

Don Hewson's Children Blossom (Book 4 in the Don Hewson Series)

CHAPTER 1: Don Hewson

Mr Driburg telephoned me out of the blue. Mr Driburg is the agent for some of our children. Mr Driburg has negotiated some very good deals for the children.

"Mr Hewson.

"I have had an unusual request. So I am telephoning around my contacts, to see if I can find what my client is looking for."

"OK."

"I am looking for two boys, probably brothers, who look so much like each other that one can be a character as a boy of about six, and the other the same character aged about ten."

"Yes."

"You have two boys like this?"

"Yes.

"Shall I email you a photo?"

"Yes, please."

I emailed Mr Driburg a photo Sahid took at the Reunion Day on 28 December just gone. It showed Max and Dan and Janine singing together.

Mr Driburg rang again.

"They look to me as possibly what my client is looking for."

"By any chance does the older boy play a musical instrument?"

"The older boy plays guitar, accordion, saxophone, drums, and piano. He also sings very well. He is a Cathedral chorister. He is learning the organ."

"The younger boy is also a good singer."

"Would these boys be willing to act in a film?"

"Well, Mr Driburg, if the money is right, I expect they would be willing to act in a film."

"I'll get back to you."

I did not say anything to the children. It is far too soon.

I told Emma of course.

Arthur is a lovely baby. He does not cry in the night much.

Arthur will let anybody cuddle him.

Max and Alice and Damien play with Arthur a lot. I think that every child interacts with

Arthur.

We had prepared Damien for the fact that a new baby was coming. Damien is fine with Arthur.

Damien is now our "big boy" and Max is our "big son".

Max said that really Max is our "biggest son", so we have adopted Max's grammarian pedantry. Arthur is our son, Damien is our "big son" and Max is our "biggest son".

Damien likes to be our "big son".

Damien is walking and running pretty well. We are going through the "terrible twos" at the moment but Damien is not a toad really.

Damien cries when we leave Alice at the nursery school. Damien does not like to abandon Alice.

Alice loves nursery school.

The other children are doing fine. Rebecca Johnson and Ali Miah are sitting their A levels in about six weeks time. I have taken them off kitchen duties until after their exams.

Mark Johnson has GCSE exams in about two months time. Mark is coming off the kitchen rota next week. I have enough chefs that the kitchen duties are not onerous.

Soon after the exams, as her exam treat, Rebecca has two weeks with a driving lesson virtually every day, and then her driving test.

Helen Wilkins will have finished her degree final exams by then.

Helen is going to take Rebecca out in one of my cars to give Rebecca driving experience. So Rebecca will learn to drive.

I have told Rebecca that I will fund driving lessons until she passes the test. Rebecca does not need to pass first time.

Shortly after Rebecca turns nineteen Rebecca is going to go off on missionary duty, and then we probably will not see her for eighteen months.

I told Rebecca that there is no need for her to obtain paid employment between now and January when she becomes a missionary. With what Rebecca has saved and what the Sal Hewson Memorial Fund will put in Rebecca has no financial problems.

I am giving Rebecca free board and lodging and pocket money until she goes. Instead of Rebecca doing hotel work I think she should gain useful experiences and skills. Maybe Rebecca might relax!

We have booked for Rebecca to do a First Aid course soon after her driving test. Then Rebecca is helping to run a Mormon summer camp for young teenagers. Rebecca is very pleased with me.

Ali was asked what he wanted as a post exam treat. Ali wanted lessons in a flight simulator

for an A320, the plane we will be using to fly to Tunisia. Ali says that for his interview for the University Flying Squadron having experience of simulator training on a big plane will be helpful.

Ali is hoping to fly transport planes when he joins the RAF. Flying transport planes is less exciting than flying fighter planes, but the skills are more readily transferable to civilian life. Mark's treat after his GCSE exams is a ten day long adventure holiday involving abseiling, rock climbing, dinghy sailing, and potholing.

The Cathedral Choir School does not operate during the six week summer break, so Max will be completely free over the summer holidays.

A gang of the younger kids want to go camping for a week.

Helen and Rebecca and Dennis Wilkins are going to supervise the gang.

Peter and Janine Wilkins, Daniel Wilbey, Freda and Robert Graham, our Max, Linda, Derek, and Colin Donkin, Gerald and George Butler, Michael and Matthew Kelner, Grace Adams, Charlotte and Sally Johnson, and Fulesa Miah are all going.

I have hired a coach for all the kids and gear.

I will be transporting eighteen bicycles in a borrowed pick-up truck. Ali will drive Helen's car over, and then Ali will come back with me in the pick-up.

Some of the Daar children are going, too. And Olivia Hudson. That should be a really wonderful experience for Olivia.

Sahid Daar found a relatively small camp site on the Internet.

Helen and I inspected it, and I booked the entire site. That way there should be no difficulties with neighbours.

The children are very clear that they do not want me around.

Our cleaner cum housekeeper Ruth Lightfoot did lots of camping as a teenager. Ruth is going as technical adviser. I am paying Ruth her normal wage plus a cash bonus.

I had to obtain permission from social services for the children in care, but they had no issues.

Andy Haines was a bit concerned about Robert being on a camp site in a wheel chair. I showed Andy photos I had taken of the camp site. It is pretty flat and open. It has adequate toilet facilities including facilities for Robert.

The only real issue is that there is not enough cold storage for the meat.

Arthur Brown and I between us will do a daily supplies run so Helen does not need to shop for anything.

Soon after the camping week the household is off to Tunisia. That will be fun.

Emma and I will teach more children to swim in the hotel pool.

When I asked the local GP to refer Robert Graham to a specialist he did so readily enough.

When we saw the specialist he had tests and X-rays and all sorts done.

We had to go and see the specialist again.

The specialist has referred us to Stoke Mandeville Hospital, which is the leading Hospital in Britain for spinal injuries. Robert will be there for three days. I will go with him.

The filming at half term for Robert and Tohur went well. Sahid stayed with us for most of half term, because he wanted to. We put up a camp bed in the study for Sahid.

Heinz sleeps in the study.

I know that Heinz got into bed with Sahid but I said nothing.

For filming purposes Tohur and Robert were cooking for only four people. Tohur cooked all one morning. Then Robert cooked in the afternoon. By dinner time there was so much food that the duty cooks had virtually nothing to do.

This was repeated on a second day.

David and Sahid declared that they had enough in the can. They now had to edit. The editing took them only a day, because they are pretty experienced. Sahid had already prepared his lists of ingredients and the recipes. We viewed the programmes that evening. They were great.

David spoke to Mr Driburg about Robert. David gave Mr Driburg the DVDs. Mr Driburg approached the supermarket with the DVDs.

The supermarket people loved Tohur. Tohur may resemble a brick, but Tohur has such a friendly and careful teaching approach that the supermarket focus group just loved him.

Tohur is all Man, as well. For a predominantly female audience that is useful.

With Robert the supermarket was a bit twitchy, but their marketing people said that if the TV company wants Robert then the supermarket would continue the existing arrangement with the TV company.

Then Mr Driburg went to see Mr Vincent with David.

David had made the appointment for two in the afternoon. David warned Mr Vincent that he would be bringing a lot of food for Mr Vincent to sample, so would Mr Vincent please skip lunch.

The combination of Mr Driburg coming and that Mr Vincent would be sampling a lot of food had made Mr Vincent curious.

First out of the hamper were two samosas. They were light and crisp. One was meat and the other vegetarian. They were excellent.

Then a small tub of a green soup. Mr Vincent recognised a ham stock, peas, carrot, mint,

and coriander. What else was there? Salt, pepper, and a dash of Worcestershire sauce. Then a vol au vent with prawn stuffing. A fluffy pasty with curried meat and chunks of tinned peach. A traditional Cornish pasty.

Mr Vincent could see there was more in the hamper.

“Stop!” said Mr Vincent.

“Is this food that you have cooked, David?”

Mr Vincent was not sure what was going on.

“Mr Vincent”, said David,

“This food was cooked by a very good chef.”

“Yes.

“I agree.”

“I would like this very good chef to be my successor when I leave the program.”

“This food is excellent.

“Why do I think that there is a catch?”

“You told me once about “social inclusion”, Mr Vincent.

“Could you just explain again what your company's policy is on social inclusion, please?”

Mr Vincent looked at David with some surprise.

“I will read it to you if you like.”

“Yes, please.”

So Mr Vincent read the company's policy on social exclusion out loud.

“Do you guys actually believe in that?”

“It is company policy. We all believe in it.”

Turning to Mr Driburg,

“What are you up to, Tom?”

Mr Driburg had been very quiet all through the meeting. This was not like Mr Driburg.

“I feel like I am being ambushed.

“I just can't see how.”

Mr Driburg gave Mr Vincent a look of pity. Then Mr Driburg gave Mr Vincent a DVD.

Mr Vincent put the DVD in his DVD player.

Mr Vincent started to play the DVD.

First there was just sound. It was the “Come To The Cookhouse Door” bugle call played on an accordion.

When Mr Vincent saw a ten year old boy in a wheelchair say,

“Hi, I'm Robert Graham”,

Mr Vincent just did not know what to do or what to say.

Then Mr Vincent saw the boy make eighteen prawn vol au vents identical to the one that Mr Vincent had just eaten. The segment had the list of ingredients and utensils and the recipe exactly as they appear on David's programme. The segment lasted eight minutes plus the music.

There was a silence.

Mr Vincent was shaken.

Astonishingly Mr Vincent was silent.

"Mr Vincent, I don't want you to think of Robert as a disabled child who can cook."

Mr Vincent looked surprised.

"I want you to recognise that Robert is an excellent cook who happens to use a wheelchair.

"If Robert was not in a wheelchair you would hire him.

"So why are you reluctant to hire him?"

Mr Vincent looked at David sharply.

"Basically you are saying that our company has principles and policies but you are suspicious whether we will really live up to them?"

David and Mr Driburg said nothing.

David and Mr Driburg had blank expressions.

Mr Vincent's statement just hung in the air.

Mr Driburg spoke,

"The supermarket says that if you will appoint Robert they will continue the deal the supermarket has with your company."

Mr Vincent smiled.

"Tom, you and David have my arm twisted right up my back.

"I have not seen such a good ambush in years.

"Selling this in the company is going to be a struggle. Until you put me in this spot I had not realised how much I discount people in wheelchairs.

"I had thought that I am not prejudiced."

"May I make an offer, Mr Vincent?"

"What?"

"The set I use is not right for Robert to use.

"I will pay to install a kitchen that Robert can use. Robert could come in on Friday morning and he will just cook and cook. Anyone in the company can meet Robert and eat his food."

"And here is a DVD of Robert doing things other than cooking.

"I suggest we have this on a wall screen in a continuous loop. Just to show that Robert is

multi-dimensional.”

“David.

“In this room I do the bullying and the blackmail.

“You are very good at blackmail and persuasion, but really that is my job.

“I will view the DVDs you have given me.

I will sleep on this tonight.

“I will phone Tom tomorrow.”

David reported this all back to me.

We have to wait.

“What is a socialist, Don?”

“Why do you ask?”

“Mr Driburg told me that a long time ago, long before I was born, Mr Vincent and Mr Driburg were in the Young Socialists together. They have known each other for a very long time.”

“You have heard of the Labour Party?”

“Yes.”

“The Labour Party used to be socialist. They still are a little bit.

“A socialist believes that everyone should have a fair chance. If necessary the rich will have to pay more tax for everybody to have a fair chance in life.

“The Young Socialists were the youth section of the Labour Party. I think the Youth Section is called something else now.”

“Could I join the Young Socialists?”

“Or whatever it’s called?”

“Yes. Now you are fourteen you may join the Labour Party.

“Now that you are a millionaire do you wish to be a socialist and to share the wealth you have worked for?”

There was a silence.

“I will have to think about that.”

Mr Driburg rang me the next morning.

“These boys.

“Would the older boy be willing to learn ballroom dancing?”

“Mr Driburg. Both boys have certificates for ballroom dancing.

“I will send you videos of both boys dancing!

“What is going on with David’s proposal that Robert should take his place as a TV chef?”

“I don’t know yet. Mr Vincent is for it, but he has to persuade some other people.

"I'll let David know when I know."

I also sent Mr Driburg the recording I made of Max singing his solo on Christmas Day. I decided to send Mr Driburg a list of all the musical or talented children with photos. Where I had recordings I sent those as well.

CHAPTER 2: Ali Miah

I worked really hard on my A levels. From sitting my A level in Islamic Studies I worked my socks off on the others.

Doing the kitchen work at the Tryton Hotel over Christmas and New Year was a nice earner. When I was not working at the Hotel or I was not at school, I worked at my A levels. There is always a lot going on at the Hewson house but I just had my head down and I got on with my work.

Some guys tried to kidnap Linda Donkin but they were caught by our heavy mob.

Mark Johnson has learned the hard way that in a combat situation Mark is better to break the other guy's arm than to be stabbed or to be shot. My brother Tohur was just off his unarmed combat course. Dennis Wilkins can be amazingly violent. Cute little David Wilkins is a savage in the judo ring. Four lads and four broken limbs.

I would have expected more broken limbs but Don has roasted the boys about inappropriate violence a few times.

Don Hewson is a fine one to lecture others on violence.

When Don was an Army pay clerk he killed four people and he hurt four other people in just a few minutes. If Don had been an infantry soldier I don't think that Don could have done any better.

Don is getting soft in his old age. He should have given Mark and Tohur an early bedtime for their violence, but he didn't.

I suppose it is difficult to say "Well done!" and "Here is an early bed-time" over the same incident.

Emma was not sure whether to go back to work after having Arthur. I think the thought of sitting at home with Don made Emma decide that she would be happier at work.

The exams were fine. I need three A grades. I am expecting A or A* in all five subjects so I am not worrying too much.

Rebecca worked almost as hard as me over her A levels. Rebecca is a nice girl, but she is doing airy fairy subjects like English and History where there is discussion and thought and different points of view that must be discussed. It must make her A levels more difficult than mine.

I am much happier with maths and sciences where there are right answers.

Don told me quietly that the Sal Hewson Memorial Fund is willing to buy a house in Cambridge. They would give me a bedroom in the house, and they would pay me a fee for managing the house.

I could choose who lives there.

I thanked Don.

I said that at King's College one is normally living in college for all three years. I suggested the house should be put on a back burner for now. If I find I do not like college life then I will come back to the Fund. The Fund is paying all my University expenses so I will leave University without debt. That is wonderful.

Helen has her degree result. It is a good degree. It is a 2:1, which means Second Class, First Division. The only result better would be a First Class Honours Degree. Not many people earn a "First". Helen is perfectly happy.

Helen has a teaching job that starts in September. It is at a school with a good reputation. Max and Dan are going to Bristol for an audition. Don is taking them. Dan is supposed to play a character when he is young, and Max plays the same character a few years later. I do not know which actor plays the adult part or what the film is about.

The weekend before the gang go camping the youngsters will erect all the new tents in the back garden, just to make sure they all know how to put them up. This is also to check for missing tent pegs and that kind of problem.

The smaller children, who are not going camping this year, will be able to sleep in the tents overnight. Mark will sleep outside to keep them company. The back door will be left unlocked so the children may come in to use the toilet or in case they decide they prefer their own beds.

I am going to Amsterdam for the A320 simulator training. From here in Yorkshire it is often cheaper to travel to Amsterdam than it is to travel to London. That is really ridiculous.

I have only once been abroad before, so Amsterdam will be an adventure.

The training has cost Don quite a bit of money but Don says he is happy with it. Don says it is partly a reward for me and partly an investment in my future.

I have a couple of weeks before I go to Amsterdam. Rebecca and I are going to see films, visiting museums and castles, and just chilling.

We are both "nose to grindstone" people.

It is very odd to have nothing to do.

Our support from the local authority has ended. We are just living off Don.

Don says he is happy with it. Apart from virtually daily driving lessons Rebecca has nothing

much to do.

Rebecca and I offered to mind the household for a weekend and to let Don and Emma have a holiday.

They were very surprised. They asked us to let them think about it.

Rebecca has been part of a Mormon hit team. I don't know what the Mormon terminology is. She and three other teenagers were asked to help an old couple.

The old lady broke her leg a while ago. The old man was not fit to look after himself, let alone her. So the old man was taken away to stay with relatives while his wife remained in hospital.

The old lady will be coming out of hospital soon.

The house and garden were a mess.

Rebecca and her mates have thoroughly cleaned the house from top to bottom. They did some painting where it was needed. They sorted out the garden. It took four of them most of a week.

Mark was roped in for a couple of days to dig over the garden, paint the garden fence, and so forth.

The Council have installed a ramp and a railing to help access into the house. The Council will provide a home help.

Older Mormons are going to visit the old lady and sit with her. Once she feels that she can cope, her husband will be brought home. The local Mormon Church will support the couple. There are no children.

Now that I have free time I am doing a lot more with Fulesa and Moklisur and Monika. We are going to parks and playgrounds. Don organised a coach to Lightwater Valley, an adventure park near Ripon. That was great fun.

Sharon, the mother of Michael and Matthew Kelner, has linked up with Andy Haines the social worker for the Donkins.

I am pleased for them both. They are nice people.

The boys were a bit unsure what to think. They have attached to Don as a father figure, but they have to share Don with a lot of people.

They like Andy.

They were a bit conflicted.

Rebecca suggested that if they thought of Andy as a father figure and Don as a grandfather figure then that would make sense.

The boys were happy with the suggestion.

Don was not quite so happy with the suggestion!

Emma just laughed.

Annie Feldon who used to work for Mr Hewson, and her husband Dave, are going to have a baby. They do fostering, but only short term Reception fostering. So they will stop taking new children when Annie is five months pregnant, and by seven months there should be no children. Then when the new child is born they can go back to fostering if they wish.

I am pleased for them. They are good people.

I love Amsterdam. The public transport system is fantastic. There is a big enough Muslim population that I can always eat tasty good food.

A lot of the people here speak English. Everything is pretty civilised.

I arrived at the simulator facility an hour early. They gave me a ring binder of information to read. I knew virtually all of it.

About fifteen minutes before I was due to start the Instructor pilot came to meet me. He asked a few questions about my flying experience.

I showed him my flying log book.

He read it.

What do I want from my sessions? I told him that I would like a little straightforward flying, but I was mainly interested in take-offs and landings. These are the important things.

"I am glad", he said.

"We get very twitchy about people who want to fly but who do not wish to know how to land!"

"Especially Muslims?" I asked.

"These days, we are not just looking at Muslims. There are so many nutters and terrorists around that we look at all our clients carefully."

"People who are not funded by airlines are a particular concern."

"Shall we get started?"

Was I interested in any particular airports? I told him we were flying to Enfidha in Tunisia from Manchester, so I would like to practice both ends. And Leeds/Bradford Airport because that is my nearest large airport.

Over the next three days I took off from each airport four times, and I landed at each airport four times. All of them were acceptable landings for freight.

By the third day I was doing really good night landings that were fit for passengers.

I was getting too cocky.

On the fourth day, without warning me, the instructor threw in a malfunction alarm and flight deck smoke about a minute out from landing at Manchester Airport. That landing was successful, but it scared me silly.

“OK”, he said.

“You are a good pilot. You are young and cocky, which makes you a frightening combination.

“On the positive side, I would trust you with a real A320.

“You need to have more frights, so you learn more respect for the plane and for your passengers. “

He wrote in my pilot log that I had this simulator experience. He signed and dated it. I have never enjoyed four days so much in my life.

Don collected me at the airport. I told him all about it. I was hugely excited.

When I got back, the kids were off camping.

Mark was off on his adventure holiday.

The house seemed really quiet. There was only Tohur and the little ones. Don and Emma, of course.

I was utterly excited about my Amsterdam experience. I was talking excitedly about it when I realised there was something up.

“Why is everyone so quiet?

“What is the problem?”

Tohur told me that Mrs Shah has been rushed to hospital this afternoon. The call had come after Don had left the house to collect me. One of the family had telephoned Tohur to inform him.

There are so many family members around that Tohur and I are not wanted at the hospital. The call was just for information.

Well, that put a damper on the afternoon.

Tohur already has dinner organised so I will not cook until tomorrow.

Don has been to the camp on a supply run earlier today. Yesterday Colin Donkin swung over the lake on a rope. Colin discovered that the rope was only coiled around a tree branch, not tied to it.

Colin landed in the lake.

Colin can swim, fortunately.

George Butler fell into a patch of nettles a few days ago.

Otherwise all is well at the campsite.

Mark comes back from his adventure holiday tonight.

Mark and I will go with Don to help pack up the camping on Friday.

Tohur's social networking site has been planning for Ramadan and for Eid. They are not until September and October. Various cooks are filming themselves making food for

Ramadan and for Eid.

Lots of children do not know how to cook, so the pod casts are very helpful.

People are trying to organise Eid parties in each locality. Don is hosting an Eid party for all the Muslims in care in Meldon. People who are fostered with Muslim families will probably not be interested. People who are not placed with Muslim families will probably be interested.

Meldon social services have agreed to organise transport for all who wish it.

David's new cookery programme is going to begin broadcasting in September.

David and Sahid are using the second week of August to do as much filming as they can.

A twenty-five minute format is more interesting for David.

In the third week of August Tohur and Sahid are filming Tohur's programmes.

In the fourth week of August Sahid and Robert are filming Robert's programmes.

Sahid has joined the cameraman's union. There was a bit of difficulty because Sahid is so young.

Sahid explained that his motivation for joining the union is that Sahid does not wish to undercut people who need to earn a living.

The union liked that!

Sahid now must be paid at least union rate for his work.

Tohur and David and Robert are working together on the planning of the programmes to ensure there is no duplication of content. The timings on the programmes are that David is shown on Tuesday afternoon, Tohur is shown on Thursday afternoon, and Robert is about two hours later.

Tohur has done a lot of planning and practising.

Don and Emma have been very happy to let Tohur cook virtually every night.

Robert Graham is away camping with the gang, but Robert has been planning.

David Wilkins I think has planned his programmes for the next six months.

