicates that I should not spend more than nineteen thousand six hundred pounds a year.

I own my home outright. I have the food allowance from the supermarket. My personal spending is well under five thousand pounds a year. By the standards of the rich I am frugal.

I spend more on my monthly allowance to little Angela than I do on myself.

Gerald likes my frugality.

I must have been drunk to disclose all that information!

Annette was even more affectionate when we got home, and again in the morning. The Tryton Stage School is up to thirty youngsters, each child paying a frightening fee.

Emma now has two full time teachers plus herself, and a team of part time teachers.

Rebecca is training up a school secretary cum bookkeeper to replace Rebecca when Rebecca leaves for University.

There is a Mormon studying for a PhD at Meldon University called Esther. Esther has taken over the driving and chaperoning from Rebecca. Esther is funding her living expenses from the driving and the chaperoning.

Charlotte's autobiography and mine come out this autumn as we turn eighteen.

Charlotte might come close to the sales that Dennis has achieved because of her possible American sales. I have no chance!

Tohur Miah is now in the top three under eighteen judo athletes in Europe! Tohur is a certainty for the British Olympics team.

Tohur turns eighteen this May. Tom Driburg is milking the publicity for Tohur with a view to Tohur's autobiography coming out in time for the Christmas after next.

Tohur is doing fine at the Cordon Bleu College. So am I. We are always in the top three in our respective year groups.

Tohur works hard. With preparing and filming Tohur's cookery program, writing two cookery books a year, writing his autobiography, following the Cordon Bleu course,

all that judo and training, and his religious activities Tohur has no time to fool around.

I am not as pushed as Tohur. Annette fills my time nicely!

Annette works very hard on her fashion studies, including making a lot of clothes for her portfolio.

We actually book time to see each other. I should have thought of that with Gisela! Annette and I like it that both of us are committed to our careers. We do not begrudge the time that the other spends on their career.

I have heard that Mark Johnson is in China, staying with Ali Miah. I thought Mark had gone to Nevada but obviously Mark has been moved.

Rebecca says that Mark is just in China for a short while. Mark is doing an important job for the Mormon Church.

Rebecca is seeing a young man whom Rebecca met through the Mormons.

Scott Wilson is an American posted to work here as part of his training. In Scott's multinational company all the rising stars are posted abroad to gain international experience.

Scott has a first degree "summa cum laude" from Cornell University and a MBA from Harvard University, so Scott is a bright cookie.

"Summa cum laude" is the rough equivalent of a "good" First.

That amuses me. The concept of a "good" First implies that there must be a "so-so" First Class Honours Degree!

I have heard of people scraping a pass in an examination. Presumably one can "scrape" a First Class Honours Degree!

Scott is originally from Colorado. Scott did his Mormon missionary stint in the slums of Chicago, learning how his own people live, before attending Cornell.

Rebecca is determined to study for her degree at the London School of Economics and then she will work for a few years before marriage.

Scott is only here for another year and then Scott will be posted somewhere.

The logistics of staying together is something that Rebecca and Scott will have to work out for themselves.

Being Mormons there is probably no nookie between them, but they are certainly kissing and clinching.

Rebecca is not my sister. What I think does not matter. For what it is worth I approve of Scott.

Ali marries Shakoora Daar in September. We are not catering. We are invited to the wedding. Of course we will all go.

I watched the Oscar ceremonies to see what Candice Gumm is wearing. Candice looked terrific! Well done, Amina!

The Daars are jumping around like crazy. Sahid has prepared a loop of their “red carpet” dresses that features Candice Gumm, Emma Hewson, Karen Wilbey, Shakoora Daar, and Michelle Sayers. The loop is up on the Daar Fashions web site.

The Daar dresses that Charlotte and Sally Johnson and Kali Daar wore at the Easter Sunday program were added to the “red carpet” loop as soon as the program came out.

There is a loop of ballroom dancers with Abdullah and Amy, Dennis and Diana, and Amal and Olivia. They even have Gerald and Sally and Max and Janine dancing.

There is a really interesting loop. My sister Andria and my sister Janine model Daar wedding wear. Andria wears thirty different wedding dresses while alongside her Janine wears bridesmaid dresses. It took three long days to film because they both had to look exquisite every instant. The Daars insisted on paying Andria and Janine.

Amina Daar is back from California. It was a financially satisfying jaunt. It was personally satisfying, too.