Mark came back from his holiday. He has had a really exciting time.

The other guys on the course were all right. Mark did not make any special friends.

Then we went to the camp to help to dismantle it.

It was already dismantled by the time we arrived.

The tents were down and bagged. The grounds had been policed. The toilets had been cleaned. The children were singing when we arrived.

So it was load up all the tents and bicycles and kit onto the pickup truck that Don had borrowed. With so many people to help it took only a few minutes.

The kids were all high. They all want to come here again next summer.

Arthur Brown arrived and he loaded up the Daars and Olivia. We had to wait for the coach, which was not due for another half an hour. Then we were away!

When we arrived home Don announced that it is bath time now. He has never seen such a mucky bunch of kids.

Don cannot see their tans for dirt.

Don cannot see their ears for the cabbages growing in them. Lunch will be on the table in forty minutes.

Visiting children may raid the recycling cupboard for clean clothes.

Most of the children are happy to have a bath or shower anyway. They are a great bunch of children.

Heinz is delighted to see them all again.

Over lunch, Don talked about Mrs Shah. Mrs Shah is important to the Miahs. If anything occurs around Mrs Shah Tohur and I will need to do all that we can to help the Shahs. This may mean us missing kitchen duties or other engagements at little or no notice. Just so that everyone knows.

CHAPTER 3: Emma Hewson

You would think that putting twenty-five people onto an aeroplane would be a challenge.

Don broke down the task amazingly well.

I am in charge of myself and our baby Arthur.

Don is in charge of himself, Max, Alice, and Damien.

Rebecca, Linda, Freda, and Ali are each in charge of their biological families.

Our family social worker Elizabeth Mountford generated a raft of letters from social services authorising the foreign holiday for each child.

Tohur organised snacks for the flight.

Tohur generated baguette based sandwiches, cold fried chicken, samosas, crudités, and chunky biscuits. It was quite funny on the flight to see the other passengers eyeing Tohur's snacks enviously.

Ali chatted up one of the stewardesses, and Ali showed her his pilot log book with the simulator training endorsed on it.

A little while later Ali was invited to the flight deck to see the real flight deck. Ali said it looked identical to the simulator, which of course it should.

We had a courtesy coach to take us to the hotel. It was not long before everyone was in the pool.

Only Max and Colin could swim. I taught the girls. Don taught the boys.

One of the teenagers minded Alice and Damien and Arthur while I was in the pool.

The hotel had a good supply of floats, but Don had to buy water toys and water rings and lilos.

By the end of the holiday everyone could swim except Arthur and Damien and Alice. They were used to being in the water, though.

We had a couple of excursions into the town, but Don and I had the distinct impression that prices had inflated since we were here last year.

A lot of stuff was just not good value.

The hotel had table tennis tables and pool tables so the children had everything they needed.

The bar sold alcoholic drinks but Don and I were not really interested.

I noticed Tohur and Robert disappearing into the hotel kitchens presumably to pick up ideas.

It was a really good holiday. Kate was conceived there.

I can't even say I was drunk. I was just happy and careless and relaxed. Whoops!

The flight back was fairly similar. Tohur had used the hotel kitchen to generate another banquet of snacks.

I saw Ali chatting up the same stewardess. She recognised him. Let's face it, not many passengers have simulator flying experience on an A320.

She is an attractive young lady.

Ali is a nice looking teenager. Ali looks very young for his age.

I was not surprised when about an hour out of Manchester the stewardess asked Ali to come to the flight deck.

Ali was away for a long time.

I was totally astounded when I heard Ali's voice on the plane's public address system!

"Good evening, passengers.

"There has been a slight problem here on the flight deck. Both the pilot and the co-pilot have been taken ill.

"Fortunately, I am an experienced pilot. I have had flight simulator training for the A320 and also flight simulator training for landing an A320 at Manchester Airport.

"I will land the plane safely, so there is no need to be concerned.

"It will be my seventeenth A320 landing, so you can relax.

"I have spoken to air traffic control at Manchester Airport. They are giving us priority, so there is a fair chance we will actually land slightly early.

"Forget all that nonsense about "Brace, Brace!"

“This is not going to be any kind of emergency landing or crash landing. There will be no excitement.

“This will be a normal aeroplane landing. I have my own family on board, so I will make this as smooth a landing as I can possibly achieve.

“There is an A320 pilot in the control tower at Manchester. He is going to talk me down. I don't need to be talked down, but obviously I will accept any help I am offered.

“I suggest you use the time to look at where the doors and exits are.

“I am not intending that you should do anything other than leave by the normal doors, but you will feel happier if you know where the exits are.

“Now I am very serious about the next bit. This is a no smoking plane, so do not smoke. The toilets are closing now, so if you did not use them it is too late.

“Fasten your seat belts, please.

“Turn off your mobile phones and any electrical devices.

“Cabin staff will be checking that your seats are fully up and that you have your seatbelts fastened.

“Be particularly nice to the cabin crew because they are not as well paid as they should be.

“It is at times like this that you realise how important the cabin crew are.

“Forgive me if I do not keep talking to you, but I am sure you would prefer me to concentrate on the flying and on the landing.

“There is no need for you to worry. I am not worried, so there is no need to fret. If you are from Yorkshire, “There's nowt oop”.

“For those of you who are not from God's County, I have just told the Yorkshire people not to worry because there is nothing up to worry about.

“Oh. I will be releasing some fuel soon for safety reasons. So if you see fuel streaming out it is not a problem. It is just a safety precaution.”

There was a silence.

Everyone was worried. Of course we were.

I noticed a lot of people looking at the flight safety plastic cards that they normally ignore.

And some couples kissing.

It seemed a very long time before we heard Ali announce,

“Lowering the wheels.”

The plane was silent.

We heard the wheels come down.

Everyone went even quieter.

“Landing soon.”

Outside I saw what seemed like dozens of fire engines and ambulances on the ground flashing away like a huge Christmas lights display.

I felt a slight bump. I waited for the next bump.

It did not come.

“Passengers, we have arrived safely at Manchester Airport.”

There was a great cheer.

“Can I ask you please to keep your seatbelts fastened and to remain in your seats.

“We are taxiing to our normal location.

“I am following an airport vehicle to our normal location.

“Can I say to everyone that we have had a completely straightforward landing. Just use the normal doors, and everything will be pretty close to normal. We have arrived early, so you may have a slightly longer wait for your luggage than usual.

“If you feel the need there will be plenty of time to use the toilets at the terminal building.”

That generated a great laugh!

“Can I ask the Hewson group to stay in your seats please and to let everyone else leave the aeroplane first.”

“Could I ask Mr Hewson to make himself known to the cabin crew, please.”

The children all pointed to Don.

“Stewardess. Mr Hewson paid for me to have flight simulator training on the A320, including practising landing at Manchester.”

“I am a Muslim. So I do not drink.”

The expression on the faces of some of the passengers was amusing. Their obvious anti-Muslim concerns and the fact that Ali has saved their lives made interesting combinations.

“But in the circumstances I would be grateful if you would give Mr Hewson a bottle of whisky. He has saved our lives today.

“I will pay for it later.”

There was a round of applause.

“Before you disembark there will be some ambulance men coming on board at the front to take off the captain and the first officer. Let them on and off, please, and then disembark in the usual manner. If you are leaving at the back there is no need to delay.”

Apart from the bottle the stewardess gave him, several other passengers gave their whisky to Don, too.

After the ambulance men a bevy of men in suits came rushing up the stairs at the front of the plane.

Ali was wearing a pilot's hat, T shirt and shorts. He looked about fifteen years old.

Ali shook hands with the passengers leaving the plane. Several of the women kissed him. The men in suits just had to wait for Ali until the passengers had disembarked.

We were ages before we came off the plane.

Once everyone else was off the plane our gang started to leave. The cute stewardess said that Ali will find us in the baggage hall.

Ali was still on the flight deck with the men in suits.

The stewardess went in to take the Miah's passports and social services approval letters from Ali. She left Ali with only his own passport. Ali is no longer in care so Ali did not need a social services letter.

We were still waiting for our plane's luggage in the baggage hall when Ali walked into the baggage hall. Everybody just cheered and clapped.

Fulesa ran to Ali and Ali picked her up. Ali was soon sat on one of our empty trolleys with Fulesa, Monika, Moklisur, and Alice.

Ali was all smiles.

"That was easier than the simulations.

"It was a good landing, so I am well pleased."

"Who were the men in suits?"

"Oh. The alphabet soup you would expect. The airline. The Civil Aviation Authority. The Airport. Special Branch. The pilot who talked me down."

"Why Special Branch?"

"Well. It is not supposed to happen that both pilots go sick together. Concern how that happened.

"And who am I?"

"I am a Muslim pilot, so I am halfway to being a terrorist suspect.

"I just have to live with that."

When we got outside the baggage hall there were journalists and photographers waiting. Ali explained that he is a qualified pilot for small planes. Ali said he has simulator experience on an A320.

"So that has been very good luck."

"Is there anything you would like to say?"

"Alahu Akbar!

"God is great!"

I could tell that some of the journalists were not pleased.

Ali kept smiling and the journalists just had to use what Ali had given them.

The coach Don had booked was there, so we piled in and we went home. It was already

agreed that the little Miahs would sleep with us overnight.

The photo of a smiling Ali holding a smiling proud Monika and a smiling proud Alice on his hips was on several front pages the next morning. Monika was wearing Ali's pilot hat at a fetching angle.

I was not surprised when the airline telephoned the next morning.

Would it be possible please for Ali to come to London in three days time? The Chief Executive of the airline would like to meet Ali.

Would we fax or email copies of Ali's pilot log book and an up to date CV today please? And would Ali like to bring an adult with him?

The airline will provide a car to collect Ali and adult and drive them to Manchester Airport.

There is obviously a free flight to London. Ali will be met and escorted at London.

The A level results are not out yet, so Ali has to say that his anticipated grades are A/A* in all subjects.

Ali updated his CV to include the simulator training and the Manchester landing yesterday. Ali mentioned his five A*s at AS level and his A* in Islamic Studies. Also that he was expecting to enter Cambridge University this October. Ali's CV now clearly explains what Quran hafiz means.

Ali has bought several newspapers. He and Tohur are off to show them to Mrs Shah. Mrs Shah is at home now.

Tohur and Robert are practising their cooking for the TV filming, so everyone else has very light kitchen duties.

Mark and Rebecca are off camping. Rebecca is supervising at a Mormon girls camp. Mark is helping at a Mormon boys camp.

Charlotte has stayed behind so that Sally, Andrew and Michael do not feel abandoned. Charlotte and Sally and Andrew and Michael have put up a small tent in the garden to sleep in.

Derek Donkin is hardly here. He is with Sebastian and Sara most of each day.

Derek plays golf with Sebastian in the mornings and they carve wood in the afternoon.

Long before Derek was born there were some terrific storms that brought down trees at the Golf Club. Trees were down all over Britain.

Sebastian bought a couple of fallen trees from the Club. Sebastian had them cut up into rounds and taken to his garage. Sebastian has a lifetime supply of lime and oak rounds. Sebastian and Derek cut slivers off the rounds as they need them.

Every time Derek comes home Don ostentatiously checks Derek's hands and fingers for cuts or amputations. Don hugs Derek too of course.

Derek has made a pretty lattice, varnished it, and he has given it to his mother. Derek says that he is thinking of carving an African face mask next.

Linda Donkin is earning money in the kitchen of the Tryton Hotel. Mark Johnson starts there again in September, working on Saturdays from twelve until whenever. Mark starts at college in September.

Mark is not sure what A levels to take because he really does not know what he wants to do afterwards.

I said to Mark that he is not to drift into becoming a teacher.

“Do it because you really want to do it. Or don't do it. If you are not committed you will only last a couple of years in teaching and then you will drift out. Do something else first, and then come into teaching later if you wish.”

Tohur and Dennis and Nigel start their GCSE year in September. Robert and Derek will move up to the High School.

Alice is already full time in Reception. She moves into Year 1 in September.

In October Ali starts at Cambridge.

In January Rebecca goes on her missionary duties.

Damien starts part time nursery school in March.

Andria's daughter Angela starts part time nursery school in June.

Freda Graham is just glorious. Freda is nearly thirteen and she is enjoying life.

The Donkins have not quite finished their Tomatis therapy. We can all see that they are improved. They are happier in themselves because they can see the changes in each other and in their interactions with other children.

Dan and Max have been asked to go to a meeting in Birmingham with Mr Driburg and with the film company. They are going to see their scripts. If they like the scripts then Mr Driburg has negotiated a payment rate for them. Mrs Wilbey and Don are going with them. The filming should take place over the October half-term.

Susie has had another child, bringing her up to four. I think I am pregnant again. I have not told Don yet because it is too early.

Don had to be in too many places at once, so I went to London with Ali.

The car that collected us was a limousine like one might have for a wedding.

We were taken through the staff entrance into the airport. We were ushered to a VIP lounge.

The Captain who had talked Ali down was waiting for us. He told us that every airline has procedures to make sure that both pilots cannot be ill at the same time. This incident was being incredibly thoroughly investigated even though there were no fatalities. A “near miss”

like this is treated as seriously as if there had been fatalities.

If Ali had not been on board the plane and crew and passengers could have been a total loss.

The culprit was they think the apple juice! The apple juice is supposed to be two different brands so as to reduce risk. Both pilots had the same brand of apple juice and from the same batch. Both pilots are now recovered from food poisoning, but they are both on compulsory leave until the investigation is officially concluded.

Captain Thornton said that one of his tasks is to assess new pilots as they complete their training. He is independent of the trainers, and he does not meet the trainees. He works solely off the black box recording and the radar records.

Based on what Captain Thornton has found from Ali's black box recording and the Manchester Airport radar recording, Ali would be in the top half of trainee pilots at the conclusion of their training.

Ali is an excellent natural pilot.

Captain Thornton has already sent a memo to the Pilot Recruitment team that should Ali apply for a position with the airline in years to come then Ali is strongly recommended by Captain Thornton.

The cute stewardess from the Tunisia flights escorted us to the London plane. Naturally Ali was invited to the flight deck once we were in flight.

At the other end was a smart young woman, also very attractive. She took us to a chauffeur driven car, and we went to meet the Chief Executive.

The Chief Executive welcomed us.

"Do you know what an A320 costs?"

"About ninety million dollars, sir. Although you bulk buy so you probably pay less."

"Very good.

"More important to us than the ninety million dollars is the lives of our crews and our passengers.

"Our good safety record is one of the reasons for our success.

"You have a place at Cambridge University to read Engineering?"

"Yes, sir."

"Confident of your grades?"

"Yes, sir."

"I am going to ask you some questions. I have a reason for asking, which I will explain at the end."

Ali nodded.

“Are you in good health?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Do you use illegal drugs?”

Ali showed surprise.

“No, sir.”

“What is your normal weekly consumption of alcohol expressed in pints of beer a week?”

Ali smiled.

“None, sir.”

“Do you have any criminal convictions or cautions?”

“No, sir.”

“Are you charged with or are you expecting to be charged with any criminal offences?”

“No, sir.”

“Are you willing to join BALPA the British Airline Pilots Association?”

“Yes, sir?”

“You said on your CV that you hope eventually to become an airline pilot?”

“Yes, sir.”

“We have very strong recruitment systems here. We have a good relationship with the Trade Unions.

“One of the rare joys of being Chief Executive of this airline is that I have the power to bypass our systems when I think it right.

“I have spoken to our trade unions.

“I showed them Captain Thornton's memo to Pilot Recruitment about your flying skills.

“The trade unions agree that you have saved the lives of more than a dozen airline employees, who are almost all members of their trade unions.

“You saved the lives of hundreds of passengers.

“You saved the airline an A320, for which we are also grateful.

“If as a one-off exceptional event I wish to employ you outside the normal recruitment processes, the unions have no objection provided that you join the relevant union.

“This is an application form for an Engineering Scholarship. This will pay your living expenses and other expenses while you are a student at Cambridge.

“We also pay your tuition fees.

“Complete the application form before you leave the building. Give it to one of my secretaries.

“You will receive a letter next week confirming that you have been awarded an Engineering Scholarship.

“This is an employment application form.

“You must complete these forms so we may open a personnel file on you.

“There is also an application form to join BALPA. Complete that, too, please.

“There will be a medical examination at Manchester Airport next week. You look pretty fit so I expect you will pass it.”

Ali's mouth was open.

“We have a training partner in Oxford.

“We will pay your fees and expenses for you to qualify as a large passenger plane pilot. We wish you to qualify before the first of July next year.”

Ali's mouth opened wider.

“You will be required to fly for eight weeks during July, August, and September. The first fortnight is on simulators, and then you will be a First Officer on real flights. You will receive full First Officer pay for those eight weeks.”

“That is worth between eight and ten thousand pounds a year before tax depending upon what flights you are assigned.”

Ali's mouth could not open any wider. There was no sound coming out.

“If after your degree you wish to undertake further studies for a Masters Degree or for a PhD the sponsorship will continue for another five years.

“When you wish to come into flying you are very welcome.

“If in a few years time you think Engineering is what you wish to do, instead of flying, we will make that possible.

“From the first of October you also have free flights, reduced fare flights for family members, and health insurance. And a pension plan.

“Welcome to our airline.”

Ali had not been expecting this. He just had his mouth open. He could not speak.

The Chief Executive was smiling broadly.

“So.

“You are eighteen years old.

“Your future is on a plate for you.

“You put your future there by your courage, by your skill, and by your initiative.

“Get on with the rest of your life.”

“Yes, sir.

“Thank you, sir.”

“I know that you do not drink whisky.

“This is a very expensive bottle of whisky for Mr Hewson.

“This is an even more expensive bottle of perfume for you Mrs Hewson.

“Thank you for coming. Miss Pearson will take you to a quiet room so you may complete the forms.”

I helped Ali to complete the forms because Ali was totally and utterly shocked. He was emotionally all over the place. He struggled to make coherent speech.

When we got home I let Ali tell Don. Ali had recovered by then.

CHAPTER 4: Don Hewson

I can't go to London with Ali, so Emma has gone in my place.

Ruth Lightfoot is on holiday so I am without adults except for Tohur Miah. Fortunately Linda Donkin has a day off from the hotel so she and Charlotte Johnson are also around to help.

All the children need to visit the hairdresser. With the number of children I have that is a significant logistics operation.

Robert Graham and Derek Donkin need school uniforms for the High School. I did not wish to buy the uniforms too soon, because sometimes children grow inches unexpectedly. I did not wish to leave it until the week before term begins because sometimes the shops run out of certain sizes.

So I am shuttling groups of children to and from Meldon all day today.

Some of the children have money to spend, so they will shop in Meldon and they will return to Tryton by bus.

I have given them bus money. I know I am soft!

Max, Robert, and Colin have taken Alice, Annie, and Georgina to the park.

I noted without comment that the boys are carrying boomerangs.

They are sensible lads. As sensible as any nine year old to eleven year old lads will ever be.

I know there has been a lot going on, but I sense that the general practising of music has reduced. It may just be that there is more to do outside. Or that music lessons stopped for August and the children wish to take some holiday from practising. Tohur and Robert are still practising their cooking performances and their patter.

Tohur has explained that his audience will be mainly bored white women watching daytime TV. He knows they are unlikely to follow his recipes exactly. Tohur says that as much as anything he is teaching techniques and combinations of flavours that the women may introduce to their normal cooking.

Like David and Robert, Tohur is using everyday materials that anyone is likely to have in

their house. And of course exotic spices.

Tohur told me that for many people paprika and turmeric are exotic spices. Tohur likes cooking vegetarian food he says because there is so much opportunity for playing with colour and texture and taste. In each of his programs Tohur makes an interesting vegetarian dish as well as a meat dish and a sweet.

The chefs are co-ordinating their programmes so there is no repetition of any idea inside the same fortnight. No-one has told them to do this.

David's argument is that although each is a stand-alone programme or segment the same supermarket is financially involved. There will be someone from the supermarket watching the programmes. It is important that that person does not sense repetition.

The supermarket gives each of Tohur and Robert and David a £100 weekly allowance for experimentation and practice. I am happy for the boys to play in the kitchen all day.

Some of the experiments do not work hugely well, but all the results are edible. Unless some are destroyed before I see them!

I have agreed with Dan Wilbey's mother that I will buy identical clothing for Dan and Max to wear at the meeting in Birmingham. This will accentuate that they look amazingly similar. I did the same for the audition at Bristol.

Dan is coming to the house at lunchtime so Dan and Max may have identical haircuts this afternoon.

Dan and Max do not know what they will be paid. They are too young to understand the information.

Dan is doing six days work. Dan will earn enough to buy a small car. Given that by law Dan may only work two hours a day that is a pretty good hourly rate.

I will invest the money for Dan. Hopefully it will go a good way towards Dan's University fees.

Max will work on a different set, for twelve days.

I had to negotiate with the choir school for Max to miss an extra week from school. The school does not wish to stand in Max's way.

Max will have to work very hard when he gets back to catch up with his classmates.

Sahid Daar is coming with us for Dan's week, just so Sahid can see how a film is made.

I will invest Max's money for Max.

Max decided on Spanish as an additional language rather than German.

There are quite a few good reasons to choose either language over the other. I think that Spanish would be more useful just because Spanish is spoken more widely than German.

I have no strong thoughts on the issue, but I wished to understand Max's thinking.

I asked Max why he had chosen Spanish over German.

Max told me that when we were in Menorca a number of the Spanish people there could not speak English. Whereas when Max watches war movies on television the Germans can always speak English. So it makes sense to learn Spanish first rather than German.

I kept a straight face. Max has by himself decided as I wish him to decide.

The adult actor is a world famous face. The children are in an early part of the film, being his character as a child. There is always the hope that in some future film the film makers may wish to flash back to the actor's character's youth. Max or Dan or both may be called upon. The boys will not meet the star, because he is filming in Australia. They will meet him at the London premier in about a year or so.

Rebecca has her driving test tomorrow. She is pretending to be calm about it, but I know Rebecca well enough not to be fooled. I am half tempted to create a row with Rebecca tomorrow morning so Rebecca can flame at me and then be calm for the driving test. I will check with Emma first because Emma may have a different strategy.

I am really troubled about what to advise Mark Johnson.

Mark has to choose his A level subjects for College, and he has no idea what to study. He has no idea what career he will follow. Beyond doing his missionary stint Mark has no career thoughts.

I put Mark in for vocational guidance testing last year.

Mark is not an academic high flyer like Ali. Mark is significantly above average on many of the tests. Mark could do more or less anything.

Mark could specialise in IT or Catering, or Public Services, but he just does not know what he wants.

About the only decision I have managed to get out of Mark is that he is not interested in hotel work or catering because of the unsocial hours.

I think Mark will pass his A levels, whatever they are. We are talking about C grades or possibly B grades. Not A or A*.

If Mark did not do A levels but he did BTEC in a vocational subject he would come out with Distinctions and Merits. Mark could still go to University.

I would like to push Mark in a vocational direction, but pushing Mark is like pushing string. When Mark is engaged, Mark just does. When Mark is disengaged, he just floats. I don't know what to do.

Mary Pickles is the Johnson family's social worker. Mary said that I have to bite my tongue, stand back, and give the lad space. I have been doing that for a year now.

Rebecca Johnson always has strong motivation, bordering on relentless. Rebecca did not

know what she wanted to do, so she chose A level subjects that she thought she would enjoy.

Rebecca is older than Mark. She still does not know what she wishes to do. Yet I am not worried about Rebecca at all.

Rebecca is a very hard-headed forceful young woman who will do whatever she thinks right. All I have to do is to back Rebecca in whatever she does.

Rebecca knows I will back her. I have told her that I will.

Ali has a place at Cambridge University. He is launched.

It would be nice if the airline stumped up for some flying lessons. I expect that the cheapskates will just give Ali a citation in a frame. Is it worth travelling to London for that?

Tohur is a wild card. I would say Tohur is the best chef in the house. He is better with spices and herbs than I am. Tohur has a wider culinary repertoire than I.

I hope that Tohur's launch into being a TV chef is successful. It will be a significant experience for him whatever happens.

I will have to give Tohur the hard word about not getting involved with girls or with drugs. I am keeping Tohur's plumber apprenticeship option open for the moment. In a year from now he may need it.

Tohur is doing well in his judo. Tohur was a very hard fit quick lad when he began judo, and he is leaping up the judo rankings.

Linda Donkin is nearly two years off her GCSE exams. I am pleased about that because the dyslexia treatment finishes in October and then Linda has a clear run at her GCSE studies. It also gives Linda longer to mature emotionally before she has to sit exams. Linda will be seventeen when she sits her GCSEs instead of the normal sixteen years old.

Taking the rape threat away has been wonderful for Linda.

Linda's confidence is growing daily as the fear drops off her. I heard Linda giggling the other day. I was so pleased!

Linda is testing my patience as she explores the boundaries. All children explore and test the boundaries at intervals. Now that Linda has more confidence Linda has to explore the boundaries again. My happiness in Linda's personal growth more than offsets the irritations that Linda's explorations create.

Linda knows how to wind me up.

I try to make sure that I do not react as Linda expects.

The drug dealer's colleague is going to give evidence against the drug dealer. The judge will give the colleague a lighter sentence. The drug dealer will stay in prison for a long time. Hooray!

There is going to be a problem if Linda stays on at school after her GCSEs. She will be nineteen when she sits her A Levels or BTEC National exams. That is a problem for care funding. Elizabeth Mountford has told me that there are exceptional circumstances around Linda, so funding Linda to sit her A levels ought not to be a problem.

Elizabeth asked me if I think Linda is bright enough to take A levels.

I said that Linda is developing. We will just have to see. I hope that Linda does earn A levels.

Charlotte Johnson is just lovely. Although Charlotte has a wonderful voice Charlotte is not intending to make a career in music. Charlotte asked me for piano lessons and I have agreed.

All this thinking is a bit disjointed because it is interspersed with running children in and out of Meldon. I also become involved in conversations about hair styles.

The boomerang gang has returned from the park.

Max threw his boomerang at a rabbit but he missed it.

An old lady told Max off. She said that the rabbit has a right to life.

Why was Max trying to kill it? Just for his own pleasure?

Max apologised to her.

Max would have apologised to the rabbit, but it was no longer visible.

Ali and Emma have returned. Ali is high as a kite, and so he should be. The lad is made for life. I am so pleased for him. We all are.

Ali and Tohur are going to see Mrs Shah tomorrow morning to tell her the good news.

CHAPTER 5: Mark Johnson

I enjoyed my camping holiday with the Mormons. I am not officially an organiser because I am too young, but I helped out a lot. The main role for me was just to be there while younger teenagers took part in activities. I kept an eye on their safety.

It was a good camp. You could see some of the younger boys maturing over the week.

Rebecca went for her driving test.

The examiner was off sick, so Rebecca had to miss her driving test. Rebecca had got herself all emotionally wound up for the test and now it has been postponed.

So Rebecca continues her driving lessons, twice a week until we have a new test date.

Then for the fortnight before the new test date Rebecca will be on a lesson a day.

Rebecca and I are ever so pleased for Ali Miah. Provided Ali does not do anything stupid his career is established.

Ali is a bit young to marry, and he has nobody in mind. He does not drink. He does not

tithe.

I think that Ali has the sense to live like a student and to save the rest of his income.

The Sal Hewson Memorial Foundation will help Ali with a deposit to buy a house when he decides to buy one.

There is a daily trip to Manchester to film our chefs. David, Tohur, and then Robert.

Sahid Daar is making good money on the filming. Paid at union rate, and not paying National Insurance because he is too young, Sahid is on nearly £1,000 a week!

Rebecca is making good money as a chaperon for Robert and for Tohur. Tohur needs a chaperon because he is still under sixteen. Helen Wilkins is driving everyone and chaperoning David Wilkins.

Rebecca's First Aid course has been put off until she has time to do it. Sahid also needs a chaperon. Helen is chaperoning Sahid for free.

Mr Vincent is only involved with Robert Graham. Mr Vincent has given Robert a good assistant producer, called Carol.

Carol was impressed when David and Robert and Sahid gave Carol a list of the equipment needed, a set and lighting design, a list of the ingredients needed, and a shooting schedule.

Mr Vincent likes the musical introduction.

Mr Vincent asked Robert and Sahid to come up with visual images to put on screen during the introduction music.

The visual background to the music is now the hands of Fulesa and Sally and Kali doing things. In one film the hands peel and chop vegetables. In another the hands carve and shape vegetables into flowers and other pretty shapes. There is a lovely film where the three girls together are plaiting dough. The girls prepared ten films, so on each programme we see a different activity.

The girls were very pleased to earn a significant chunk of money for such easy work. They did not see a TV studio because the filming took place in David's kitchen. Don saw to the social worker permissions.

David has his films in the can to last until after Christmas. David has done some really good Christmas food. David ignored Eid and Ramadan because those are reserved for Tohur.

Tohur got his filming done before Ramadan started, as otherwise he would have had difficulty. During the programmes that will be broadcast during Ramadan Tohur has a strap line making it clear that the programme was filmed before Ramadan. Tohur's food looks so good that you regret that television cannot convey smell as well.

Tohur is so happy and pleasant and relaxed during the programmes that he comes over as ever such a nice guy. Which Tohur is.

You forget that Tohur looks like a thug because he is so nice on screen.

Robert also ignored Eid and Ramadan. Robert did a couple of programmes about cheap Christmas presents like making biscuits and making sweets. Robert took advice from David about High School children starting Food Technology, so Robert shows how to make a white sauce, how to make pastry, and how to make bread and rolls.

Robert does not mention his disability in any of his programmes.

Robert's disability is not relevant to Robert. After a while Robert's disability is not relevant to the viewer. You get used to it.

I know that Don Hewson thinks I don't think about my future. I do. I just don't know what to do.

I am getting clearer on what I don't want to do.

There is nothing I want to study.

I do not want to spend two years of my life going to college when I am just not interested. I could go. I would get the certificates at the end. I really don't want to do it.

I understand Don's point that if I spend my life as a shelf stacker or shop assistant I will always be desperately poor. That is not a good life for me or for my family.

Tohur has had a stroke of luck with this TV chef opportunity. I think that Tohur will not be taking up his apprenticeship to become a plumber and gas fitter.

I had a good long chat with Bishop Collins. I am going to ask Don Hewson if I can leave school and become a plumber.

If I follow an apprenticeship as a plumbing and heating engineer I will do practical things. I will build systems. I will maintain and repair systems. I will end up with a qualification that will allow me to earn a living and to support a family.

I am happy doing practical things.

Becoming a teacher or a social worker just does not appeal.

Bishop Collins was interesting. He said that I have the brains to be a teacher or a social worker. But if I do not want to do it, then why should I spend years of my life preparing to spend a lifetime in a job I will hate?

Bishop Collins said I must follow my star. A plumber is a useful and worthy occupation.

If things don't work out as a plumber I may later become a teacher or a social worker. I will bring to the job experience of the real world. Go for it!

I went to Bishop Collins first, because I knew Don would tell me to discuss the question with Bishop Collins.

I think Don will be disappointed in me.

Don organised the apprenticeship for Tohur because Tohur was never going to do A levels. Tohur already has one A level. Tohur is so encouraged by his good A level that he is doing much better at school. Tohur may take more A levels.

If the TV programme takes off Tohur may work in catering or on TV.

I really don't think that Tohur is going to become a plumber. So Tohur will probably not going to take up the apprenticeship that has been reserved for him.

I need to speak to Tohur first.

Or maybe to Rebecca. Rebecca can persuade Don into almost anything.

Part of me says I should speak to Don myself, man to man.

I am going to have grief from Rebecca I think. So do I take Rebecca first, or Don first?

I think Tohur first.

Ali and Rebecca's A level results are out. Ali has four A*s, but only an A in Chemistry. Ali romps into Cambridge because he only needed three As.

Rebecca has two As and a B, so she qualifies for University easily. She is happy with her result.

The GCSE results will be out in another week.

Don cornered me. He wants to talk to me tomorrow about my future studies. We will meet after breakfast.

I spoke to Tohur.

Tohur says that he is expecting now to study for A levels or for a catering or business qualification. Tohur is perfectly happy for me to take his plumbing apprenticeship.

Rebecca was much nicer than I feared she would be.

Rebecca really enjoyed studying for her A levels. If there is something constructive I wish to do instead then I should do it.

Rebecca asked whether I want to train as a plumber or whether that is really just an escape route for me? Would I be as happy learning to be an aircraft mechanic? Or as a RAF caterer?

Once I have decided not to go up the A level route I should have a good look round at what else is on offer. But I must do it quickly because as soon as the GCSE results are out there will be a lot of competition for all the good opportunities.

Rebecca offered to break the news to Don that I do not want to study for A levels but I want to start on a career now. But what career?

I said I would ask Don for advice on careers. Between now and seeing Don I will search the Internet and see what is possible. There may be careers I do not know exist.

Searching for them on the Internet will be a challenge.

I spent the rest of the day researching on the internet.

How do you find out about training for jobs that you do not know exist?

I never knew there were so many occupations out there.

A lot of them promised I could start by stacking shelves and then work my way up to shop manager. The same companies told graduates that they could be Assistant Managers after a year and possibly Manager after three years.

I suspect that the shelf stackers get their promotions much more slowly. I don't think I want to be a supermarket manager, anyway.

There are a lot of jobs in the Health area. Ambulance attendant looks interesting. I thought about radiographer but I realised I would get bored. Taking the X-rays is fine, but not being a doctor I would never do anything except to give the X-rays to a doctor.

I could be a nurse. I need a Nursing Degree for that, and A levels first.

I could be a fireman, but I am not old enough.

Journalists need A levels and preferably a degree.

Most of the manufacturing jobs are just production line work. The career path people need a degree before they start.

Dental nurse? Boring!

Dental hygienist? No thanks!

It seems to be technician jobs. I think I would get bored running around servicing photocopiers.

"Fitter" sounds possible. I like the idea of helping machines to work.

The Construction Industry is always up and down. I see guys in their forties in and out of work. There is one man in our Church who is really struggling. Even when he is in work he does not earn a huge amount. He always seems to be on short weeks or on short time. I don't know how the poor guy sleeps at night.

Maybe he doesn't.

I will sleep on all this tonight. Maybe "Chef" is the answer. There is always a shortage of good chefs.

The star chefs earn good money, but the Head Chef at the Tryton Hotel is not paid very well. He has free food and free accommodation, but if he had to support a family his wage is just not enough.

I don't know.

I had ideas running through my head all night.

After breakfast I sat down with Don.

"Are you all right, Mark?"

"Yes. Why?"

"You look like you didn't sleep last night. Normally you are bouncy in the mornings. If I didn't know you don't drink I would think that you have a hangover."

"I have been thinking a lot, Don. It hurts."

Don laughed.

"OK. What have you been thinking about?"

"Jobs. Careers. Income."

"And?"

"I don't know."

"That's normal."

I was surprised. Don is always so certain about things, even when he is wrong. Here he is being really tolerant that I don't know what to do.

"At your age I was in work. I wanted to be a combat soldier but the Army made me into a pay clerk.

"I was a "boy soldier".

"Depending on how you count it I am on my fourth or fifth career now. What you decide at sixteen does not commit you for the rest of your life.

"Are there any definite decisions?"

"Not really."

"I don't want to go to college to study stuff I am not interested in."

"Fair enough."

I was amazed.

Don is not forcing me to go to College!

"When you are interested you will do night school or correspondence courses to obtain the qualifications you need. Or you may call on the Sal Hewson Memorial Fund.

"Depends what it is.

"You have got until the First of October.

"By the First of October you must be in a job. I don't care what it is. You can chef at the Tryton Hotel if you wish. Or do a totally different job.

"But you must be in a full time job or two part-time jobs."

My face showed my surprise.

"I will tell you my thinking."

I was really interested.

I am going to get a job of some kind anyway.

Don is a strange man.

"You might strike lucky. You might apply for an apprenticeship and the employer says "Oh Mark Johnson. Let me kiss your neck."

"We are desperate for an apprentice and we will happily take you. You can start tomorrow."

"More likely is that you apply for thirty jobs and you don't even have an interview.

"And every week you sit at home bored out of your skull you are becoming less and less employable because you are doing nothing with your life.

"If you are in a job you are demonstrating that you can hold down a job. You have confidence that you can carry on in this job forever. You are not desperate.

"It is much easier to get a job when you are in a job.

"You will have money in your pocket. You will have people to talk to at work. Opportunities may come up at work. You will meet people. You may hear about jobs before they are advertised.

"If you are in work your CV looks like a worker rather than looking like a dosser."

"Why the First of October?"

"You worked hard on your GCSEs. You are allowed a little holiday. And it may take a little while to land a job because there are thousands of people out there who want the jobs.

"You need a deadline because otherwise I am just saying "Get a job"."

"Is there a threat? What if I don't have a job by the First of October?"

"Mark, my love, you know I don't work on threats and intimidation."

Don said that with a straight face!

I think Don believes it!

"Just get a job by the First of October.

"That gives me a few weeks to think up a dire "or else". I haven't got one at the moment.

"I don't think you need to be threatened.

"I give you a deadline and you will meet it."

That is very fair.

The easiest thing to do is to ask the Head Chef to give me a job. Or maybe speak to the General Manager about a non-food job.

The great thing about the Tryton Hotel is that there are no travel expenses, very little travelling time, and usually free meals. If I find a job in Meldon I am looking at the first hour's pay going on bus fares, and an hour and a half travelling each day.

Do I want to be a plumber?

Don said,

"Now, you need to have a conversation with Mary.

“Mary makes the decisions about your life. I can make recommendations but Mary actually makes the decisions. Mary is coming tomorrow morning to talk to you. About eleven o'clock she says.”

I had a chat with Mary Pickles my social worker at Easter. I did not know what I wanted to do.

Mary just accepted this and she said we would talk when my GCSE results come out. The results are out tomorrow.

Robert Graham came home from filming.

Robert has his first out-take!

A pan of milk boiled over and Robert said a word that cannot be broadcast on children's television.

Generally though, Robert is really enjoying the filming.

Robert's director is very happy with Robert and Sahid's work rate. She says that David and Robert and Sahid are real professionals. Robert says that Mr Vincent pops in twice a day to watch Robert briefly and to sample the food that Robert has cooked.

The GCSE results are out. I have mainly Cs and two Bs. An A* in Food Technology.

My results allow me to do A levels or an apprenticeship if I wish. Abdullah has mainly Bs with an A* in Food Technology. Abdullah can do anything.

Mary Pickles came at eleven. We had a good long talk.

I have decided not to become a plumber. I realise now that the plumber apprenticeship was an escape route rather than something that I really want to do.

I have decided to become an Aircraft Technician.

The problem is that we are not anywhere near an airport.

So I could join the Royal Air Force. It would get me out into the world.

Or I can apply to lots of companies and be prepared to move to wherever the job is.

Don says that the Sal Hewson Memorial Fund will support me financially. The fund will buy a house near my job, and will pay me to manage the house. I will have my apprentice wage, live rent free, and earn extra money by managing the house.

It is a really nice offer.

I will apply for every apprenticeship there is as an Aircraft Technician.

Don has told me to play with my Meccano® a lot more, in case mechanical aptitude is a component of the assessment procedure. I am also spending two hours a day on Ali's flight simulator programme.

Don will arrange flying lessons for me.

With working in the kitchen of the Tryton Hotel and my Mormon activities as well I barely

have time to breathe!

The other issue is that I will be ordained a priest in November. Our ceremony is on the second Sunday in November.

Four of us Mormons are being ordained priest on the same day. Bishop Collins will ordain me priest because I have no male Mormon relative to do it.

We will have special classes with Ted Singleton during September and October.

Elder Ted Singleton is probably a nice man in his personal life. Older young men have warned me that in these special classes Elder Ted has absolutely no sense of humour.

Elder Ted has eight classes in which to turn boys into men. He has absolutely no time for people who do not measure up.

Elder Ted has been known to bounce a young man back for six months because the young man was not mature enough to become a priest yet. We have all been warned!

Strictly speaking it is not Elder Ted who would bounce me back six months. Ted would suggest to the Bishop and to the Youth President that I am not mature enough yet.

Elder Ted Singleton is held in huge respect.

I would be bounced!

CHAPTER 4: Charlotte Johnson

I am a good singer. I am fine on the drums and I am doing pretty well on the piano.

After the excitement while flying back from Tunisia I was suddenly hit by the idea for a hymn.

I worked on it for about three days, because I was writing the lyrics and composing the tune. Eventually I realised I was better to do one or the other first. So I wrote the lyrics, and then I fitted music to the lyrics.

If I say so myself, it is a good piece.

THE LORD LOVES US (Charlotte Johnson)

The Lord loves us.

The Lord loves us.

The Lord The Lord The Lord The Lord

The Lord loves us!

When we are small The Lord loves us

When we are tall The Lord loves us

When we are not small – or tall
The Lord loves us!

(CHORUS)

The Lord loves us.
The Lord loves us.
The Lord The Lord The Lord The Lord
The Lord loves us!

If we are poor The Lord loves us
If we are sick The Lord loves us
When we are not poor or sick
The Lord loves us!

CHORUS

When we are brown or black the Lord loves us.
When we are white or yellow the Lord loves us
Whatever shade we are
The Lord loves us!

CHORUS

When we are young the Lord loves us
When we are old the Lord loves us
When we are neither young nor old
The Lord loves us!

CHORUS

When life is good The Lord loves us
When life is hard The Lord loves us
Whatever good we do
The Lord loves us.

CHORUS

I did not know what to do with the song.

I thought I might sing it at the Mormon Christmas Party after "I Heard Him Come".

Freda and Linda and I have decided that we are old enough each to need a black dress to wear on formal occasions. Obviously we will ask the Daars to make them.

We were discussing the lines and the cuts when Max Hewson started teasing us.

Are we going to go to Halloween as "Bat Sisters"?

We rolled Max on the floor and we tickled him. Poor Max was laughing so hard that he could not resist us. I blew raspberries on Max's lower back. Max is such a nice kid and he is so pretty that we all three kissed him.

We said that we would take Max with us so he could be fitted out as a Cat to accompany us three Bats.

Robert Graham had bother in his first week at the High School.

Some lad made a rude comment about Robert and his wheelchair.

Robert instantly punched the lad extremely hard between the legs. The lad was taken to hospital. The lad had to have an operation on his sensitive bits.

Everyone at school is very careful what they say to Robert now.

Don was absolutely furious with Robert because Robert struck the first blow. In fact Robert struck the only blow.

Robert has early bedtime for three weeks, and his double bed has been taken away for three weeks. Robert has no TV for three weeks. Robert cannot even watch his own program.

This is the heaviest punishment that Don has ever given any child.

The lad came back to school a week after the incident, and he apologised for his comment.

Robert then apologised for punching him.

Robert also told the lad about Don's punishment, which pleased the lad a bit.

The lad has been roasted by the Head of Year about abusing a disabled child. The Head of Year chewed off Robert for his violence.

Both lads are on report. They need a signature from the teacher at the end of each class to say that they have been properly behaved in class.

Robert's first TV appearance was broadcast the week after the punch. Robert may not view it until after his three week ban expires.

Within days there was a piece of news in a Sunday newspaper about Robert punching the

other lad at school. The article was almost approving. The headline was "Disabled TV Child Chef Punches Bully".

By now Robert has been told to put a lock on his mouth as well as on his other parts. So Robert said nothing at school.

The school had known little about Robert being on TV or about David and Tohur's daytime programs. The social workers had sent courtesy emails when the local authority granted permission for Tohur and Robert to make the programs.

No social workers are now involved with David Wilkins, so there was no message about David.

Tohur's TV appearances have started. Tohur reports that the girls are all being friendlier to him. They were not unfriendly before, but more girls are smiling at Tohur and more girls are initiating conversations with him.