Amina Daar has found a young man. Abdul is coming over from California for Shakoora’s wedding and to meet the family.

I saw the advertisement that Diana Green and Amy Waters made for sanitary towels.

Diana tries the brand of sanitary towels that Amy recommends.

Diana immediately leaps up on a wall about the height of a vaulting horse and Diana does exercises, splits, and flips. Then Diana jumps off the wall onto what is obviously a trampoline just out of sight and Diana does more gymnastics.

Diana flies off the trampoline to be caught by Dennis and Abdullah.

Amy's expression right at the end of the advertisement is priceless!

Derek Donkin has already picked up a TV part.

Derek's character is the "bad boy" of a high school but Derek is never caught with the evidence of his crime on him. The story line always features the female Deputy Head who is trying to nail Derek, a relationship between Derek and the Deputy Head's gorgeous daughter, and enormous amounts of confusion and misunderstanding.

Derek's character always comes up smelling of roses when we all know that Derek's character is a baddy.

There is a funny scene where an irate PT teacher orders Derek to do twenty press-ups. Derek does the press-ups on his left hand and then Derek says to the PT teacher,

"Your turn!"

Of course the PT teacher cannot do a one handed press-up, let alone twenty of them.

Another time Derek comes to the rescue of the school concert by playing piano in place of a teacher who suddenly became very ill just before the concert was due to begin. Only the viewers know how the teacher became ill!

Derek's character is not a Muslim. In every program Derek has to kiss and hug and cuddle at least one pretty girl, and usually more than one.

Derek says,

"The sacrifices I make for my art!

"I think it's all right if I don't really enjoy it!"

Derek has a lovely wicked smile.

Linda Donkin has nearly finished her catering course. The Sal Hewson Memorial Fund is going to pay for Linda to do a degree at the Cordon Bleu College.

With a degree from the Cordon Bleu College Linda will be able to decide her own future.

Linda will always earn good money.

The nanny Beverley has quit her job with the Thornton children.

Beverley says that there comes a point when a nanny must move on, and the point has been reached.

I understand Beverley is going to have three weeks holiday in the Seychelles and then Beverley will apply for another job. For a trained Norland nanny there are always jobs to be had.

Don is not replacing Beverley, which suggests that Beverley's thinking was right.

The Hewson gang are going to the Algarve again this summer. My family are going to Lanzarote. The Miahs are going to Beijing.

The Daars do not have time for a summer holiday. The Daars have bought a second industrial unit beside the first to take their containers of Chinese wedding goods.

Sahid has taken a strategic decision not to buy any more houses. Sahid is investing in equities.

Sahid's thinking is that if he ever needs to raise cash for a new enterprise it is always easier to sell shares quickly than to sell houses quickly. What the new enterprise will be Sahid does not know.

The local mosque has asked Abdullah to serve on the Mosque Committee. The Daars are the wealthiest family in their local Somali community so the Daars should be involved with the Mosque.

Sahid is too young and Uncle Jalil is not fit enough yet. Abdullah would bring some energy to the Mosque Committee.

Abdullah said that he is greatly honoured but the time is not right. Abdullah expects to be travelling a lot over the next few years, so Abdullah should not take on new commitments at the moment.

The unspoken problem in the Daar family is that if Shakoora goes off to Beijing and Amina goes off to Los Angeles young Mina would be saddled with Uncle Jalil, the family, and the growing Daar fashion business.

Mina is bright and hard working, but it is not fair to load all this onto a sixteen year old young woman.

Abdullah and Sahid will have their studies for the foreseeable future. Mina should also study because Mina is bright.

The answer is either that Amina puts off marriage for a few years or that Amina's young man moves to Doncaster.

Shakoora and Ali have had a bit of a surprise. It seems that Ali and Shakoora decided on Bahrain for their honeymoon. As Ali has free first class travel Ali only has to pay for the honeymoon hotel, which of course Ali booked.

The Bahrain Royal Family is still very pleased with Ali for saving their little princess. As soon as the Royal Family learned that Ali is getting married and that Ali is coming to Bahrain for his honeymoon the Royal Family pushed the boat out.

The King of Bahrain's private Boeing 747 jet will fly from Doncaster's Robin Hood Airport to transport Ali and Shakoora to Bahrain. Ali and Shakoora will be the only passengers!