The programmes go out while the children are at school, so Tohur is a bit surprised how many girls watch him.

Tohur has learned that many of the girls watch his programs on i-player when they get home. The girls also watch David on i-player.

Rebecca and I are pleased that Mark is going to be ordained priest in November. Mark is a serious young man and he is ready to become a priest.

Don and Emma are going to attend our Church for the first time ever to watch the ceremony.

Ali is coming back from Cambridge to attend.

We are all catering, but the Reception is at the hall attached to our Mormon Church because there are four young men being ordained together.

Derek Donkin is at the High School. He is in no trouble at all.

Derek is enjoying the High School. Derek is in a different class from Robert so each boy is on his own.

Dennis Wilkins decided to take the practical classes for Food Technology in his GCSE year because Dennis has been told that Miss Watkins is very good about preparing students for the practical examination.

Miss Watkins asked me if I live in the Hewsons' house?

I said that I do.

Then Miss Watkins asked if I wish to skip the Food Technology practical classes?

I told her that I enjoy the practical classes. I also enjoy helping my classmates in the practical classes. So, thanks, but I am happy in her practical classes.

Tohur also attends Miss Watkins' practical classes, even though he is a TV chef.

Tohur told Miss Watkins that he sometimes learns something from her classes. It is easier to attend than not to attend.

Tohur told Miss Watkins that he needs to score A* in her subject because it would be embarrassing for a TV chef to score anything less.

Ali agreed to drive us over to the Daars on the Saturday before he went to Cambridge.

Ali and Max gravitated to the living room where they chatted to Joy and Arthur Brown.

We three and the Daar girls discussed dresses.

They showed us black materials.

Then they showed us other swatches of colour.

I fell in love with a cream silk that felt as though it would be incredibly light and comfortable.

While Shakoora and Amina were cutting and sewing for a "first fit" for us Mina said we must come with her to Sahid and Jabril's bedroom. They are out.

Sahid and Jabril's bedroom looks like a geek's dream. There are two beds in there, but what catches the eye is all the equipment. There are two laptops opened up side by side on a long table. There is a camera mounted on a tripod, a couple more cameras and tripods, spotlights, a high rail from which is draped a huge blue cloth, two microphones on stands, a sound system, a sound mixing system, and a mess of wires connecting it all to the power sockets. On the wall is a very big plasma screen and the rest of the walls are covered in what looks like egg boxes, to deaden sound. There are wires connecting all the pieces of equipment to each other.

Sahid has used his media earnings to equip himself to do anything around films and sound.

I said that if Sahid tried to use everything at once the house fuses would blow.

Mina giggled.

Mina said that was exactly what had happened. Sahid has since paid for an electrician to rewire the house.

My cream silk dress was ready. There was an underskirt to help the line and to prevent any danger of "see through". I was wearing white underwear fortunately. When I put the dress on I looked pure and lovely like an angel.

I am no angel. But I looked like an angel.

Sahid came home, and he greeted us. Sahid said that I looked beautiful.

Sahid asked if I would like to see Sahid's studio?

Mina and I went to the bedroom again. Sahid went round the room pointing out everything electrical, kicking some socks under a bed as he walked around the room.

Sahid asked if I would like to record a pod cast for the Mormon site? So I sang "I Heard Him Come", unaccompanied.

Then I asked if I could record a song I had written? I sang "The Lord Loves Us", unaccompanied.

When I finished I became aware of a silence. Joy and Max had crept up the stairs as I had been singing. Both rushed to me and they hugged me.

Sahid played back the two pod casts. I had been stood in front of the blue cloth, Blue frequently does not show up on camera, and Sahid had chosen this shade of blue because it does not show up on camera at all. There was just me in my cream silk dress looking gorgeous.

Sahid said he would work on the sound to make the pod sound even better. I should come back in an hour.

My black dress was ready, and so was Max's cat costume, complete with whiskers.

When we came out we waited downstairs until Sahid called us up.

Both pods are really wonderful now. I don't know about these things but both pods seem to me to be of professional quality.

Sahid said that he still has the access codes for the Mormon group web site, but it is not good manners for Sahid to use the access codes. So Sahid emailed the pod casts to the girls who are now running the site.

Do I want to go on You Tube? Sahid could put the pods up there.

I should have asked Rebecca but I was so happy and excited that I just agreed that Sahid could put the pods up.

Sahid took a photo of me as an angel, and photos of us three Bats and our Cat.

Then Ali took us home.

We all helped Ali to prepare for his journey to Cambridge.

Rebecca has passed her driving test so Rebecca drove Ali to Cambridge. I went, too, so Rebecca would have someone to chat to on the journey back.

Cambridge is a lovely town. Ali is so lucky to be living right in the very middle of Cambridge.

Then a few days later Rebecca drove Mark to an interview near Luton Airport. There are twelve apprenticeships as an Aircraft Mechanic at the company. Twenty people have been invited to interview, and Mark is one of them!

Mark reported that the first interview was of five applicants together. They were all talking about why they wanted to be aircraft mechanics. Mark was the only one who had practiced on a "how to fly" computer programme.

Mark explained that an air mechanic who can fly is more useful than an air mechanic who cannot fly. That is why Mark is currently taking flying lessons.

Mark is the only person in his group who is taking flying lessons.

Then each lad was given a large stack of metal Meccano®-like parts and he was told to build a model aeroplane from them.

Mark spotted quite early on that there were not many long parts. Mark used those to be the fuselage. The next longest pieces were the front edges of the wings.

Mark felt that the aeroplane more or less fell together.

When Mark looked round Mark was the only applicant to be anywhere near finished. So Mark caught the eye of the supervisor and he was motioned to just sit. With the bits left over Mark built a staircase on wheels that reached up to the door.

Then Mark sat still until the activity finished. That was another thirty minutes!

Mark said that he was grateful to Don for buying him Meccano® after his vocational guidance assessment about eighteen months ago.

Mark now has to wait for a letter.

Ali has sent a message by email to Tohur.

Ali is having a great time. Ali's nickname was "Al" for about six hours but now Ali is known as "Yorkie" because of his Yorkshire accent.

I did not realise that Ali has an accent. Maybe we all have Yorkshire accents? I shall have to listen for our accents.

Ali has already applied for the University Air Squadron and he has an interview for the Squadron next week.

Ali has joined the Engineering Society, the Islamic Society, all the political societies except the nutty ones, and the Cambridge Union Society which is a famous debating club. Ali will see a lot of famous people speak at Cambridge over the next few years.

The University lectures do not begin properly until next Monday.

Quite a few people have recognised Ali from his newspaper and TV coverage after the landing at Manchester Airport. Ali is a minor celebrity in his College.

Ali is happy.

Ali did not mention George, even though Ali had mentioned George quite a few times when he returned from his interview at Cambridge.

On Monday after school Mr Driburg telephoned Tohur and then Mr Driburg spoke to Robert.

Tohur is a great success. Almost nobody who started to watch Tohur's programme switched channel away or turned their TV off. People watching daytime TV tend to get

bored easily, so Tohur in holding his audience's attention is a star!

The TV company and the supermarket are pleased at these early results.

Robert Graham has done well. Taking over from David Wilkins was not an easy task, but Robert has held almost all of David's audience. The TV company and the supermarket are pleased.

Now Mr Driburg would like to speak to Don.

Don listened carefully. He said

"I will have to consult.

"I will phone you tomorrow."

Don sat silent for quite a while. Then Don and Emma went off to their bedroom. When they came back they were both very quiet. We were all curious.

Eventually, over dinner, Max asked,

"What's going on, Dad? You spoke to Mr Driburg over an hour ago and since then you have barely spoken."

"Has Mr Driburg offered you a part?"

Don did not reply.

It really is not like Don not to speak. We all sat looking at Don.

The silence stretched on.

Then Don told us.

Mr Driburg has been approached by some people who want to make a TV series about a bunch of children or young teenagers setting up a pop group. Did Mr Driburg have any suitable musicians?

Mr Driburg already had a video recording of the Tryton Tykes playing "Nutrocker", and another of Charlotte singing "I Heard Him Come" with Rebecca on piano at last year's Mormon Christmas Party. He had another of Max's solo from Christmas at the Cathedral. Ages ago Don had sent a list of all the children and all our skills to Mr Driburg.

"Mr Driburg sent all this stuff to the clients. Now the clients want to meet all our musicians together at our house.

"The idea is a TV series about a bunch of child and teenage musicians. It does not have to be rock or pop or anything yet. They want to see all our talent and decide if you are good enough musicians to make a TV series with.

"Because if you are good enough musicians you can play whatever music they need."

"So what's the problem?"

"First, I have to decide if I think the general idea is a good one.

"I have an interesting time already managing a house with twenty-two children from baby

to eighteen years old.

“If half you kids are away making a TV series half the time, life becomes incredibly complicated for me.

“And what about the effect on the non-musical children?

“ And what is the effect on Tohur and Robert who are TV chefs?

“ And on Emma who has a demanding job?

“I never set out for any of you to be TV performers or TV stars.

“I wanted you to cook well because that improves your lives. I encourage music because music enhances your lives.

“It’s wonderful at the beginning when everything looks good. But imagine if things don’t go right and then you are a “has-been” all your life.”

“Don. It’s better to be a “has-been” than a “never was”.”

We all thought that.

“The worst outcome is that we have had some fun and we have earned some money. If people will pay us to play music I’m all for it.”

“Well, Emma and I are going to sleep on it. I want you children to sleep on it. We will have breakfast a little early tomorrow so we can have time to discuss it.”

We youngsters were all excited, even the non-musical children.

Later that evening Sahid telephoned me to ask for my bank account details. I asked Sahid why he wanted them.

Sahid explained that “The Lord Loves Us” has gone viral on You Tube. We have had over half a million views, and viewings are still increasing exponentially.

I did not know what “exponentially” meant so Sahid explained.

So why does Sahid want my bank account?

You Tube sells advertising, and a share of the advertising revenues goes to the originators. Sahid has had a payment for advertising revenues which he wishes to forward to me.

I had not expected any money.

How is the income being divided? Sahid says that the Daar girls have a free ad that Sahid placed on the You Tube pod casts, advertising that they made my dress. The Daar family are very happy with the free advertisement, so Sahid is taking no money.

This first payment is only a few hundred pounds, because You Tube pay monthly. We only put the pod casts up towards the end of September, so Sahid has only been paid for about five days in September. Sahid will be paid in November for the October viewings. The November payment will be over a thousand pounds. Probably it will be a lot more than a

thousand pounds.

I thanked Sahid and I gave him my bank details.

When I put the telephone down. I sat down and I prayed.

I prayed that I should not become bigheaded.

I prayed that I would have the wisdom to use this windfall sensibly.

Then I looked at You Tube.

I was in the featured videos!

The still photo of me in my cream dress makes me look beautiful. I am pretty, but Sahid has done things with the lighting that make me look so beautiful and so innocent.

On the video there was a very small box that said the dress had been made by the Daars, with an advertisement for their web site. There was a link to the other pod cast of "I Heard Him Come". Looking at that, I have had nearly fifty thousand views.

I had to tell Rebecca.

Mark was out.

Rebecca took the laptop downstairs to show Don and Emma. They hugged me and they congratulated me.

Don said that in the same way as David and Tohur and Robert have to behave themselves, so do I now.

Don is not abnormally worried about me messing around with boys. I am showing no signs of doing that. The most important lesson is to keep my mouth closed because anything I say will be twisted.

Do the Mormons know?

I said that up to ten minutes ago I had not known. Don said that we have to tell the Mormons, and Mary Pickles our social worker, and the school.

We have to tell the Mormons because there may be Mormon issues that Don would not recognise. Don does not wish me to be in trouble with the Mormons.

Mary should be told out of courtesy.

The school must be asked so the staff can be warned to be wary of outside enquiries.

Don telephoned Bob.

"Bob, we need your guidance!"

"Oh, Yes?"

"Charlotte has put up a couple of videos on You Tube. They are really taking off!"

"We want to be sure that Charlotte does not upset your Church in any way. When can we see you?"

Bob said he would pop over this evening after his dinner.

Don left a message on Mary's phone.

The school would be closed by now so Don will telephone the school in the morning.

"Charlotte, you look really lovely. You have a wonderful voice.

"Who wrote the song?"

"I did."

"And the tune?"

"Yes."

"Well done, princess!

"You are a clever girl as well as beautiful!

"Now I have to explain something.

"I worry about all my girls. I worry that bad things will happen to you."

It is not exactly the first time that Don Hewson has said that!

"In that dress you look utterly beautiful. So I worry about you more. Singing those songs your inner goodness comes out. So you seem completely vulnerable.

"So I am now even more frightened for you.

"Promise me you will not leave the house without somebody with you. Ideally Tohur or Mark."

"Don, when I leave the house it is either with Rebecca and Mark to go to Church or to our Youth Club, or with Grace or Linda or Freda. Do I really need a guard?"

Don looked distressed.

"I don't know. I am just worried for you.

"Will you do something for me?"

"This is a homing device. You fit it on your leg just below your knickers.

"On this screen I can see exactly where you are. If anything happens – if you are abducted – this may save your life."

"Are you serious?"

"Charlotte. I am so pleased for you and so proud for you and I am so scared for you.

"There are a lot of dodgy people out there.

"I want to know you are safe.

"If you wear this radio beacon I will have peace of mind.

"If you are abducted I will be with you within minutes if I have to break down doors to do it."

I know that Don would break down doors and walk through fire for any of his girls. Not just me.

Don is nearly in tears.

If Don is this upset I have to agree.

“Don. I think you are being stupid. But yes I will wear it just so you do not worry yourself.”

Don hugged me.

Tohur and Mark rolled in. They missed dinner because they have been visiting Mrs Shah – and stuffing themselves on Shah family cooking.

Don told them my news, and we all watched You Tube together.

Mark and Tohur agreed that I look beautiful in that dress.

Don explained he does not want me going out on my own. They agreed to be available as escorts if I need an escort.

Bob came round later. Bob was very impressed. Bob said that he would inform Bishop Collins. There is nothing in the videos that causes concern. So well done!

Bob knows that I tithe from my pocket money, so Bob did not mention tithing.

Neither of us could imagine that I would not tithe from my media income. In fact, until a few hours ago I was not aware that there would be any media income.

A few days later, a Saturday, a letter arrived from the possible employer at Luton.

Mark was at work at the Tryton Hotel.

The envelope just sat on the study mantelpiece until Mark came home to open it.

We all looked at it. Some of us felt its thickness. It was too heavy just to be a rejection letter.

Mark did not come back until about four o'clock.

About ten of us watched Mark open the envelope. There were several pieces of paper in the envelope.

Mark has an apprenticeship!

We all cheered and we kissed Mark.

Over seven hundred people applied for the twelve apprenticeships. So well done Mark!

The job begins on the First of February.

Mark has to report to Luton for a medical examination on Thursday afternoon of next week.

Don said that Mark needs to go on the Internet tomorrow to print out a street map of Luton around his workplace. Ideally Mark should live within walking distance of work, so Mark has no expenses for travel and so Mark is not dependent on buses.

Mark needs to email every estate agent in Luton saying that he wishes to purchase a property within one mile of his workplace. As the results come in Mark should plot them on the map.

“Then we can arrange to view some properties on Friday.”

“And find a hotel we can stay in. We need to book for three people for Thursday and

Friday nights.”

“Three people?”

“Robert’s appointment at Stoke Mandeville Hospital has come through at last. We have to be there for eleven on Thursday. Your medical examination is at two in Luton. So we drive to Stoke Mandeville and you catch a bus to Luton. We will meet up in Luton about five o’clock. We spend the night in Luton, we look at properties on Friday and Saturday, and we drive back late on Saturday afternoon.”

Stoke Mandeville is one of the leading hospitals in the world for spinal injuries. If they can do anything for Robert, that would be wonderful.

CHAPTER 5: Rebecca Johnson

Helen Wilkins is really enjoying her first teaching job.

Dennis and Tohur are having tutors in their GCSE year to help them to earn better grades.

David Wilkins is just happy.

David and Jennifer Wilbey are a bit romantic again, but Helen is really stamping on David.

Helen has laid out precisely how far David may go, which is not very far.

I would not like to have Helen cross at me. Even less would I like to live in the same house as Helen if Helen is cross with me.

Peter Wilkins is enjoying the Cathedral School. He finds it a bit tough that everybody there is bright, but Peter is keeping up.

Janine is just happy with the world.

You would not recognise Linda Donkin as the girl who came to live here.

Linda is almost always happy. She is polite and kind.

Linda has a Sunday shift at the Tryton Hotel, and sometimes Linda covers a Saturday shift for me or for Mark if we are busy.

Linda has stopped saying “I am not interested in boys”.

We can’t work out who Linda is interested in.

Derek has come third in a junior golf competition at the Golf Club, which is very good for somebody who has been golfing for less than a year. Derek has made a scary African mask that is so obviously Don Hewson when he is cross that everyone laughs.

Sahid took a photo of the mask and of Don Hewson putting on a scowl while both were reflected in a mirror. Sahid won a prize at his school for that photograph. Sahid put the photo up on his web site.

Colin is getting really good on the guitar. Colin is having singing lessons again.

Freda Graham is lovely.

Robert Graham is a bit subdued. The savage punishment by Don has made Robert realise that hurting another person was a very bad thing to do. Apparently the child Robert hit is all right now, but as Don says that is no thanks to Robert.

Robert was very hurt by about four days when Don barely spoke to Robert because Don was so upset.

Eventually Emma intervened. Emma told Don to behave like an adult and to stop sulking. Robert really has got the message.

The trip to Stoke Mandeville has created an interesting situation.

Robert's spinal cord injury is serious, but there is a bit of spinal cord that is still connected. Robert has been put on an exercise regime that Don supervises. Robert is determined and Don is determined. If Robert does all his exercises Robert might be on crutches in less than four years. There are examples of people who have had a full recovery from spinal cord injury. So Robert is going to try his utmost.

Ali Miah telephoned Charlotte a couple of weeks after Mark learned that he has an apprenticeship in Luton.

Does Charlotte know her song is now being sung in Arabic? And that "The Lord Loves Us" is now a protest song in the Middle East?

Ali explained that there are Islamic religious singers called Nasheed artists. One of them took Charlotte's song, translated the words into Arabic, speeded up the beat, and the song is now popular in the Muslim world.

The Palestinians know that "The Lord Loves Us" is originally a Western song. When they think the Israeli police are about to attack them they sit down and they sing the song. It is really bad publicity for the Israelis to attack people singing "The Lord Loves Us" while the TV cameras and mobile phone cameras are recording their brutality. So the Israelis often stop. At the Cambridge University Islamic Society meeting last night the speaker played a mobile phone recording of an Israeli police line charging a group of Palestinians. The Palestinians sat down and started singing. The charge fizzled out and the police just stood there looking angry.

Everybody laughed.

So everybody in the Middle East who is pro-Palestinian is listening to the Naheed version of "The Lord Loves Us".

Ali is sending the film clip to Tohur to put up on the Islamic care site. Tohur will let Charlotte have a copy.

So now Mr Driburg is complaining to You Tube, and he is trying to obtain a share of the payments that You Tube make to the Nasheed artist. Charlotte is not trying to stop the

Nasheed version of the song, but just to have some royalties from it.

Mr Driburg said that Charlotte is not to say anything political. It is best if Charlotte says nothing at all.

Don put in for planning permission to build a gym for Robert to work out in so the apparatus never has to be put away.

Don went to visit his neighbours to explain the application before he put it in.

The neighbours have all seen Robert in his wheelchair.

We have seen the plans. The gym is a largely glass structure that has been designed by a recommended architect. The glass is special glass that retains heat in winter and excludes heat in summer. The glass is also toughened. The gym is two storey because it contains ropes and even a climbing wall. It has a half-storey glass dome to allow just a bit more space for the trampoline that will hopefully one day be needed. There is plenty of space to put in a small pool for Robert to exercise in the water.

What will it cost?

Don said "Buttons!" rather firmly, so we all shut up.

We all know that it must be a heck of a lot of buttons.

When Don went in to lodge the application the Planning Officer said the Council knew this application was coming in because they had already had a petition about it. When people object to a planning application there is often a petition to the Council asking the Council to refuse planning permission.

Then the Planning Officer told Don that every adult resident of the street has signed a joint letter saying that they support Don's application for a gym.

Don was in tears.

Margaret Graham and Georgina Donkin and my sister Sally are all more or less the same age. Fulesa is their age, too. They are a tight group who are pushing for equality with Max and Peter and Colin.

Their argument is that girls are generally more competent at everything than boys, so the slight age disparity should not disqualify the girls from doing anything that the boys can do. Emma and I are generally supportive.

Don is not opposed. More I think impressed.

I thought that I would leave care just by time going by. It turns out to be more confusing than that.

The care order on me expired on my eighteenth birthday. So since my eighteenth birthday I am completely free. I cannot be punished for not making my bed or for staying out late. If I were to be in a relationship it is no business of any social worker.

The money to Don Hewson continued until a week after my last A level exam. After that I should either get a job or claim social security. Although I am out of care and the money has stopped, social services will keep my file open until I am twenty-one.

Mary Pickles at Tryton Social Services is my designated contact person until I am twenty-one. Mary will help me if I need advice or if I need money.

So should I apply for social security?

Don Hewson says that the problem with social security is that the social security people are looking for opportunities to stop your social security.

They interfere with your life. They make appointments at inconvenient times that you must attend or lose your benefit. They want you to apply for jobs. Don thinks that me doing a First Aid course is more useful to my life than me filling in three application forms a week for jobs that I do not want to do.

Don says he does not mind if I do a couple of shifts a week at the Tryton Hotel to earn pocket money.

Don is just as happy to give me pocket money anyway.

Don says the two shifts a week at the Tryton Hotel will look better on my CV than just dossing. It is up to me.

At the moment I am working Friday nights and Saturdays.