The hotel booking has been upgraded to a penthouse Royal Suite in one of Bahrain's best hotels. They will have a private chef and security guards.

The King's third best boat and crew will be available for their stay. The King's best boat has twenty-four suites and nineteen crew members. The third best boat only has six suites and a crew of six, so Ali and Shakoora will have to rough it!

The little princess is going to present Shakoora with a piece of jewellery, and Ali will be given another medal "for services to Bahrain".

The Boeing will then take Ali and Shakoora to Beijing Airport.

It is not the honeymoon that Ali and Shakoora expected but it promises to be even more memorable than most honeymoons.

CHAPTER 39: Mark Johnson

The Mormon women have set up a rota to sit with the unknown stranger.

I visit the hospital once a day. I am meeting the Mormon women of course.

Lieutenant Inspector Sen was cross with me. Apparently I am concealing the name of the injured man. The Mormon women say among themselves that the man's name is "Jon Do"!

And why does the gajin have a Chinese name?

I burst out laughing!

I said to Lieutenant Inspector Sen that he should watch more American television.

"John Doe" is the way Americans describe an unknown person or corpse. I spelt out "John Doe" for him. I told Sen to Google® it if he does not believe me.

The doctors say that the injured man is getting better. He should regain consciousness soon.

I had a few telephone calls in English asking for details of the Angel Moroni Hotel. I gave the enquirers the information about our services.

On Sunday I went along. I arrived early of course. The chairs were already out. Harvey and Amelia Jones were there early.

The Mormon women I had met during the week came, together with their husbands. The congregation is a decent size but it is really weird to see so few children and absolutely no old people.

Luke Tenton is the other leading light of the Congregation. He and his wife are great people.

The newcomers were welcomed warmly.

Luke and Harvey led the service. It was fine. The singing was good.

The hotel had loaned a piano. A visiting Mormon from Milwaukee played it as none of the Beijing congregation can play the piano. He will not be here next Sunday!

I was invited to introduce myself. I explained how it is that I speak Putonghua and how I come to be here in Beijing.

I talked about John Doe and I passed around a photograph of him.

Nobody knows him.

Sunday was fun! Most Mormon Sundays are fun.

We had a good sing.

Luke Tenton gave a good talk on the Mormon duty to strangers, and the Mormon duty among strangers.

The food was good.

On Tuesday Paul Winfield arrived. Paul really likes Ali's apartment. Paul says Ali's apartment is the best Mormon missionary accommodation that Paul has ever seen. Normally we Mormon missionaries rent an apartment or a small house. We have to do our own cooking, cleaning, and laundry.

In Dry Gulch there were no empty properties in decent condition so Mark and I boarded with Dinah Telford.

Ali Miah has an apartment with a servant. All Paul and I have to do is to cook and to clean up after ourselves. So far I have been spoiled!

The next Mormon accommodation will be a comedown!

Paul is fine with us cooking for Ali. Paul is fine with a halal kitchen.

We barely see Ali because Ali is working very long hours and studying for his final exams.

In the morning we decided to go first to the office.

Paul reported in by email to Chuck Warrenner and to Bishop Raymond.

Paul supervised my opening the post and opening the emails. There was nothing of interest in them. There were no plants to water. The cups were already washed.

We took a taxi to the hospital.

John Doe was still there, but John was actually handcuffed to the bed! There were two police officers in the room.

They explained that John Doe is wanted by the American police for bank fraud.

They gave me his real name and his real date of birth.

Is he a Mormon?

"What is a Mormon?"

The current police plan is that John will stay in the hospital until John recovers consciousness.

The Chinese do not bother with extradition. The Chinese will expel John as an undesirable alien. The Chinese will put John on a plane to the United States.

An American police officer is on his way to Beijing now to accompany John back to the United States.

This still leaves the mystery of why John had the Mormon telephone number in his pocket.

It was time to go back to the office.

Paul being senior, it was Paul who sent the emails to Chuck Warren and to President Raymond.

What to do now?

Paul said that if we did not get on with registering to do Indexing and actually doing some Indexing President Raymond would be displeased.

As President in charge of Missionaries President Raymond has had a decade of dealing with teenage lads who always have an excuse for not doing their job as it should be done. That would curdle anyone's milk of human kindness.

President Raymond is loving, caring, and so forth, but if you are not doing your work as a missionary then President Raymond becomes testy. Paul says that I do not wish President Raymond to become testy with me.