When Mark goes to his apprenticeship in Luton Meldon Social Services will expect Mark to pay for his keep out of his wage. Meldon Social Services will top up Mark's wage if Mark needs that help. Their colleagues in Luton will visit Mark's proposed accommodation to make sure that the accommodation is clean and adequate.

Don had originally suggested that the Sal Hewson Memorial Fund would buy a house for Mark to live in.

Mark told Don that Mark would prefer to contact the Mormon Church in Luton and ask if anybody there would take Mark as a lodger. That would integrate Mark into the Mormon community.

With a bit of luck Mark would have all his meals prepared without ever having to cook, and Mark would have his laundry done for him.

Don was I think a bit surprised. Don told Mark to see what Mark could organise.

Mark's medical at the company doctor went fine. The doctor noticed the stab wound. The doctor said that Mark is as strong as a horse.

When Mark reported this comment, Sally said, "and almost as clever".

Mark picked Sally up and Mark held Sally above his head while she giggled. Mark

pretended to drop Sally and caught her and kissed her.

With driving lessons and outings and work and my Mormon activities I am busy enough. After my A levels I am very happy not to have a frantic time.

I did not take back the Mormon care web site because really I am no longer in care. The girls running it are doing a great job.

I asked Don for organ lessons. They are beginning soon.

The organ is very similar to the piano, so I have time to become good on the organ before my missionary service begins.

I had my meeting with Bishop Collins. He was very positive and encouraging. I feel empowered.

Mark is basically waiting for his apprenticeship to begin in February. Mark is now flying aeroplanes solo, which is exciting for him.

Mark is having his pre-ordination classes with Elder Ted Singleton. They are much better than Mark had feared.

All four lads are being sensible and so there are no issues.

Elder Ted Singleton did knock somebody back six months to give them longer to "grow up". That was twelve years ago!

Mark has discovered what textbooks his apprenticeship course will be using. Don bought them, and Mark is studying them.

Mark is not exactly seeing a girl.

Mark is sixteen and a few months, so Mark is allowed to see girls if he wishes. This is a girl whom Mark met at the airfield.

She is learning to fly.

Mark has passed his pilot test so he just flies.

After they have both been flying they catch the bus together into town. They go to a coffee shop. We Mormons do not drink tea or coffee so Mark has hot chocolate and Karen drinks tea.

Mark says there is mutual interest, but they are both just at the friendship level.

I believe Mark.

Charlotte is a bit embarrassed and shocked by "The Lord Loves Us". The song is popular across the Christian world as well as the Arab world. It has become an instant hit in junior schools everywhere. Some of the Christian radio stations in America play it several times a day. Mr Driburg registered Charlotte with the Performing Rights Society (PRS), so Charlotte now receives a very small payment every time the song is played on a radio or a TV program. The PRS is part of an international network so Charlotte is paid when the

song is played abroad, too.

Charlotte has already earned enough advertising income from the song on You Tube to pay for her missionary stint.

Charlotte earned even more money through Mr Driburg, who is now Charlotte's agent. There have been exclusive interviews and photo-shoots for which the magazines have paid a lot of money. I mean a lot of money. Charlotte already has more than enough money for University.

Charlotte told Mr Driburg that she does not wish to charge any Mormon Church organisations. Mr Driburg said that he understands where Charlotte is coming from. Mr Driburg will honour Charlotte's wishes. Mr Driburg is missing out on his commissions but he says he does not mind.

Charlotte had a stalker for a few days. The guy came up from London just to leer at Charlotte and to follow her around.

After a short and painful meeting with Dennis Wilkins the stalker has agreed to stay away from Tryton and to stay away from Charlotte.

I like Dennis Wilkins!

Charlotte is a really sweet girl, and she is working hard on staying a sweet innocent girl. Tohur walks Charlotte to and from school.

Charlotte was grateful to Sahid for putting the videos up on You Tube. She suggested to Sahid that Sahid deserves some financial reward.

Sahid says that the Daar sisters so far have orders for 308 sets of white silk dresses and underskirts at £225 each, and £20,000 of other orders all paid for online. The girls have bought a second industrial sewing machine, and the girls are churning out fifteen sets a week.

Sahid said the Daars could not have afforded to buy that much internet advertising. The Daars are very happy with the deal.

The only downside is that the girls are too busy to cook so Abdullah, Sahid, Jabril, Amal and Kali are doing all the cooking.

If Charlotte has any more songs Sahid will gladly record them.

CHAPTER 6: Don Hewson

I love half terms. The autumn half term is upon us. The logistics of twenty plus children doing so many things is beyond challenging. I may have to use contract taxis for some journeys.

Ali Miah is back from Cambridge for the holiday. Ali is named driver on one of the household cars. That is much cheaper than for Ali to rent a car. Ali and Tohur and Fulesa and Moklus and Monika will spend time together as a family.

There is a girl called George they are going to meet. George is to visit us on the Thursday during half term.

I knew a girl once called Mike so I have no preconceptions about George. Curiosity of course.

So far as I am aware George is the first girlfriend for Ali since Andria Wilkins.

On Friday night we are going bowling again. Linda surprised me by not choosing a hamburger chain for dinner. Linda has set a menu for us and Linda will do a lot of the cooking for it. It is going to be mainly meatballs and spaghetti and salad.

Amal will be dropped at our house by my father in law Arthur.

Arthur is taking away Alice and Damien to spend a few days with Arthur and Joy and the Daars at Doncaster.

Helen Wilkins is dropping Peter and Janine Wilkins and Dan Wilbey to eat with us, bowl with us, and go dancing on Saturday morning.

After dinner Helen will drive Amal up to Preston to spend the night with the Hudsons. Rebecca is travelling with Helen for a natter.

There is a dancing event on Saturday in Carlisle where Olivia and Amal should collect some more winners' cups. The Hudsons will return Amal to Doncaster on Monday.

On Saturday we are off to Harrogate for a dancing competition with Gerald and George Butler, Michael and Matthew Kelner, Max and Peter and Dan, Derek and Colin, Freda and Janine and Sally and Georgina, and a gang of kids from the dancing school. Miss Addie and I have hired a coach and driver.

Mark and Charlotte have religious instruction on Saturday morning until ten. Then Linda and Grace and Charlotte are going shopping in Meldon. Mark will work at the Tryton Hotel. Emma is holding the fort with children ranging from Robert Graham down to baby Arthur. I am not involved much now but Dennis and Abdullah and their partners are dancing in Cheltenham all weekend. Amy's parents are the drivers this weekend.

On Sunday the children will begin rehearsals for the concert.

The family's agent Mr Driburg has arranged for a TV company to visit us. They are looking for musical children to take part in a new TV series. It is easier for them to come to us than for all of us to travel to London.

The kids decided to have a family concert that the children will enjoy. The TV people may sit through it. So all the musical children will take part, and the TV company will see all the family's talented musicians.

If the TV people like any of the kids they can talk to Mr Driburg.

The concert is on Friday.

Charlotte is already famous so Charlotte will not perform while the TV people are watching. Charlotte is not against a TV opportunity, but Mr Driburg says that this opportunity is not appropriate for Charlotte's career.

On Tuesday we are all going on a coach trip to the Lightwater Valley amusement park. We do an outing most half terms. It is fun for all the kids to run around together.

The Famous Four and most of the Wilkins and all the Miahs will come on our coach.

The Greens will take the Sachs children to the same amusement park.

The Daar family are going from Doncaster with Alice and Damien and Joy and Arthur. Alice and Damien will travel back with us.

Over half term we always have lots of children visiting, so the house is a riot of fun.

We have Ali's George visiting on Thursday and the TV people on Friday.

On Saturday Dennis Wilkins, Abdullah Daar and Amal Daar are dancing in Bournemouth.

Then on the Sunday Mark is being ordained as a Mormon priest. Everyone is going. Abdullah and Shakoora are coming from Doncaster.

Ali has to be back in Cambridge on Sunday night so Ali is observing the ceremony on Sunday morning and then travelling straight back to Cambridge by train. Ali will change trains at Wakefield and Grantham.

CHAPTER 8: Ali Miah

I love Cambridge.

I am living in college.

A lot of the social life in Cambridge takes place in bars. Because I am a Muslim I do not drink.

People already accept that Yorkie (my nickname) does not drink, so after the first fortnight I was not under any social pressure to drink alcohol.

I tend to drink pint glasses of orange juice and lemonade because I like it. Some people think that I wish to give visible evidence that I am teetotal, but that is not the reason.

I read "Lord of the Flies" over the summer.

I had a mental picture of the character "Piggy" and I can see why Maroof is called "Piggy". Maroof is really not happy about being called "Piggy".

I told Maroof that most people at Cambridge are quite civilised. If Maroof makes sure that everyone knows he is called "Maroof", and Maroof does not answer or respond to "Piggy", most people will adjust.

For the few people who don't adjust readily one very hard punch in the stomach will usually be enough.

I said that Maroof will probably have to hit one guy, and the word will then spread.

Maroof found that he did not need to punch anyone.

Maroof is much happier.

There are cooking facilities that serve my corridor. I cook on Sunday mornings and I have an "open house" from 2pm for all Muslims, all Mormons, all Engineers, and any friends I have who are not Muslims or Mormons or Engineers. I tend not to get many Mormons because they have other things to do on a Sunday.

My room will not take all the people so the "open house" spills into the corridor and into the kitchenette. Most of the students on my corridor mooch some of the food.

The arguments and discussions go on until I kick everyone out at 6pm.

Usually the arguments move off to someone's room or to a pub.

I go with the most interesting argument.

I can afford the food and tea or coffee because my airline financial support is topped up by money from the Sal Hewson Memorial Fund.

I have a "quality of life" allowance that allows me to do anything I might wish to do. The Hewsons trust me and I will not abuse their trust.

The University Air Squadron was very happy to take me. I already have my pilot licence and I have landed an A320 with passengers on board.

They are very happy that I wish to fly large transport planes rather than fighter planes.

They say that I will start training on Hercules aircraft either before Christmas or soon after.

I will have the chance to play on fighter planes, but if I wish to specialise on large planes that is great so far as they are concerned.

I have no lectures on Fridays so on Fridays I go over to a training facility near Oxford to learn how to fly large passenger planes for the airline. My simulator experience on the A320 has been very helpful.

I have nothing on Saturdays so I am at the Royal Air Force base every Saturday.

I am being inducted at the moment, having the common training that all new cadets receive. Once that is finished we will begin to develop our strengths.

I will also learn to drive Heavy Goods Vehicles because I signed up for that. You never know when the qualification will come in handy. Apparently the Armed Forces are exempt

the normal age regulations so I will earn my full HGV licence long before I am twenty-one. A lot of what we are learning as Air Cadets I already know, like Navigation, Aircraft Recognition, and what the bits of a plane are and what they do.

I am in the top three of the new cadet intake. As the others catch up I will have to struggle to stay in the top three.

The Engineering lectures are good. I bought all the books at the beginning of the term. By the time a lecture begins I have read the relevant chapter at least twice, and where there are exercises or worked examples I have done them already. I have prepared for each lecture and I get a lot out of each lecture.

I was surprised that some of the foreign students do not have desperately good English. After most lectures I lead a study group to chew over the lecture that has just been delivered. So I have covered the material four times!

I go to hear as many visiting speakers as I can.

Some of the politicians are much better than I expected. They only have thirty seconds on TV but talking to a student group they have usually forty-five minutes to set out their argument to a friendly and intelligent audience.

If you are an intellectual lightweight forty-five minutes is long enough for you to demonstrate your inadequacy.

All the political groups have internal arguments going on. You can sometimes see these internal differences being played out. I am really not interested in their squabbles.

Cambridge has a famous debating society called the Cambridge Union Society. I am a member because I like to hear the visiting speakers.

I usually cannot be bothered to stay on to hear the students who speak after the visiting speakers. They are trying to score points and to be recognised as good debaters.

After one debate I was in the bar with some friends when an obnoxious drunk American called Hank came over to us.

I see Hank around, but I try to avoid him. I don't like drunks, and I don't like obnoxious loudmouths.

Hank thought that the combination of me being a Muslim and me being a pilot meant that I was going to perform another 9/11 attack on the United States.

I decided to be cool. I asked Hank if he could spell "Srebrenica"?

Hank would have had trouble spelling Srebrenica if he were sober. Hank did not know what a (rude word) Srebrenica was.

I asked Hank if he could spell "My Lai"?

The room went quiet when I said that.

Most people have heard of My Lai even though Vietnam is further away in distance than Srebrenica and My Lai is further away in time than Srebrenica, and fewer people were killed at My Lai.

“Well, Frank, (deliberately getting his name wrong), you are a perfect example of the American abroad. You are bigoted. You are ignorant, you are a loudmouth, and you are drunk.

“Srebrenica is the name of a town where you good Christians promised Bosnian Muslims that you would protect them from the Christian Serbs. Then you good Christians in NATO stood back and you allowed the Christian Serbs to massacre and to rape eight thousand Muslims.

“Eight thousand helpless unarmed people who were stupid enough to believe American Christians, and who were stupid enough to believe European Christians, and were then killed and tortured and raped by you Christians.

“Eight thousand innocent people, Frank.

“Protected by you Christians in NATO, Frank.

“Betrayed by you Christians, Frank.

“If you are a Christian consider Matthew 7:3 before you try to give a Muslim a hard time over 9/11.”

Hank looked blank.

“Oh, you don’t know your own religion?

“And you dare to sneer at mine?

“Matthew 7:3 says “And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brothers eye, but considerest not the beame that is in thine owne eye.”

“A mote is a speck of dust, Frank, and a beam is a large piece of wood.

“The Srebrenice massacre was in 1975. You American Christians and you European Christians did nothing to Serbia over it.

“Eight thousand innocent people were killed and you did absolutely nothing!

“They were killed while they were under NATO protection, Frank. You guys are in NATO if you remember, Frank.

“You guys run NATO, Frank.”

“My Lai was 1968. More than 350 people killed by American troops. Yes, you good Christian Americans.

“Some of the women were gang raped by you good Christian Americans.

“So how many American soldiers were executed, Frank?

“For rapes and murders at My Lai, how many American soldiers were punished, Frank?”

Hank did not know.

“None!

“One officer got three and a half years house arrest, which works out at less than four days house arrest for each helpless civilian murdered by you good Christian Americans.”

“The rapes and the gang rapes were free, Frank.

“So, Frank. You look at My Lai in 1968. You look at Srebrenice in 1975. Get off your high horse about 9/11

“9/11 was in 2001. Just over two thousand people killed! Suddenly you American Christians care about mass murder.

“We have an expression in Yorkshire “What goes around comes around”, Frank.

“And because you are stupid, Frank, as well as ignorant, this does not mean that I agree with the 9/11 massacre.

“I do not approve of the massacre of any innocent people of any religion. But I don't sound off at you about My Lai or Srebrenice because they happened before either of us was born.

“By the way, have you any idea how many innocent Afghans have been killed by you Christian Americans since you invaded? A lot more than the two thousand innocent Americans killed on 9/11.

“So, Frank. You are ignorant or stupid or self deceiving. And then you wonder why not everybody likes America?

“Fortunately I have met some really decent Americans. I know the Americans are not all like you.”

“Certainly the Americans I have met up to now are better Christians, have better manners, and are nicer people than you.

“Good night, Frank.

“If you need counselling in the morning I will be happy to give it. Or you can go to see one of your Christian priests.”

I was applauded as I left the bar.

I have not mentioned George so far. That is because George has disappeared. The Secretary in the Engineering faculty told me that George's father died just before the beginning of term. George had to support her mother who was utterly devastated by the death of George's father. George has had to take a year out.

Maroof knew a girl who had George's e-mail address. I sent George an e-mail but she has not replied yet.

I have joined the college boating club. I cannot row at weekends because I am too busy,

but every Wednesday afternoon I am out rowing. People whinge about how cold it is on the river, wearing only shorts and a thin shirt. Coming from Yorkshire I do not feel the cold at all. I am in the college sixth boat, which is for novices and weaklings. I expect I will work my way up from there.

I also use the college gym to try to keep fit.

The cadets had to go to a base Mess Night, where everyone wears good uniforms and eats a really good meal. Not surprisingly I was the designated non-drinking driver for our group of cadets.

That suited me fine, and it suited all the other cadets. Booze is relatively cheap on an air base.

I drove the hired minibus to the airbase.

By now I am used to watching people becoming drunk. I have seen it often enough that it does not bother me. I mourn all the money being wasted.

It is not my experience that people become more articulate and more scintillating as they approach drunkenness. They think this happens because their critical faculties are impaired by drink.

Suddenly one of the officers demanded that I should drink a toast to Her Majesty. He was clearly drunk.

The room had gone silent.

I am not particularly a fan of the Royal Family. Nor am I opposed to them.

I do not think about the Monarchy from one year to the next. They are there, like the Pennine mountains.

I raised my glass.

“To Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth!”

“That is orange juice.”

“Yes, sir. I am the designated driver for our group. I am a Muslim. I do not drink alcohol.”

“I order you to toast Her Majesty in whisky”

“No, sir.”

“I will give you another chance. Toast Her Majesty in whisky.”

“No, Sir.”

“You will be placed under arrest for disobedience to a lawful order if you do not toast Her Majesty.”

I am not prepared to drink alcohol. Whatever the consequences.

“No, sir.”

Suddenly the Base Commander came over.

“Squadron Leader, you are drunk. Go to your quarters immediately.

“Report to me at nine in the morning in full uniform.

“Go.”

The officer left.

“Miah, I am very sorry this has happened, I apologise unreservedly.

“Requiring a Muslim to drink alcohol is a pointless insult to you.

“Whatever I personally think, I will not say now what I will decide.

“I will hear what he has to say in the morning. But I do apologise to you. This is not what the Royal Air Force is about.

“You are one of the leading cadets on the course. Please do not leave the Squadron because of this incident.”

The row put a bit of a damper on the party. After a decent interval of half an hour we cadets left.

The cadets were solidly behind me. Yorkie had stood up to an idiot.

The next morning there were two notes in my pigeonhole. The first had come in the University internal mail. It was from one of the leading lights of the Cambridge Union Society. She is President-Elect, and she is organising the debates for her term of office which is next term. Would I be willing to speak on the motion “This House regrets the discovery of America” next term? Would I prefer to propose or oppose?

I was really surprised. I have never spoken in a debate. Presumably she saw or had heard about my altercation with Hank, and she thought I would be fun.

I immediately sent her an email to say that I would be pleased to take part in the debate. I needed to consider her second question carefully and I would respond early next week.

The second was from the Senior Beater of King’s College Choir.

I thought this was a bit weird.

Apparently the Senior Beater does not beat the choristers.

The Senior Beater is a Choral Scholar who helps to rehearse the choir by beating in time so they should sing at the right speed.

At the Hewson house we sometimes use a metronome. If I think of the Senior Beater as an assistant conductor, that is probably about right.

Anyway, he understands that I may know Charlotte Johnson. If I do know Charlotte could he have Charlotte’s contact details please?

I looked up Mr Driburg on the Internet.

I wrote a note to the Senior Beater confirming that Charlotte and I live under the same roof in God’s County. I gave Mr Driburg’s details as Charlotte’s agent.

On Friday I went to Oxfordshire. I had a really wonderful time flying an A320 to North Wales, to South Wales, and back to Oxfordshire. I had an instructor with me who barely spoke.

I made a lovely landing.

When we left the plane the instructor spoke.

The instructor said that I am competent on the A320 and that he is passing me on the A320.

I had not realised that this had been an assessment!

He will be starting me on the Boeing 777-300, the workhorse of the long-distance flights.

Next week when I come I will inspect a real 777-300 and then I will start using a simulator to learn to fly it.

My passing on the A320 is one of the fastest the instructor has known, so well done! He shook my hand.

I was very surprised and a bit shaken.

I know that I am a natural good pilot. I had the simulator training in Amsterdam, and I had the Manchester experience where I landed a real A320 with passengers. Still I had not expected to pass out on the A320 so fast.

The 777-300 is a wonderful plane. As it is for long-haul flights maybe I will see Bangladesh one day.

The next day I had to go to the RAF base. I was immediately sent to see the Base Commander.

"Miah, I am so pleased you have not thrown in the towel.

"Once again, I apologise for what happened.

"This is a written apology from Squadron Leader Stokes.

"Squadron Leader Stokes cannot apologise to you in person because he is now on the way to Ascension Island where he has been posted.

"A full report about the incident is on his personnel file.

"I think it very unlikely that Squadron Leader Stokes will have further promotion.

"Whenever Squadron Leader Stokes returns from Ascension Island he will have a training course on equal opportunities and his counsellor will be discussing this episode with him.

"Stokes has been a good man. Only good men are assigned to this training squadron.

"It seems that Stokes had personal reasons why he had drunk so much. The inner man came out.

"Rank is supposed to have its privileges. It carries with it responsibilities, as I hope you will learn in time.

“Report to your Cadet Commander.”

I saluted and said “Yes, sir.”

I wheeled round and I marched out.

The Cadet Commander seemed pleased to see me.

“Well, Miah. I am pleased to see you.

“You have moral fibre and that is essential for an officer.

“Your HGV course has come through. That will be over the Easter vacation.

“Your University Term ends on the 4th of December?

“Yes, sir.”

“Would you accept sixteen days training on the Hercules beginning on 7th December?

“Yes, sir.”

“I thought that would be your answer. I have provisionally booked it. I will confirm the booking this afternoon.

“The other cadets are in Maintenance Workshop E learning about engines. Join them.”

“Yes, sir.”

When I had time to think about it, I thought it a remarkable coincidence that my HGV course and my Hercules training course had both come through within a few days of the incident with Squadron Leader Stokes.

It would be incredibly embarrassing to the Royal Air Force if I resigned as a cadet and I went running to the newspapers. It is almost as if I am being bribed not to resign.

Or of course it may just be coincidence. I am so new as a cadet that I have no idea where the truth lies.