So we registered to Index.

A human being does a final check before we are accepted as Indexers so we have a couple of hours to kill.

Paul and I decided that it was legitimate and appropriate to explore the few streets around our office. By the time we return there should be some information from the United States about John Doe.

We had a mid-morning cup of hot chocolate at a tourist hotel because we are under no pressure. Our Milwaukee piano playing Mormon was already having a cup of chocolate there. We joined him.

I introduced him to Paul.

He is Mike Young but no relation to Brigham Young. Mike is a computer security salesman. Instantly Paul and Mike jumped into a conversation about computer security of which I understood almost a quarter.

Mike gave Paul his card. Mike asked Paul to contact Mike when Paul finishes his missionary work. Mike's company may have a job for Paul!

In a shop window Paul saw a cheap electronic keyboard. Paul used to play the piano. Given that the Beijing congregation does not have a pianist it is likely that

Paul will be pressed into service as a pianist. The keyboard really was cheap, so we bought it.

On our return there was an email from Chuck Warrenner.

John Doe was born into the Mormon faith but John fell away as a teenager. John has been in trouble all his life.

Most of John's family have no contact with John.

The reason for John being in China is very likely to escape to a country that has no extradition treaty with the United States.

John is a sort of cousin of Chuck Warrenner, which is why John had the Mormon telephone number in his pocket.

We are to do absolutely nothing to help John.

I telephoned Lieutenant Inspector Sen.

I told him that I had made enquiries about the injured man. We Mormons have no further interest in John Doe.

I rang Amelia Jones to tell her of developments. Amelia will telephone the ladies on the visiting rota to inform them not to visit.

Indexing is quite interesting, but Paul and I are young men who want to be doing.

We have set ourselves targets for the morning shift and for the afternoon shift.

What is important is not how big the target is but that we are meeting our target.

The work is important but I would much rather be doing something else.

Paul says that his stay in Beijing is time limited because Paul is nearing the end of his time as a missionary.

It is entirely possible that Paul will go but that I will stay on. If I stay on I will earn promotion to Assistant Administrator for China!

In our free time Paul is teaching me to play the keyboard so that by the time Paul leaves I will be able to take over from Paul.

I was puzzled by some of the things that Paul has said.

I know of President Raymond but I have never met President Raymond. Most of our missionaries never meet President Raymond.

Paul talks about President Raymond as if Paul actually knows him.

Paul explained that Bishop Raymond's aunt is Paul's grandmother! Bishop Raymond is Paul's mother's cousin.

Paul has known Bishop Raymond all his life. That is both good and bad.

All of Paul's family agree that Paul's problem with his legs must not be allowed to be a handicap. It is a handicap of course but Paul's family make virtually no allowances.

Paul is known to be bright.

Bishop Raymond has very high expectations of Paul. Paul is expected to perform brilliantly at everything all the time.

I just have to get through my time as a missionary. Poor Paul is required to excel!

Paul is excited by the idea of working with Mike Young. It is wonderful to have a hugely supportive family but Paul would like some independence.

Paul would like to work at a job that Paul finds for himself. Not surprisingly one can study online for a degree in computing, so Paul would like to work in computing and on the side obtain a degree by distance learning.

CHAPTER 40: Kevin Hanson

The last few years at Byram's have been astonishing for me.

For eight years I minded a machine at Byram's that turned out small metal components. I was reasonably paid for work that was straightforward. The work was boring but the job was safe.

I expected to work at that job until I retired.

Then my legs gave me trouble. My legs got worse. It was getting to the point where I could not do a day's work.

I was facing dismissal.

It might have been wrapped up as redundancy but I was still looking at spending my fifties and early sixties unemployed.

Mark Johnson seconded me to work for him.

I have not looked back.

I really enjoy my job with Byram Housing. We are rescuing combat veterans who put their lives on the line for our country.

They are good men. They have made mistakes in life, but we have all made mistakes in life.

The project works well. The first housing estate will open shortly. Four men from Byrams Engineering now have jobs as Security. Like me they are not fit to work long hours at a bench. They are fit to do this security job. They have had First Aid training. They have had training for dealing with elderly people. They have work now until they retire.

We are well into building the second estate.

Our men walk tall.

There are enough projects in the pipeline to last another three years. Then Mr Byram will decide what to do next. I half expect that we will become the core team for the two factories that Daniel Mason will be setting up.