I have arranged with George over the emails that during Reading Week I will visit her and her mother in Leeds. Reading Week is like a school half-term holiday. There are no classes of any kind. We are supposed to use the time to read. I read ahead before term began, and I am well ahead in my reading for this term. I can spare the time to visit George. Then I will go to stay with the Hewsons and see my brothers and sisters. I will borrow a Hewson family car for the week.

CHAPTER 9: Karen Byram

My parents have always been rich.

My dad was only an apprentice when he started courting my mother, but Dad's parents owned the factory in which Dad was an apprentice. One of the family jokes is that Dad was not born with a silver spoon in his mouth but with a silver spur up his bum.

My mum's parents are not exactly poor, either. When my parents married, my mum's parents gave the couple a house as a wedding present.

Our family house is in the next street to my mum's parents. The houses are near to each other but my parents could have their privacy.

My Dad's father died in a road accident soon after I was born so Dad stepped up to Managing Director before he was twenty-three.

Fortunately Dad's mother had always taken a close interest in the business so she was able to give Dad support and advice.

After four years Grandma announced that Dad had served his apprenticeship as Managing Director. She was going to get out of his way. Grandma went to spend a year with her sister in Australia. She was there for about two years, by which time Dad clearly did not need her input.

So then Grandma turned into a sweet little old lady and she spoiled me outrageously.

Grandma also taught me blackjack, poker and bridge. The stakes were sweets and bedtime extensions so the stakes were important to me.

At boarding school the other girls often tried to set me up with their brothers. This might seem nice, but I soon noticed a pattern.

If a family was wealthier than our family there was no suggestion that I should meet a girl's brother.

The boys I was being introduced to were all from less well off families. They were always boys who had nothing going for them. They were not going anywhere. They needed a rich wife!

The worst part was that they were not interested in me Karen Byram. They were interested in Byram's Bearings. I was just a pretty girl who was their route to wealth.

I could have been ugly or stupid and they would have been just as interested.

Mark Johnson is like a breath of fresh air!

The first few times we saw each other at Meldon Airport Mark was really shy. I could see that Mark was interested in me. He smiled at me a few times.

Mark does not have film star good looks but he is a nice looking boy.

Mark is polite and shy.

I smiled at Mark to encourage him. Mark had to know that I would not mind if he spoke to me.

After I finished a flying lesson Mark actually spoke!

"That was a good landing. Well done!"

"How long have you been flying?"

“Eight lessons.”

“Then that was a really good landing!

“My name is Mark. Mark Johnson.

“What is your name?”

“Karen. Karen Byram.”

“I think we must be about the same age. I am sixteen.”

“So am I.”

“Would you like to go for a cup of tea?”

Of course I said I would.

Over a cup of tea we chatted. Mark had hot chocolate but I preferred tea.

Mark has just left school. He will start an apprenticeship in February.

Mark has to go down to Luton for the apprenticeship. Mark was really lucky to gain the apprenticeship.

Mark is an orphan. He lives with foster carers who are good people.

I told Mark that I work for my father in the family business. Dad is making me learn to fly because it will be useful for me. I have GCSE French but my dad has organised extra tuition because I am going to Toulouse in January.

Mark is totally incurious about my family business. Mark is only interested in me.

Why am I going to Toulouse?

Our family company has a customer in Toulouse that we have been selling to since 1967.

Their managing director has a sixteen year old son. The son is coming to stay with my parents and I am going to stay with his parents. I will come back with fluent French and a regional French accent. Marcel will go back to France with fluent English and a regional English accent.

“That's a good idea.

“I'm not very good with languages myself.”

For as long as I can remember there has been a steady stream of people like Marcel. The serious sons of family businesses staying with a business contact in England for a few months.

They were all too polite to show any interest in their host's daughter. I was away at boarding school much of the time anyway.

But these have been solid serious young men. They made the lads I was being offered by my school-friends look flaky.

I could put Mark beside the European lads and not feel embarrassed.

Mark has already qualified as a pilot.

On Thursday Mark is flying to Luton to meet his likely landlady. Then Mark is flying on to Cambridge to pick up a friend who lives in Mark's foster home in Tryton. The friend is being dropped at Yeadon Airport near Leeds because he is going to visit a girl. Then Mark is flying back to Meldon.

We agreed to meet again at the teashop on Friday.

I have had a few first meetings with boys. This is the first time that a boy has genuinely not been interested in my family company. Mark does not know the name of the company.

Mark did not ask!

Every time I chat with a boy I am on my guard that he is just interested in marrying into Byram's Bearings. This conversation with Mark is like I hoped a conversation would be.

Mark is only interested in me.

Mark has no interest in Byram's Bearings. Mark Johnson is only interested in me, Karen Byram. That is so good!

Am I interested in Mark?

The only boy in my life who has chatted to me for thirty minutes without mentioning Byram's Bearings?

Yes, I am interested.

When I got home I made a cup of tea and I chatted to my mother.

My mother looked at me closely.

"What is his name?"

"Who?"

"Karen, when you learned your GCSE results you smiled happily for about five minutes and then you went back to normal. This afternoon you have come in with a big happy smile, you are smug, and you are content with the world.

"That is so out of character for you.

"So what is his name?"

My mother loves me. She cares for me. I cannot lie to her.

I do not say that I have never tried to lie to my mother but I have never got away with it.

"Oh mother!

"Can't I have just a little bit of privacy and love and romance?"

"Is he that good?"

"Oh, mother!"

My mother smiled lovingly at me.

We sat silent with my mum just loving me.

After about eight minutes I broke. I had to tell her.

I told mother everything.

“He sounds a nice boy.”

“Don't tell Dad yet. Let's see how Friday goes.”

Mother agreed.

On Friday I was in the teashop. Mark came in, a bit flustered. Mark had two gorgeous little boys with him, who looked to be about nine years old.

“Oh, Karen. I am so sorry.

“These two saw me coming into the teashop and they chased after me. I have to bribe them with hot chocolate and cakes.”

The blond lad looked into my eyes. He said to me sincerely,

“You are beautiful.”

I nearly said “And so are you!”

I said “Thank you.”

Then I said,

“Before you make personal remarks to a young lady you should introduce yourself.

“Hello, my name is Karen.”

“My name is Max Hewson. This is my friend Gerald Butler.

“I am very sorry if I was rude.”

“You were not rude.

“Thank you for the compliment.

“So how do you know Mark?”

“Mark lives in our house with his family. My parents foster Mark's family.”

“That is nice of them.”

“Dad says the Johnson children are good children.

“Everybody loves Mark.”

“That's nice.

“So why are you two in the town centre on a school day?”

“Gerald and me...”

Max started again.

“Gerald and I attend Meldon Cathedral Choir School. We have long days and short days. Friday is a short day because sometimes we have to sing on Saturdays.”

“Are you choristers?”

“Yes ma'am.”

That threw me. I am only sixteen and I have never been called ma'am in my life, except by shop assistants!

I have to accept it as a display of good manners.

“Why does Mark have to bribe you with chocolate and cakes?”

“Mark doesn't have to bribe us with chocolate and cakes.

“It's just that if he doesn't we will tell everybody that Mark is meeting with a beautiful girl.”

“Isn't Mark allowed to meet girls?”

“He never has before.

“Mark will get lots of teasing if people know he is meeting a pretty girl secretly.”

“Who will tease Mark?”

“Rebecca and Charlotte and Sally and Linda and Tohur and Grace and Dennis and Abdullah.”

“And you?”

Max looked a little embarrassed.

“Just a little bit.

“Then Mark will roll me on the floor and Mark will tickle me until I say I am sorry.”

“Do you like that?”

Max smiled widely and he said “Yes”.

It looks like Mark is on a hiding to nothing!

“You know, sometimes a boy and a girl like to be alone together.”

Max nodded.

“If I gave you each some money to go and buy sweets and to stay away so Mark and I can be private together would that work?”

Gerald said,

“No, miss.”

“We have drunk our chocolate and we have eaten our cakes. We will go now and give you some private time with Mark.

“Mark is a really nice person and he deserves a nice girlfriend. You are kind inside.”

So they upped and left, shaking my hand as they left.

“I am so sorry!”

“They are lovely children.

“How many people live in your house?”

“The house joke is that we have to count every night. Mister and Mrs Hewson and their four children – Max is their eldest. Mrs Hewson is pregnant again, so that is four and a half. Us six Johnsons. Two Miahs, but one of them is a student at Cambridge University. He will be with us tonight.

Five Grahams. Five Donkins.

Then we have overnight visitors like Gerald, particularly at weekends.

"I can't remember a weekend when we have not had overnight visitors."

"Is it a big house?"

"Ten bedrooms, but sometimes people sleep in the study as well."

"Who does the cooking?"

"We all do.

"Every child of ten or over has to cook, and some of the younger children help to cook as well. With so many chefs it works out at about two times a week. There are usually three of us cooking"

"And then you cook at the Tryton Hotel?"

"Yes. I cook there on Saturdays. Although we can swop shifts around between us if one of us needs to miss working at the Hotel."

"Doesn't the Hotel mind?"

"Last Christmas six of us cooked at the Tryton Hotel all over Christmas because their Head Chef was off with a heart attack. The Tryton Hotel is very pleased with our team.

"Within reason we can swop shifts between ourselves without the Hotel complaining."

"Who did the cooking at home while you were all at the Hotel over Christmas?"

"The younger children, and Mr Hewson."

"Did that work?"

"It worked fine.

"They cooked quail inside a duck inside a chicken inside a goose inside a turkey, with about six vegetables."

"And all the trimmings?"

"Oh yes.

"Would you like to eat at our house? I am on kitchen rota on Monday so if you visit then you will be able to taste my cooking."

"Aren't you worried about being teased?"

"That will happen anyway.

"Max can't keep his mouth shut about anything for very long.

"Once they have met you they will tease me a bit. Then if you are a regular guest the teasing will stop."

We exchanged telephone numbers. Mark says dinner will be on the table at a quarter past six so I should arrive at six. Mark gave me his address but I did not give him mine.

My family is very small. There is me, my parents, and my dead brother Sam. And my three grandparents.

For the first four years of my life I was just a princess.

When I was just a princess I could laugh and sing and skip and roll on the grass. When I was that princess I could wear dresses or jeans or just a smile.

I was four years old when Sam was born and died in an afternoon.

When my Mummy came back from the hospital the doctors said that Mummy is hurt inside.

My mother cannot have any more children.

That's it.

My Dad was very happy to have me as a first child. Dad also wanted a son to grow up and to take over the family business. That is not going to happen.

Since Sam's death I have been the princess instead of a princess. Once I became the princess I had responsibilities.

It is not my fault that Sam died.

I did not want Sam to die.

I wanted a little brother. I wanted a little brother I could sing to and play with and wrestle with. I was going to let Sam play with my toys.

From the age of eight I have been going into the family factory.

On my first day at the factory Dad gave me a broom and a dustpan and a black plastic sack.

Dad told me that he wanted me to sweep up all around the factory.

Dad said I had two jobs. One was to walk round sweeping the factory. The other was to keep my eyes open and my ears open. I had to find three things in the factory that seemed odd or strange or wrong.

I was to tell only Dad about my second job and to tell only Dad about what I found.

A young woman from the office was brought in. We were introduced. Her name was Frankie. Her name still is Frankie and she still works at the factory.

Frankie was told that I was starting at the bottom. Frankie was to walk round with me and to make sure that I did not get lost, did not get hurt, and that I did not miss out any room in the factory.

Every room we went in Frankie announced that I am Karen Byram and that I am a new broom.

All the men smiled to see me. A few of them talked to me but most of them were working on their machines and they were too busy to talk to a child.

I saw some things and I told Dad.

One was a door that had a sign on it. The sign said "Keep This Door Locked". The door was not locked.

Another was that I went into a toilet where there was a “No Smoking” sign and there was lots and lots of cigarette smoke.

In one of the offices I emptied the waste paper basket. I was surprised to find an empty whisky bottle. One of the men breathed whisky smells over me.

The next time I went, the door that was supposed to be locked was locked. There was no cigarette smell in the toilet. The man with the whisky smell was not there.

I swept the whole factory maybe eight times. Then I was promoted!

I was given boxes of envelopes and boxes of leaflets. I spent the day folding leaflets and placing the leaflets into the envelopes.

Then I put address labels on the envelopes.

The next few times I spent in the office, but the office was boring.

I worked in every part of the factory except the foundry. Matt who ran the foundry would not let me work there because it was too dangerous for a child.

Matt allowed me in to see the foundry running but I had to hold tight to Frankie. It was a big favour to let me see the foundry working.

I really enjoyed my time in the despatch department. I was given a list of items to collect on my little trolley.

A storeman called Brian would check that I had collected everything, or tell me where the missing items should be.

Once the collection was complete we would pack the order, and place the box or packet in the pile for the courier.

One time I suggested to Brian that maybe I should collect two or three orders together. He told me to try it.

It took me a long time to collect everything. I had taken three boxes and I had tried to keep the orders separate. I only got a little bit confused.

Brian helped me to organise the three orders and to pack them.

“What do you think?” Brian asked.

“Was it a good idea?”

“I don't know.” I said.

Brian smiled.

“Karen, I don't know either.

“So when you do not know if something will work, try it and see. The worst that happens is that you have wasted some time but you have learned something.”

“Brian. When you are here on your own, how do you do it?”

"It depends how busy we are. If I have a lot of orders I do it the way you have just done it.

"If I am not in a rush I do it one list at a time."

"So doing two or three lists together is faster?"

"Yes. I go rush rush rush, pack pack pack, and then I have nothing to do. Your Dad or one of the other bosses sees me sat here doing nothing and so I get given something to do.

"Usually something meaningless, just so I look busy.

"I make sure that I look busy all the time.

"So why rush rush rush?"

I could see what Brian meant.

I did not talk to my Dad about what Brian had said. I needed to think about it.

One time I asked Brian,

"What is in Bay 17?"

I had been in every other bay, but not Bay 17.

"Why don't you open the door and find out?"

The door squeaked when I opened it.

I turned on the light.

There were shelves and shelves and shelves stacked high with boxes. All the boxes were covered in dust.

I looked in some of the boxes.

I looked at the dates written on the boxes. Many of the boxes were older than I was. I was ten by now.

"So what is all this stuff?"

"What do you think it is?"

"My guess is that it is things we made a long time ago. Now nobody wants them. But we have not thrown them away."

"Yes."

"Why haven't we thrown them away?"

"Ask your father."

When I asked my father he seemed a bit surprised.

Dad came down to the stores. Dad and Brian started looking at the stuff.

"Brian, so far this year, how many times have we sold anything out of Bay 17?"

"Nothing this year. The last time I think was about three years ago - a gasket we stopped producing about twenty years ago."

"So we shipped a twenty year old gasket?"

"No. It was perished and brittle. It was virtually identical to a gasket we now make for the XK31 so I sent one of those instead."

"So we have a box of perished and brittle gaskets that are twenty years old?"

"No. We have twelve boxes of those gaskets."

Dad stopped and thought.

"Brian. You know our stock."

"Yes."

"Go through this bay and empty it."

"We changed our computer system about eight years ago. Was this stuff entered on the new system?"

"It has never come up on a stock take list, so I assume it just isn't on the computer."

"Scrap what wants scrapping. Recycle where you can. Where you can intelligently return to stock you do that. A month from today, remind me, and I will come and give you a cash bonus off the books."

"Keep the bay empty. I have plans for it."

After a while I reported to Dad about what Brian said about "rush, rush, rush."

I felt a bit guilty but my loyalty is to Dad, not to Brian.

Dad laughed.

"I know."

"Brian is the best storeman we have. That is why you are with him. The job I have just given Brian would take most storemen a month working full-time. Brian will get the job done with no sweat."

"And no overtime."

"So when I pay Brian three days cash wage I will still be saving money on what the job would otherwise have cost me."

"What are you going to do with the empty bay?"

"People are always asking for storage space. Painters are the worst. How many shades of paint do we have in the building?"

I thought for a bit.

"About eight."

"So how many half empty tins of paint do we need?"

"Eight?"

"Actually with primers and undercoat maybe a dozen."

"The painters have a cupboard that is knee high in half empty tins of paint. They want more storage space."

"I will give them a couple of shelves in the bay."

"Dad, do you need painters? Wouldn't it be cheaper just to bring in painters when you need them?"

Dad looked at me.

"Karen. When you have thoughts like that make sure you are alone with me, or even better at home with me.

"You are a very clever girl.

"I will think on that."

By the age of sixteen I have worked on almost every machine in the plant, from a capstan lathe to the canteen till. I cannot set a milling machine but I can operate it.

Matt still says the foundry is too dangerous for me to work in.

I recently asked Dad to make Matt let me work in the foundry.

Dad said that Matt would quit if Dad made Matt do something that Matt thought was unsafe.

Dad does not wish to force Matt to quit, so Dad nicely requests me to shut up about it.

I can take a hint!

The first date with Mark went well.

After Max and Gerald had gone we were able to chat.

Mark likes his landlady. She is a widow. There is a resident daughter but she is only eight years old. There is also a six year old lad. The woman is almost old, about thirty. So I have no competition!

Mark will bicycle to his works and go by bus to college.

"And for the first time in years I will have no cooking or washing up to do!"

"And because I will be earning a wage I will not have a Saturday job. I will have Saturdays completely free!"

Mark has never had a girlfriend. Mark suggested that we be friends while we decide if we like each other enough to become closer.

Mark did not ask if I had had boyfriends before.

Mark said that I might find Mark a bit slow. It is because Mark is inexperienced with girls.

Mark's sister Rebecca has drilled into Mark that Mark has to treat any girl how he would like a lad to treat Mark's sister Charlotte. Mark must display respect and courtesy and good manners.

Mark is strictly religious.

Mark's Mormon religion basically says that Mark is not allowed to get involved with girls until he is sixteen. Even then Mark is not allowed to mess around with girls. Mark must either treat girls seriously and respectfully or leave them alone.

I am the first girl whom Mark has been interested in.

Mark likes me. Mark is scared to move too fast. But Mark does not wish me to think that Mark is not interested in me.

On the bus home it suddenly hit me.

We have now been together over an hour and a half and Mark has not asked me about my family business.

Byram's Bearings is a huge part of my life. Yes I do not want a young man who is more interested in Byram's Bearings than he is in Karen Byram.

I am quite shaken by a lad who has utterly no knowledge of Byram's Bearings and who has no interest in the company whatever.

Mark is only interested in Karen Byram.

I gave Mum the full story when I arrived home.

Mum laughed.

"Well if he does not smoke, he does not drink, he does not want sex before marriage, he has integrity, and he has a work ethic then he is a super first boyfriend from my point of view.

"On top of that he can cook, he is good with children, and he has a sense of humour.

"Do you like him?"

"Oh, mother!"

Dad was interesting.

"I want you to have a happy life.

"A happy life will usually involve boys and men at some point.

"Like any Dad I am worried about you having bad experiences.

"It sounds like Mark has been brought up right.

"I am not worried about Mark not having any money. He seems to have his head screwed on, and that is more important in the long run.

"I will take you to the house and I will meet the lad. If the evening goes well, you should invite Mark for dinner on Saturday or Sunday."

Dad says I seem to be happier in myself because I have met Mark. Dad hopes for me that all goes well.

CHAPTER 10: Cecil Byram

Like any father I worry about my daughter and what life holds for her.

In my unbiased opinion Karen is beautiful.

We can afford clothes and hairdressers, and when Karen turned fifteen we gave her a makeover. The result is that Karen is as beautiful as she wishes to be.

Karen does not waste money on clothes.

She buys good clothing rather than rubbish. Although we give Karen a respectable clothing allowance she is not one of those stupid girls who has eighty pairs of shoes and who needs a separate bedroom just to store clothes.

Karen says that she is happy to look smart. Karen does not try to look like she has just stepped off the front cover of a fashion magazine.

Karen is very bright. Her GCSE exam results were all As and A*s.

My mother says that Karen is a terrific card player. When we play Scrabble® Karen does pretty well.

Karen knows everything we make at the factory and what it is used for. She sometimes comes up with ideas to expand our offering or to consolidate or to repackage our product line.

We make components. As our customers' needs change we have to change with them. Or preferably we should change slightly ahead of our customers' needs.

It is such a job just managing a business that I have trouble making the time to look at the big picture.

I need a competent day to day manager of the existing operation. I need a brilliant marketing strategist. I need a number cruncher who can think outside the box. I need someone who can tell me what else I need.

Obviously I have a management team, but there is no-one who could step up to run the business if I were to die suddenly like my father did.

I was happy to let Karen leave school and to spend a year deciding what to do. She is at the factory most days. At least once a week Karen has a sensible idea, which is better than my batting average.

I served my time as an apprentice fitter. My father's death thrust me into management far too young. I know I am not a terrific manager despite fifteen years experience of running the business.

For a few years now I have used a firm of due diligence ("DD") investigators. After I have short-listed for management level vacancies or for key posts my DD investigators check out the short-listed applicants before they are invited for interview. The DD investigators have found a number of warning signs that have frightened me silly. The DD investigators

have uncovered managers with drink or drugs problems, finance people who have stolen, fake degrees, collapsing marriages, and people who bully their staff. So the people concerned were not called for interview.

The DD investigators have prevented me from making a lot of mistakes.

I telephoned George, my contact at the DD company. I told George the truth, which is that this young Mark Johnson is sniffing around my daughter.

Given Mark's youth, what I really need is information about Mark's character, history, strengths and weaknesses, relationship history, finances and so forth.

We decided to call it "consideration for a junior fast-track management position". That is pretty close to the truth!

I hope the lad is genuine.

I would like Mark to be genuine for Karen's sake.

Karen is so happy at the moment.

If Mark is a fraud then I want Mark out of Karen's life before he does any harm.

On Monday I took Karen to the house where Mark lives. I did not take the Bentley but I used my wife's runabout instead. Karen says that Mark seems to have no idea or interest in our family finances, so arriving in a Bentley would cause excitement.

Some children were obviously looking out for us from a window.

A man in his early sixties came out of the house to greet us.

The way he carried himself just shrieked "ex-services". I thought "ranker" rather than officer. Probably an NCO (non commissioned officer) - a sergeant or something like that. He was slim and fit and smiling.