My Prison Service liaison is an Assistant Governor at the Open Prison where the men lived before their release. He told me that institutionalised men like former soldiers are usually back in prison within two years of release because life on the outside is so difficult for them.

Of my group of twenty only one man has been in trouble, and he was allowed to keep his freedom. Georgina actually went bail for him! Georgina and I spoke for him at the sentencing.

He is still paying his fine by weekly amounts.

Instead of the group beating him up we had a learning opportunity. Our tame psychiatrist discussed with the group how the event had happened. The men realised that it could have been any one of them who snapped. The man is part of the team. He is not ostracised.

My tame Assistant Governor said that the Prison Service is hugely pleased with our project. When we wish to repeat the project or if we wish to try out a new project the Prison Service will happily cooperate.

A prisoner costs over forty thousand pounds a year to guard, feed, and generally to keep. We are saving the Prison Service a lot of money. Their door is open!

The Great Wall of Ming's is there as a hospital job when we have nothing else to do. An excavator has dug a trench for a foundation, and a contractor filled the

trench with liquid cement. We can build the wall anytime. There are a million bricks on the Ming's site and more are on order. Cecil negotiated a good price for the materials that we use.

The Byram Willerton Brass Band has risen three points in the rankings. Rising three points in the rankings is very difficult to do but we have done it.

Morale is high. The Academy is doing really well. The children in the Academy are really committed.

Cecil Byram is so relaxed these days. Before the tsunami Cecil worked fourteen hour days and Cecil was perpetually chasing his tail.

Now Cecil is chilled. The people around Cecil all work hard! That is how it should be.

Cecil authorised Garth to buy two factories that had been on Cecil's original list of factories. The Production Managers are the key people. They reappoint about a third of their original workforces, and then they grow their workforces slowly from there. Garth runs a tight ship.

On top of this Garth has hired two more experienced production managers to help Garth at Neverthorpe. Should a Production Manager go sick or quit Garth has an experienced Production Manager on tap.

I work closely with Georgina. Georgina has learned the first requirement of management, which is to be straight with your boss or bosses. Georgina keeps in close touch with Irene. We are a happy bunch.

The Engineering Union leaders were taken with the idea of lifting battered women out of poverty and helping them to be self supporting. They said that provided the Engineering Union could be involved in the selection process the Engineering Union would raise no objection.

Irene told them that Byrams would concede that but the Engineering Union representative would have to be female!

The Union leaders began to haver, because at Byrams there are currently no females on the Branch Committee.

"Well, whose fault is that?" asked Irene.

"This is the Twenty First Century!"

They had no answer.

The Engineering Union conceded that their representative will be female. How they organise that is their problem.

Cecil Byram has no idea how much trouble he has caused for Charlie Kent.

I can see exactly what happened.

Cecil has known Charlie Kent for thirty years. Cecil knows that Charlie is honest, competent, sincere, and hard working. Charlie is second generation Byrams. So Cecil decided to back Charlie Kent even though Charlie is going to be a Labour Party candidate.

If Cecil had given Charlie five thousand pounds there would have been no problems. Cecil's gift is so large that some of the people in the local Labour Party started making jokes that Charlie will be a sponsored MP. Not sponsored by the Engineering Union or sponsored by the Co-operative Party but sponsored by Byrams! That is not what the People's party is about!

It is so embarrassing to have as a Labour Candidate someone who is sponsored by the largest employer in the constituency. Whatever happened to the class war? Which side is Charlie on?

The Engineering Union did not sponsor Charlie Kent. Charlie had never asked the Engineering Union to be placed on their sponsoring list.

The Engineering Union is dithering about whether to support Charlie's campaign. David Wilkins the TV chef has quietly been a member of Meldon South Labour Party for nearly two years. David and his elder brother Dennis are Labour supporters. David is still only seventeen but Dennis is eighteen.

One Saturday morning Dennis Wilkins came into the campaign headquarters at Clickworth with David Wilkins.

Daisy knows David and Daisy recognised Dennis.

Dennis asked Molly Hawkins the Constituency Secretary how one set about making a contribution to the Labour Party?

Molly said,

"It is easy."

“Open your wallet or your cheque book, make a donation, and I will give you a receipt.”

Dennis opened his cheque book.

“Who do I make the cheque payable to?”

“Meldon South Labour Party.”

Dennis wrote that on the cheque.