"Hi!

"I am Don Hewson. You will be Karen Byram, and so presumably you are Mr Byram?"

I liked this man. He was totally relaxed, and he was dealing with us very well.

"Mark will be out in a minute. He is in the kitchen at the moment."

Shortly afterwards the famous Mark Johnson appeared. He was wearing chef's whites including the hat.

A nice looking boy with a good clean complexion.

He looked fairly fit and strong.

"Wholesome", I thought.

Mark was obviously pleased and relieved that we had arrived.

"Mr Byram I assume?"

Mark put out his hand to shake mine. We shook hands. The lad is not frightened of me, but naturally he wishes to make a good first impression. So far he has.

"As you probably know, I do not drink alcohol, but Mr Hewson has a cream sherry that is popular with guests.

"Please come in and have either a sherry or a cup of tea.

"Karen, we also have apple juice if you would prefer that.

"Come in."

We entered the house. I expected it to be heaving with children, but there were not an inordinate number of children on view for the number of children apparently living there.

In the hall was a striking decoration. It was a large photograph in a chrome frame and behind glass. The photo was of an African face mask that looked just like Mr Hewson with Mr Hewson facing the mask. The mask and Mr Hewson were reflected in a mirror, so there were effectively four views of Mr Hewson.

"That is tremendous! Where did you buy the mask?"

"One of my children made the mask, and another took the photograph."

A piano was playing in the study, with about a dozen children singing.

I recognised a Rolf Harris children's song, which took me back a few years.

In the front room was Emma Hewson, with a few small children.

Don Hewson introduced Emma to Karen and myself.

A gorgeous black boy of about eleven arrived bearing a tray with sherry and apple juice and glasses.

"This is Derek. He made that wonderful face mask."

Derek beamed to be praised.

"Well Derek you should be very proud.

"That mask is so obviously Mr Hewson. Well done!"

Derek left us.

"Dinner is in a few minutes. I suggest that you collect Karen at say ten? She will have had enough of us by then."

I looked at Karen, and she nodded.

As Mr Hewson escorted me to my car I asked

"How do you cope with so many children? You seem very calm on it."

"I enjoy fostering children. I am paid well to do a job I love.

"Just let me say that Mark is a good lad. He will treat Karen properly.

"See you at ten."

When I returned at ten the house was a lot quieter. Many of the children had gone to their bedrooms. Mark and Karen were playing Scrabble® against Mr Hewson and Emma, and Ali Miah and Rebecca Johnson.

The three teams were all scoring respectably. Karen and Mark had an advantage because of the Hewson handicap scoring system, but they were only just holding off Ali and Rebecca.

I was introduced to Ali and Rebecca.

The evening was obviously good-humoured, which pleased me.

Karen talked all the way home and for about two hours afterwards.

The food was terrific.

Mark Johnson is an amazing cook.

Mark's sister Charlotte cooks "to die for" cheesecake and "to kill for" cheesecake. In

Karen's honour Charlotte had cooked "to kill for" cheesecake.

The children were all well behaved and they all had good table manners.

One of the household customs is that at dinner each person talks about their day, beginning with the youngest and working through to the oldest. Everyone else listens respectfully.

Almost all the children have spent some time today rehearsing for an event on Friday. A TV company is looking to recruit musical children for a new TV series.

The Hewson extended family has nearly twenty musical children, so the TV people are coming to the house to view a family concert.

The gang of kids are great fun.

Almost all of the children are musical. Many of the children do ballroom dancing.

Karen was pleased to learn that Mark is an experienced ballroom dancer.

Two of the children are chefs who cook on television programmes. One boy is a chorister at Meldon Cathedral.

Mr Hewson has a very dry sense of humour.

Mrs Hewson is lovely.

The little children are sweet.

After dinner everyone had sung until eight o'clock, when the younger children went to baths and to bed. At half hour intervals various children were encouraged towards baths and bed.

The Scrabble® game had been really challenging.

Ali is a student at Cambridge University reading Engineering. Ali is a pilot. Ali has an Engineering Scholarship from an airline and a guaranteed job afterwards with the airline.

Rebecca is Mark's elder sister. Rebecca has good A levels and in January she will be going off to be a Mormon missionary.

The Hewsons are very sharp Scrabble® players, but the Hewson age handicap system makes it impossible for Mr and Mrs Hewson to win. They just try to better their scores from earlier games.

Mark has such a happy household. Everybody likes and respects each other.

Everybody likes Karen.

Karen has now had three conversations with Mark.

Mark has not asked about Karen's family company at all.

Mark cannot come to dinner this Sunday because on Sunday Mark will be ordained a Mormon priest along with three other young men.

Karen is invited to come on Sunday morning to watch the ceremony. Mark will come to dinner with us on Saturday night instead.

Karen is so happy about Mark.

Karen has always been conscious of her responsibilities towards Byram's Bearings. Karen does not want a lad to marry Karen just so he can inherit the company.

Karen is quite blown away that Mark has no interest in Karen's finances or in the family company. Mark is only interested in Karen, which pleases Karen hugely

CHAPTER x: Malc Dow

I run an independent TV production company. I am preparing a proposed television series.

The theme is a child pop group.

We have to find and assemble four or five child musicians. We are flexible, but we assume drums or piano, two guitars, and at least one singer. Ideally we would like a mixture of boys and girls and more than one ethnicity.

We will script around the kids whom we find. It is easier to script if we know their personalities and of course what instruments each child plays.

Again, the strengths of the children will influence what music we have them play. If they are all good musicians they can play anything, but it makes sense to work to the strengths of the children. If they are all good rock musicians why force them into folk, and vice versa?

We need musical competence, but we also want personality. We want kids who will gell together.

One of the agents I telephoned was Tom Driburg in Birmingham. Tom is agent for a few child chefs, some teenage models, and for Charlotte Johnson the singer. Tom recently supplied the child actors for a film being part made in Bristol.

When I explained what I wanted Tom burst out laughing.

"Are you prepared to travel to Meldon?"

"In Yorkshire?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"There is a house there with more child talent than you can use in one programme."

"We are looking for four or five musical children."

Tom laughed again.

"Would you like piano?"

"Yes"

"Organ?"

"Yes"

"Guitar?"

"Yes"

Saxophone?"

"Yes"

"Vocals?"

"Yes"

Accordion?

"Violin"

"Maybe"

"Yes"

"Drums?"

"Yes"

"It's all in that house.

"Just remember that I told you there is more talent in that one house than you can use in one program."

After a few more telephone calls it was agreed that we would visit on Friday of next week, which happens to be half term week in Meldon.

Mr Driburg told me that there are nearly twenty musical children in the extended family.

"The children have decided they will have a family concert to which you are invited.

"It starts at eleven and it goes on until it finishes. Refreshments will be provided. Twenty party pieces and several ensembles take a while to work through."

There are many musical children in Britain.

I once sat through twenty children playing the same piece of music one after another. They ranged from good to excellent but I vowed that I would never put myself in that situation again.

A family concert where everyone performs their party piece is fine for my purposes.

If there are some good kids there I will invite them to London for a second audition where two or three kids will play the same piece.

Although possibly not. Provided that the children are competent musicians, then personality and looks become more important than absolute technical excellence. If these kids all know each other then they are probably compatible.

It is unfair I know, but it helps if the children are good-looking.

The real question is,

"Will other children wish to watch these children?"

We drove up from London.

We arrived on time. A teenager came out. He looked I thought Somali or Eritrean or somewhere like that. He motioned us where to park.

"Are you Dower TV?"

"Yes."

"Come in.

"Hi. I am Sahid Daar.

"I am a sound and lighting technician.

"Here is my CV."

I have never been given an A5 CV before.

It was encapsulated. I cannot recall being given an encapsulated CV before.

The kid looks about fifteen so I assumed his CV would take a couple of seconds to read.

The lad was obviously desperate to impress.

I was feeling cheerful and so I thought I would humour the youngster.

Reading the CV I was impressed!

Sahid Daar was the sound and light technician on the famous Charlotte Johnson You Tube video and on another Charlotte Johnson You Tube video that has been seen only two million times.

Sahid has worked on every "Dave The Chef" and Robert Graham cookery segment on children's TV.

Sahid has worked on every "Dave the Chef" and Tohur Miah cookery programme. Over a hundred TV programmes or segments in all, listed on the back of the CV. They have not all been broadcast yet.

Sahid is already a member of the cameraman's union.

Sahid runs a website for a fashion business and another for his own photographs. Sahid has won photographic competitions.

Sahid consults for a Muslim web site and for a Mormon web site.

Very impressive.

Sahid fitted all this onto the A5 CV.

I find that even more impressive!

"There are people who would kill for this CV. Well done!"

I was not totally surprised therefore to meet Dave The Chef at the front door.

"Hi. I'm David Wilkins.

"This is the program for today, and notes on the performers."

I scanned the programme. Most of the pieces I knew to be reasonably short, and none were repeated.

There was a fair range of influences including rock, folk, jazz, and classical. Even Bernard Cribbins!

The notes included photos, ages, and CVs. where relevant. Alice Hewson aged five has no CV.

Max Hewson aged nine plays an impressive range of instruments, is a chorister at the local Cathedral, and he has appeared in a film coming out next year.

Rebecca Johnson aged eighteen is an accomplished musician. Rebecca is relief organist for her local Church.

As we entered the house I was met by Tohur Miah and Dennis Wilkins. I recognised them of course.

"Wow!

"Who's cooking?"

"Mark and Charlotte Johnson."

"The Charlotte Johnson?"

"Our Charlotte is a bit famous, yes."

Mr Driburg had said that there is more talent in this house than I could fit into one program.

I have not met the musicians yet!

A friendly man in his early sixties came forward.

"Hi. I'm Don Hewson. I am technically your host. In practice the children are running the day. Shall we go in?"

My cameraman is Philip Thee. Sadly everybody contracts his name. Phil has stopped fighting it. As he says,

"At least it's memorable"

"This is my wife Emma, These youngsters are Arthur and Damien."

"This is Mr Dow and Mr Thee."

We all shook hands, except Arthur who was asleep.

Sahid Daar had already set up his equipment. Phil did not take long to set up his equipment next to Sahid's spot. The best position had been left for Phil.

David Wilkins introduced each performer. The first performer was five year old Alice Hewson on a keyboard. She started to play "Three Blind Mice".

Alice was faltering a bit. A boy of six or seven who was not on my list moved to sit opposite Alice.

He smiled at Alice. He started to sing "Three Blind Mice", and Alice played the notes after the boy had sung the words. They got through the song and there was a roar of applause. The boy picked up Alice and he carried her to Mr Hewson who hugged her. Emma reached over to kiss her.

"Thank you Alice Hewson. That was a wonderful first ever public performance."

More applause.

"And thank you Andrew Johnson for helping out."

Andrew Johnson has a good voice. Clear, confident, and loud enough to be heard. Good diction, good timing.

Andrew is not on the list! A nice looking lad.

I made a note about Andrew on my sheet. Andrew Johnson is presumably a sibling of Charlotte Johnson.

David introduced the next act, Max Hewson on piano and Fulesa Miah singing "Amazing Grace". Max is a gorgeous boy who is clearly an Alpha male. I could see girls turning on the TV just to look at Max.

Some men will be interested in Max too I am afraid. It all builds audiences.

Fulesa is a nice enough looking girl with a lovely smile. She has a good clear voice, good diction, and she gave a creditable performance. Max is good on the piano.

The next performance was Peter Wilkins on piano and Georgina Donkin singing "My Sweet Lord". Both are attractive children. Both are very competent musically.

Then Gerald Butler on piano and Sally Johnson singing "White Cliffs of Dover". Sally's voice filled the room so I assume that Sally has performed in public before.

What a voice that girl has!

Presumably Sally Johnson is a sister of Charlotte Johnson. I think Sally Johnson is a better singer than Charlotte Johnson.

Sally Johnson went in my notes with four asterisks. Gerald played very well and I gave him two asterisks. Two more attractive children.

Then Sally Johnson sang unaccompanied.

I had never heard "I heard Him Come" before. A tremendous song.

Sally's voice is terrific.

I would have come to Yorkshire just to see Sally Johnson perform.

Colin Donkin played "Stairway To Heaven" on the guitar. Then Colin played and sang "This Land Is Your Land". Excellent.

Colin Donkin played "Lord of The Dance" on the guitar. The singers were Sally Johnson, Margaret Graham and Georgina Donkin. They were really fine.

Peter Wilkins played guitar and Margaret Graham sang "Away In A Manger". They were both very competent.

Derek Donkin played piano and he sang the Bernard Cribbins song "Hole in The Ground."

This boy has character and personality and looks. He is a good singer and a good pianist.

Kali Daar played "Nutrocker" on the piano. Kali Daar is so good that it was worth coming to Yorkshire just to see her perform.

Kali has personality and beauty and musical skill.

Then Kali sang "Where Have All The Flowers Gone?" unaccompanied. So moving. A really good voice.

By now I had given up making notations. I will view the whole show again. I have seen nine competent performers so far, not counting Andrew Johnson who is not on the program.

Sally Johnson, Derek Donkin, and Kali Daar have forced their way onto my wish list. Max, Fulesa, Gerald, Colin, Peter and Georgina are all fine performers.

At this stage I have seen just over half the performers. Surely the other half cannot be as good?

David announced an intermission, and we went through to the dining room to eat. There was chicken noodle soup and rolls. There were cold meats, salads, pickles, and fresh rolls and baps. Dessert was apple pie and cream and cheesecakes marked "Strawberry TDF" and "Lemon TKF".

I recognised Charlotte Johnson wearing chef's whites. With her was a young man who is obviously Charlotte's big brother, also wearing chef's whites.

The soup had been terrific. The baps and rolls were very good. The first course buffet was good.

Dennis Wilkins gave me a plate with thin slices of the two kinds of cheesecake.

"Why are you giving me these?"

"Charlotte Johnson made them."

The first one was strawberry TDF.

I tasted the TDF.

This first cheesecake was utterly wonderful. I had never had a better cheesecake.

I said,

"This is to die for."

"That's what TDF means."

"So "TKF"?"

"To Kill For."

The TKF cheesecake was beyond wonderful. It was properly named. I would drive to Yorkshire again for it.

I couldn't help myself.

"And Charlotte sings as well?"

"A talented girl!"

Dennis said,

"And beautiful!"

It was time to return to the study.

Max Hewson, Peter Wilkins and Colin Donkin were first up. They were all wearing wigs.

They played guitars and they sang "Long Haired Lover From Liverpool". Individually they were excellent and as a combination they were excellent.

Then the wigs came off.

Max sang "Greensleeves" unaccompanied.

If ever a singer might give a song a revival Max Hewson singing "Greensleeves" might be it.

Peter sang "Silent Night" unaccompanied. Gorgeous. Poignant.

Then Peter played guitar and Peter sang "Rock Island Line".

Gerald Butler sang "Once In Royal David's City" unaccompanied. So beautiful.

Then Gerald played piano. Max Hewson, and Peter Wilkins played guitar. All three sang "Si Tu Dois Partir."

The three boys are choristers. These were thoroughly professional performances.

The boys are used to filling a cathedral with their solos and it shows.

Phil and I were blown away by their sheer professionalism. Colin Donkin is almost as good.

Robert Graham played the violin. I had noticed Robert Graham in his wheelchair. Having tasted the food in this house I could see how the house had generated three TV chefs. Robert played Paganini's Caprice Number 24. Paganini's Caprices were written for virtuoso violinists to display their talents. Caprice Number 24 is not a piece that you would expect a child to play.

Robert's performance was a show stopper in any normal show.

Abdullah Daar played "As Time Goes By" on the piano.

Wow!

How Abdullah could evoke the atmosphere of a Casablanca bar, and yearning, was beyond me. I can play the piano, but not like that. It was almost like a violin playing.

Abdullah Daar is a very good looking young man.

Abdullah accompanied Linda Donkin singing "Frankie and Johnnie". Linda sang it normally.

Then Linda went into nightclub mode, singing "Strangers In The Night" in a performance that you felt was an adult performance for after the watershed. The raunchiness was entirely in her voice. You felt the cigarette smoke and the gin.

What a performance!

Linda is a pretty teenage girl just emerging into womanhood.

Max and Robert Graham came on with accordions. Max played and sang "Summertime".

Robert played and sang "House of The Rising Sun". Together they played and sang "Blueberry Hill" as a duet, which was tremendously good.

Robert then started to play "Beerhouse Polka". The room was instantly cleared of clutter and almost all the children danced polka. Us non-dancers moved to corners of the room. Phil and Sahid were caught in the middle.

Robert Graham has a huge personality. Robert plays the accordion like a professional. The polka was such fun!

All the children were smiling. Utterly terrific!

"Beerhouse Polka" went on quite a long time, but it is their family concert, not my audition.

Max Hewson played the saxophone "Just The Way You Are". Good.

Rebecca Johnson played and sang "All Things Bright and Beautiful".

Very good.

I have run out of superlatives and adjectives.

Rebecca played and Dan Wilbey sang "I want To Be Happy". It was a magnificent performance! That boy has a great personality.

Dan Wilbey could fill a hall with noise.

From his physical appearance Dan must be Max Hewson's brother despite the different surname.

Then Rebecca started to play "Born Free".

Everybody stood and sang. This was the finale.

David said,

"Well done, everybody.

"Mr Dow and Mr Thee, thank you for coming.

"We hope you have enjoyed the show."

I said,

"Thank you all.

"This has been an amazing experience for me. Mr Driburg told me that there is more talent in this house than I will be able to fit into one programme. That is so true!

"There is far more talent in this house than I can use.

"I have a lot to think about.

"I do want to say that I am impressed by all of you.

"I can't take all of you.

"I am auditioning more children but I cannot imagine I will ever find so many terrific performers in one location.

"So thank you all."

I let Phil drive us back to London.

"What are you smiling about?"

"I am so glad that I am not the boss. It is your decisions, not mine."

"Thanks.

"Any thoughts?"

"Did you notice that every child performed without sheet music?

Even the five year old.

There are books of sheet music and loose sheet music all over the place, but these children performed without using sheet music.

"That is impressive."

And then,

"Normally in an audition you can smell their desperate need to be selected.

"These kids were just having a good time.

"They don't give a damn whether you select them or not. That is so refreshing.

"Seeing all the kids break off to dance polka in the middle of an audition is definitely a first for me!"

I thought about what Phil had said.

It is not just the musical ability of these children. They all have tremendous personalities.

"OK. Which youngsters do I select?"

"That's your job, boss."

"Come on, Phil. Give me your thoughts."

"I think Rebecca Johnson and Abdullah Daar are great. They are not really children. A different programme would be better for them. They don't fit into the current program concept.

"That Linda Donkin is terrific, but I am not sure she isn't too old for the programme you have in mind. She and Abdullah Daar would be terrific. Or Rebecca Johnson. But not as children.

"Although they could be older siblings, which of course they are.

"There you are boss. I have eliminated three for you.

"Unless you want to make an older teenage program now?"

"So who is in?"

"Robert Graham is outstanding. He has huge talent and he has a huge personality. He is already on TV with his cookery programme so I doubt you can afford him.

"But on the other hand Robert would draw an audience.

"Robert would give you Brownie points for social inclusion."

Then after a few minutes Phil said,

"Kali Daar on the piano and for voice.

Sally Johnson for voice.

Dan Wilbey for voice."

"That gorgeous lad Max Hewson who I think must be Dan Wilbey's brother. I have never seen a better "Greensleeves".

"Gerald Butler and Peter Wilkins are terrific musicians and terrific singers. Derek Donkin and Colin Donkin are terrific.

So I think Georgina Donkin and Fulesa Miah just drop out. But they are good!

"You are spoiled for choice. We have seen good kids in London and Brighton and Bristol and in Birmingham.

"But if you take a gang who know each other and who live close to each other it reduces logistics expenses. Using a studio up North must be cheaper than renting a London studio.

"It's your decision, boss."

"This house has excellent musicians like Charlotte Johnson, Rebecca Johnson, Abdullah Daar, Linda Donkin and Robert Graham who are too old or too expensive, ten kids who

are all fine performers, and more children like Andrew Johnson who are apparently not good enough yet.

“Not to mention Sahid Daar, Dave the Chef, Dennis Wilkins, and Tohur Miah who were not put forward as musicians.

“If Tom Driburg had told me what we would meet in this house I would not have believed him.”

“I have seen it. I still have trouble believing it.

“The individual talents impress. The strength in depth is astonishing.

“What a household!”

CHAPTER 11: Ali Miah

My first term at Cambridge has been wonderful. I had no idea that life could be such fun. Up until now I have always been conscious that I am the head of my family. I have to be responsible. I have to set an example.

Now in Cambridge my family don't see me.

I can stay up arguing until breakfast. I can stay out overnight.

I can do my academic work at two in the afternoon or two in the morning. I am totally free of supervision.

Fortunately I don't drink alcohol. So I do not suffer from hangovers.

I am utterly happy to be surrounded by so many very bright people. There are some really good people here. I feel at last that I am surrounded by people I can respect.

I am still amazed how some intelligent people are idiots. I suspect that life is full of idiots.

I have a personal target, which is to be in the top ten per cent of my year group in the Engineering Department. This involves me working pretty hard. Why else am I at Cambridge?

For fun and relaxation I joined the University Air Squadron. They actually pay me to fly!

I am moving towards large planes rather than single seat fighters. The RAF is paying for me to qualify on large planes. They have also booked for me to qualify to drive Heavy Goods Vehicles.

I was pleased with the way the Base Commander dealt with Squadron Leader Stokes. Before his hangover had cleared Squadron Leader Stokes was on his way to Ascension Island with an adverse report on his docket.

The RAF staff are hugely pleased that I have not flounced out and sold my story to the press.

You can't grow up as an Asian in Britain without receiving the odd racial insult or suffering the odd incident. You can either let that define your life or you can get on with your life.

Actually this was a religious insult rather than a racial insult.

I think it is his problem rather than mine.