“What is the largest donation you have had?”

Molly laughed.

“Twenty-five thousand pounds!”

So according to Molly Dennis asked David,

“Is that enough?”

David nodded.

So Dennis wrote out a cheque for twenty-five thousand pounds!

Dennis signed it.

David told Molly that when he turns eighteen he will be making a similar donation.

Meldon South Labour Party is reeling! The General Election is not for another year but Meldon South already has much more money in its coffers than it normally raises in a full General Election campaign.

If David Wilkins is going to make a big donation in November then the constituency party will have much more money than it needs. For this Constituency Labour Party having more money than it needs is unheard of!

Dennis said to Molly that if there is anything useful that Dennis can do to please let him know.

Molly lives in Willerton. Molly’s daughter plays cornet alongside my son so we sometimes meet. Knowing I work for Byrams and knowing that I am a Labour Party member Molly told me the whole tale.

Molly says that the grumblers in the local party have shut up!

CHAPTER 41: Ali Miah

When I come home after working all hours it is great that Mark has prepared a meal and that Paul has cleaned up the kitchen. Mark is a good cook.

If I am not too late home we have conversation.

There is usually no conversation over breakfast because I have to be out the door by seven and they are still doing their exercises and their prayers at that time.

Mark and Paul signed up to be missionaries and to spread the word of God. They can't do that in China! So frustration is inevitable.

Mark and Paul say that the frustration is spiritually interesting for them. They are in Beijing to do The Lord's work. Until The Lord makes it a little clearer what He really wants them to do they are marking time. Paul has three months to serve.

The lads are enjoying this Indexing task more than they expected. It is just not what they want to do.

The Beijing congregation of Mormons are good people. Once or twice a week the lads have dinner with a congregation member.

The lads tell me that they have not heard anything from President Sexton about President Sexton appointing someone to succeed them.

They are not worried about this delay. They expect they will be told one day that the person is coming on such and such a date and they will be asked to find appropriate accommodation for a couple or for a family. Until then there may well be no news.

The building work is going well. Arthur Miller reckons that the terminal will be finished in about July. I have twenty aircraft mechanics in Seattle. I receive reports on their progress every forty-eight hours.

Tommy Sheridan and the existing Beijing operation are now under me.

We are recruitment advertising now. The advertisements all require the person to have adequate spoken and written English skills. Tommy is leading on the personnel and training side because I simply cannot spend solid weeks interviewing job applicants.

People are going to be flown out from England to do the training, so that is a big job that we do not have to do. We have to equip some rooms to be training rooms, and we have to book hotel rooms for the trainers. Tommy and I between us will sit in on most of the training sessions.

I finished my project on plasticisers in late January and I sent it off to England. I have been told that it is a "First".

I think I know what I must study for my Masters Degree.

Archaeologists have analysed the mortar in the Great Wall of China. The mortar in the Great Wall has lasted for thousands of years. The secret ingredient turns out to be starch from rice!

Obviously all the research documents are in Chinese. Who reads Chinese, is physically in China, and is owed a favour by the archaeologists?

By the end of February I had finished all my academic work. Since then I have been working through past examination papers. At my level, aiming for a First Class Honours Degree, I am not struggling to find three questions on an exam paper that I can answer. I can answer all eight questions.

Now I am trying to write perfect answers for all eight questions!

Next week a don from Cambridge will come out for two weeks. We will work through past papers. The don will coach me and help me to polish each answer.

The exams happen two weeks after the don leaves China.

The British Embassy was strangely unwilling to provide examination facilities to permit me to sit examinations at the same time as my classmates are sitting them in England.

There are only six exams, but because of the time differences some of them do not finish until one in the morning.

The Embassy's explanation is that if they do it for me one year they will end up doing it for someone every year.

I put in a plea to Wing Commander Beeson. The Air Attaché at the British Embassy in Beijing has agreed to invigilate for my exams.

In August the entire Miah family reunites in my apartment in Beijing. As soon as they have gone the decorators move in.

In early September I fly to England to be married.

We agreed to have a honeymoon in Bahrain.

I went into the Bahrain Embassy in Beijing to find out about visas. It seems my photo is known to the Reception staff because within minutes of entering the building I was being interviewed by the Ambassador.

About a week later I was told what the Bahrain Royal Family are doing for Shakoora and me. Wow! I had not expected all this fuss.