At the other end, I am getting the odd guy who tells me I should not be in the Armed Forces. They say it is against our religion.

I feel sorry for those guys. They are ignorant of our religion.

They think they are following God but they are half baked half educated socially inadequate sad sacks. I do not want to shoot them down because that is only to mock the feeble minded. But it is so time consuming to help them to understand how ignorant they are.

I do not wish to spend my life reasoning with idiots.

There was one guy who was stupid enough to say that I should study Islam to understand the error of my ways.

I said,

"I am Quran hafiz.

"I have A* at A level in Islamic Studies.

"I have undertaken Quran tafsir studies.

"When you can match any of those come and talk to me."

He stays away from me now.

On Fridays I normally have flying lessons with the company who train for my airline. I really love taking a huge aeroplane and landing it as gently as a feather. I can usually go to Friday prayers at a mosque in Oxford either after my training.

Sometimes I have to miss Friday prayers. It can't be helped.

I have taken to visiting Leeds fairly often to see George. Sometimes I travel to George on a Thursday evening after my last lecture and I return to Cambridge on Sunday evening.

I am a strict Muslim. I can't or won't have sex before marriage.

George and I spend a lot of time chatting.

I so love George.

I have been invited to speak in a debate at the Cambridge Union. I am seconding against the resolution "This House Regrets The Discovery of America". The main speaker is the American Ambassador to Britain. I have made contact with his office to try to co-ordinate our speeches. He has not started writing his speech yet. I am writing mine so at least I am properly prepared. The debate is not until February so there is no real rush.

In the main University gym I saw a guy doing one-handed press-ups.

He taught me how to do one handed press ups and one handed handstands.

It is partly about strength and partly about balance.

I am doing these in my room every day. I would like to get up to twenty on each arm, but that will take a while.

CHAPTER 12: Karen Byram

Mark and I met up two days after I visited his house.

I have talked things through with my mother.

When Mark gets round to asking about our family company, I will tell him. Until Mark asks I will not say anything.

I so enjoy that Mark Johnson likes me just for myself.

Mark is apprehensive about becoming a Mormon priest.

Mark is happy and proud to be a Mormon but becoming a Mormon priest is daunting.

People will expect more of Mark and Mark will expect more of himself.

Mark will live up to his responsibilities.

The responsibilities that are laid out in the Mormon guidebooks are straightforward. They mainly involve Mark playing a larger part in the services and in the life of the Church.

There is an expectation that Mark will be someone that his household can look up to.

There is a wider responsibility, of stepping up to the mark when the situation arises. Situations do not arise with a neat little label tied on saying "this is a situation - see page 46."

Mark has to recognise when a situation is arising and then step into it. It is like jumping into a huge puddle that may be two inches deep or may be eight foot deep. How do you know which puddles to jump into or which situations to step into?

Sometimes the wise course is not to intervene. When you are only sixteen how can you be sure that you are being wise rather than cowardly?

Mark is not looking for situations to intervene in.

It is part of Mark's responsibility as a man and as a priest not to stand back when he should step up.

Becoming a priest confirms that Mark takes on this responsibility.

It is no good saying that some Mormon priests do not step up when they should. That may be true. Without knowing what was in their minds and hearts at the time they failed to step up one cannot judge them. Even devout Mormons do not claim that they never make mistakes.

Mark is a harsh judge of his own actions and Mark makes no allowances for his own human weakness.

Mark is daunted by the deeper responsibility he is taking on.

Mark just underlines how flaky those other English boys were!

Mark is so different!

Mark has discovered that Meldon Assembly Rooms has ballroom dancing on Tuesday evenings. This is not lessons. This is real ballroom dancing.

Mark has not checked it out.

In principle would I like to go ballroom dancing with Mark? It may be a bunch of old dodderers or it may be a fun bunch of people. We agreed we would go next Tuesday.

I asked about Mark's sister Rebecca. She seems a very strong woman.

Mark told me about the Johnson family troubles, which have made Rebecca so mentally tough.

Rebecca is a very nice person now, but she has a mental strength and a directness of purpose that can be disconcerting at times.

Mark did not say so, but Mark participating in these troubles has made Mark mentally tough, too.

Moving to the Hewsons has been good for all the Johnsons.

Listening to what the Johnsons have been through reminds me how lucky I have been in life.

Mark told me that Rebecca and Charlotte both approve of me. That makes me feel good. It feels so good that Rebecca and Charlotte are approving of Karen Byram, not approving of Byram's Bearings!

Mr Hewson seems to be an interesting character?

"Yes", said Mark.

"But I want you to be interested in me!"

We laughed.

I am interested in Mark Johnson, and Mark Johnson is interested in me.

When we dance Mark will have to hold me. I am looking forward to that.

When is Mark going to kiss me? Come on!

I could suggest that Mark should kiss me, but I think that will happen soon anyway.

Mark is slow, but that is better than Mark trying to lick my tonsils on a first date. The man is a package and I have to take the whole package.

I have just said "the man".

What happened to "the boy"?

I am in love with Mark Johnson.

Oh!

I am going to have to talk to Mum and Dad about Mark.

I thought I would have to wait a few years before I met the right man.

I will wait until Sunday afternoon, after the Mormon ordination ceremony.

Granny Byram is coming to dinner on Saturday. Granny has learned that I am serious about a boy and of course Granny wishes to meet him.

My mother's parents have agreed to wait until Mark comes to dinner again.

Mark arrived on Saturday evening.

Rebecca dropped Mark outside our gate.

Mark brought flowers.

Mark looked good. Mark usually looks good.

Mark was not fazed by meeting Granny Byram.

Many people are intimidated by Granny Byram but Mark smiled a lot and Mark obviously likes Granny.

Granny likes it that Mark is not frightened of her.

I like it that Mark is not frightened of Granny.

Mum fell for Mark immediately.

Mark liked Mum.

Poor Mark had a full interview over dinner, with no holds barred. Granny Byram is a tough old bird. Granny has no sense of restraint or decency.

"If this relationship continues, what are your intentions?"

Granny!

Mark smiled.

"We have not even kissed yet, so you are jumping the gun a bit."

Granny looked surprised. Not much surprises Granny but this information did.

"My position is that I will start a three year apprenticeship as an aircraft engineer in February. That is in Luton.

"When I have finished my apprenticeship I will be old enough to become a Mormon missionary.

I will be posted somewhere in the world for two years.

"During that time on missionary service I am not allowed to communicate with my family or with anyone else.

"I am allowed one letter to my family each month. That is all.

"When I return home I will be twenty-two.

"If we still like each other then, then Karen and I will decide what to do next."

"That is a long wait."

"Yes, ma'am."

"And no sex in all that time?"

Granny!

"I won't have sex in that time, no."

Mark!

Mark smiled.

"You know Karen better than I do. I think Karen is a tough serious person like you. I dare not speak for Karen."

Granny turned to me.

"If you don't start kissing Mark soon, I will!"

I was embarrassed, amused, and shocked.

"I have always been a good girl, Granny. I will do what you tell me. But in private if you don't mind!"

"Wherever you like, but get on with it!"

"Yes, Granny."

Mark tactfully changed the subject.

"Karen has mentioned a family business. For some reason I thought it would be half a dozen people on an industrial estate turning out double glazing units."

"Looking at this house and the Bentley outside, I think I might be wrong. So what is the family business?"

Dad laughed.

"We make components. Screws, gaskets, bearings, flanges, washers. All that kind of thing."

Mark considered this.

"Cars and washing machines change their shape nearly every year, but nuts and washers do not change that often.

"Components is an industry I have never thought about."

"How do you compete with the Chinese?"

"Quality. Delivery dates. Adaptability – we can make anything you want at a day's notice."

"Very good.

"What is the name of your company?"

Granny choked into her drink. Any thoughts that Mark is a gold-digger have collapsed.

"Byram's Bearings."

"Where are you based?"

Mark has obviously never heard of us!

"We have a factory in Neverthorpe."

"Why Neverthorpe?"

"Land was cheap there after the coalmine closed. The government paid us pretty well to transfer operations there from central Meldon. Then we sold the Meldon site for a good price."

"How many people do you employ?"

"Three hundred and twenty-two."

"That is interesting."

"If I had known you existed when I left school I might have applied to you for an apprenticeship."

"I am fixed up now, but I really would like to see round the factory before I go to Luton."

"Would that be possible?"

"Arrange it with Karen. She will happily show you round."

"Dad. Mum, Grandma. I would like to show Mark the garden, and show him the summerhouse."

"When his sister arrives, just call and we will be along shortly."

The garden is pitch black dark at this time of night.

"Should I wash up?"

"No, Mark."

"Grandma has given me very clear instructions and I always do what Grandma says."

Mark is slow sometimes.

I have heard teachers talk about "the light-bulb moment". This was the first time I have seen a light-bulb moment for myself.

We went straight to the summerhouse.

Mark was about to speak.

"Stop talking. I am in charge. Relax."

Mark is very muscular. As I touched Mark's body there was just muscle. Mark and I kissed gently and slowly. We hugged like there was no tomorrow. My hands went under Mark's sweater. Still just muscle. I was impressed that Mark did not grab for my breasts.

Mark started with my shoulders and very slowly he moved his hands down me, avoiding my breasts. Mark held my bum and my shoulder firmly while we kissed ferociously.

Mark's pesky sister must have arrived early because suddenly my mother called,.

"Karen."

We unwound from each other. We returned to the house holding hands.

Rebecca was there. All four of them were smiling and laughing. They were happy for us.

After Mark and Rebecca had left, I said to Dad,

"Well, you had better do a DD on Mark before we get any closer!"

"I have done."

I was surprised.

"There is nothing bad there.

"I won't tell you the good stuff. I will let you discover Mark's secrets like any girl does."

"Can you give me just one secret?"

Dad thought.

"No.

"Let's just say that Mark comes from nothing and he is already more impressive than I was at the same age. No lad is good enough for my girl, but Mark is as good as I could hope for."

Granny said,

"There are not many good young men. They get taken very quickly. You hold on to that lad!"

So Mark Johnson has the family seal of approval.

The next morning Dad drove me to the Hewsons' house in mum's runabout.

I went with everyone else to the Mormon Church.

Linda asked,

"What is Mark like to kiss?"

I smiled at Linda. I am very happy with the world.

"Mark is a very good man. He kisses you like you would hope a good man would kiss you."

"We all love Mark. You be good to him."

"I will be as good to Mark as he will let me."

We both knew what I meant and we both laughed.

I did not know what to expect from a Mormon ordination ceremony. I have been to a christening, and huge numbers of girls' boarding school compulsory Sunday services but that is the full extent of my religious experience.

The Bishop welcomed everyone, including the visitors.

The Bishop explained that this is an important service for the Church of Christ of Latter Day Saints, often called Mormons because they follow the Book of Mormon. It is important for the Church because the future of the Church lies in its priests and its Elders.

It is important to the four young men and to their families because from now on the young men will be ordained priests with all the honour and responsibility that the post of priest requires.

Each young man was ordained priest by his own father. Mark was ordained by Bishop Collins. Mark was the last ordination.

Then we all moved through to another room where there was plenty of food and drink. The Mormons have odd dietary rules so the drinks were fruit juices or hot chocolate. There was another hot drink that I quickly put down.

Rebecca laughed.

Rebecca said that not everyone likes it.

There was no tea or coffee or alcohol.

All the young men were hugged and kissed by almost all the ladies.

Maybe I was jealous but I thought Mark was getting longer hugs and kisses than the other young men were.

We went back to the Hewsons and we had hot drinks. I was gasping for a cup of tea by then.

After a while Rebecca ran Ali and me to the train station. Ali got out at the train station. Rebecca drove on to deliver me home.

I and my parents had a long discussion about Mark.

Dad said that the DD people had checked out Mark more or less from the cradle. Mark is not just squeaky clean, he smells of roses. It would not be fair to either of us for Dad to say more.

Dad keeps the DD reports in his safe.

I know the combination.

On Monday afternoon Dad had to pop into Meldon to see his accountant and Dad said he would do a bit of banking while he was out. I had at least an hour and a half to look in Dad's safe!

In the safe was a stack of DD reports.

The top report in the stack of DD reports was for Mark Johnson.

I trembled for a minute before opening the envelope.

I know that Dad does not wish me to see the report but I am intensely interested in Mark Johnson.

I pulled the folder out of the envelope.

The folder was empty!

There was a note on the inside cover "Report Transferred to bank vault, Barclays Bank, Meldon"

And a yellow sticky note,

"Karen.

I love you.

Trust me on this.

Dad”

CHAPTER 13: David Wilkins

I like Tryton, but Tryton is a village. I know everybody because everybody goes to Tryton High School.

I decided to join some organisation that covers a larger area so I can meet more people. I enjoyed judo. I am proud that I fought for Yorkshire.

But I've done that. I want to do something else.

I thought about joining the Labour Party Youth Section or the Labour Party itself. Mr Driburg told me that as soon as I join or I publicly support a political party I will upset millions of people who support other parties. That is not good for my career.

Sadly, if I join the Labour Party there will be people there who will criticise me because I am rich.

If I am interested in girls I will find more girls in the Young Conservatives - and more girls who have or who will have money.

The Young Conservatives have pretty girls who want to marry money and who are prepared to shag first. Mr Driburg did not say that - Dennis did.

So how does Dennis know?

The Greens are interesting. Maybe I might join them when I join a political party.

So who or what should I join? I might enjoy the Territorial Army Cadets. Or the Meldon

Youth Theatre Company. Lots of girls there. The Young Farmers Club. Lots of girls there.

I decided on the Meldon Youth Theatre Company. England has so much bad weather that any outdoor activity involves rain and mud. I think I would rather be warm and dry and surrounded by girls.

Jennifer Wilbey and I like each other. We are sometimes romantic and sometimes we are just friends. At the moment we are just friends.

When we are romantic we don't go too far because Helen has had serious words with each of us. In my case one of the serious words was "kebab" in relation to my private bits. I do not think Helen really would do that to my private bits.

I seriously think that if Helen were very cross with me Helen would pull at them to see if they will come off. When Helen is in a temper she might do anything.

Helen does not lose her temper very often. One time Helen smacked my brother Alan and another time she smacked my brother Dennis. Twice is enough!

I own our house but Helen is my big sister. Helen is the boss of the family.

Helen loves me.

Helen said that because I am fit, famous, good-looking, rich, and I have a nice personality I will never go short on shagging opportunities. If I am not too picky I will be able to shag as much as I like.

The newspapers are still sniffing around looking for dirt on me. That dirt would rebound on Dennis and on Mum, too. So put a lock on it!

Jennifer Wilbey used to be a neighbour, and our families are friends. "Don't shit on your own doorstep!"

So I am not really looking for shagging opportunities. I am still only fourteen so there is no terrible rush. I think about shagging but I have never got beyond kisses and a few fondles. Dennis has a lot of girls after him. He is fifteen. Dennis has had the hard word from Helen, too.

Mr Driburg gives both of us the hard word every time he sees us. So does Mr Hewson at our monthly finance meetings. It gets a bit repetitive.

Mr Hewson does it because he loves us. Dennis has kept a lock on his but I think Dennis has gone further than me.

Dennis does not talk about his romantic life much.

I found out when the Meldon Youth Theatre Company meet and I turned up.

The other youngsters recognised me. The person running the session did not recognise me.

The Company is already working on the Christmas Pantomime. All the parts are allocated so I am an assistant stage manager. I am not desperate to be on stage. Assistant stage manager is fine. I am learning skills and I am meeting girls.

I am meeting boys too, but that is not why I came.

I used the summer to prepare for selling goods for Christmas. Next year I will have competition from Tohur and Robert. This Christmas I still have competition from twenty other TV and famous chefs. The Dave The Chef goods from last year are on sale again this year together with this year's DVD and this year's cookbook.

My calendar this year is a tease. In each photo I wear progressively less clothing so by November I am only wearing my swimming trunks. I show my six-pack stomach. In December I am dressed as Father Christmas!

I decided to show my chest this year because next year Tohur will have a calendar. Tohur is only six months older than me but he is real cheesecake! I am a fit good looking lad but Tohur is in a different league.

The supermarket is pleased with all three of us. Although Tohur and I are seen by fewer people than Robert, the people who watch us are almost all housewives who each have

financial spending power unlike the millions of children who watch Robert. The three of us have different cuisines, so the supermarket can track which customers are influenced and brought in by Tohur, by me, and by Robert.

We know that some women watch all three of us.

Don Hewson is laughing because the £100 a week practice and experimentation allowances each for Tohur and Robert goes a long way towards paying Don's food bill.

Ali came home from Cambridge for the half-term holiday.

Ali has learned how to do press-ups using only one arm. We lads are all fit but it is hard to do.

Mark is pretty good. Tohur is terrific.

We older lads can all do it now, but getting up to say fifty on your weaker arm will take a while.

The younger lads, Max and the Famous Four, just can't do it. Derek and Colin are nearly there.

Don is doing it. Don says he has incorporated one arm press-ups into his daily exercise regime.

The girl George who Ali raved about last November is now Ali's girlfriend.

George is an incredibly nice person.

Andria is making a point of being really nice and welcoming to George.

Fulesa is just in love with George.

Mark has a girlfriend called Karen. She is sweet.

I think Karen is a bit sharper than Mark, but not by much.

Mark is sharper than he appears.

Emma is being nice and lovely and motherly to both girls. She approves of both girls, which is lucky for them.

Charlotte and Linda and Freda and Grace are having a lot of fun teasing Mark and Ali.

Mark is so happy that the teasing does not matter.

We were all happy for Don and Emma when they announced that Emma is pregnant again.

They said that the baby will be called Kate, after Max's biological mother.

Max was in tears for most of a day.

The family concert cum audition went well.

If the TV company wants any of the performers they will contact Mr Driburg.

The big event of the month is Mark's ordination as a Mormon priest. This is so important to Mark and the Johnsons. Tohur, Robert and I cooked the food to share, and Charlotte made a dozen "To Kill For" cheesecakes. It was a really nice event.

The new advertisements are out.

Dennis is joined by Abdullah.

The girls in my class have fierce debates about which lad they fancy more. It is nearly a year since Abdullah moved to Doncaster. Abdullah has matured and he is very good looking.

Helen is enjoying her first teaching practice. Her Head Teacher thinks well of her.

Helen is seeing a man but I don't think it is too serious. Not yet.

Andria loves her studies.

Little Angela is such fun. Angela and Damien are friends of course. Sometimes Damien comes to us and sometimes Angela goes to the Hewsons.

They are a barrel of laughs when they are together.

They need watching because they are a pair of mischievous monkeys.

Peter is doing well at the Cathedral School. Peter is not the brightest kid in the school, so he does well to keep up.

Peter is popular and happy.

Janine loves Tryton Junior School. She is happy.

Dad is still in prison. He has a bit over a year to serve. He has told the family that I am not to come to the prison. Dad is terrified that the newspapers will get wind of our relationship. He loves me.

Mum is happy. We kids are doing well. We have no financial problems.

I persuaded Mum to come off benefits completely. I have so much money that I can fund everything out of income. My savings and my investments are still growing.

Mum has had financial problems all her life so she still pinches herself every day.

I have told Mum that if I never appear on TV again we already have more than enough money to live on forever.

CHAPTER 14: Cecil Byram

My mother approves of Mark, which is hugely important in the family. Mum controls 25% of Byrams Bearings.

Karen does not know this, but Mum has been doing some fancy footwork to pass her estate to Karen in such a way as to avoid taxation on capital transfers.

Mum's house was put in joint names with Karen when Karen was eleven years old. So when Mum goes Karen will inherit Mum's house with no tax to pay. Hopefully that's a while yet.

There are a lot of things that Karen does not know about the family finances. There has been no need for Karen to know.

We are a much wealthier family than Karen realises. Karen owns 14% of Byrams Bearings through an overseas family trust.

Karen does not know that she already has wealth.

Mum has been transferring shares in Byrams Bearings to various offshore trust funds, some of which were set up by my father and his father decades ago.

Mum's accountant was clever. Some Byrams shares were "sold" to our family trusts in exchange for annuities to my mother that are easily serviced out of the dividend income.

These transactions did not attract tax.

Against the security of the shares, including the shares my father and I transferred years ago, the family trusts borrow money long-term at reasonable rates of interest. They then lend money to Byrams Bearings at slightly high rates of interest, but not much higher than Byrams Bearings would have to pay to a bank for normal borrowing.

Our UK taxable profits are reduced significantly because of our interest burden. The trusts make untaxed profits abroad on the differences between the interest rates that they pay and the interest rates that they receive.

Byrams generates cash every year. We never need the money we borrow.

My grandfather started the practice of purchasing raw materials well in advance of business requirements. We have stockpiles of raw materials all within ten miles of the factory. Should there be a significant disruption of raw material supply because of strikes, war, or natural disaster Byrams Bearings will be able to expand production when our competitors are on their knees.

Customers who are willing to give long-term contractual commitments will be supplied with the components they need. Those who will not give long-term commitments will have to pay premium prices - and they will be at the back of the queue for delivery if we take their orders at all.

We may sell some raw materials at very high prices to competitors who are desperate.

This assumes either that we have some reason why we wish to keep them in business, or just that we wish to have some cash.

Since my father started this stockpiling practice, an industrial philosophy of JIT (Just In Time) has grown up.

Many factories now have virtually no stocks of raw materials or of components. They have "buffer" stocks for a few hours only. The businesses look cost efficient on paper, but they are hugely vulnerable to disruption.

In contrast we look incredibly inefficient because we are carrying more than two years supply of raw materials on our books - and we are paying high interest rates on our borrowings.

We are a family business owned by me, my mother, Karen, and the offshore trusts we control. So the financial "experts" in the City of London and in Wall Street can whistle.

With so many companies having no buffer stocks at all, our buffer stocks are potentially hugely significant.

I do not hope to see strikes, or war, or natural disaster, but they do happen sometimes. They create opportunities for those who are well prepared.

As an example, there was a war in 1967 between Israel and its neighbours.

The Suez Canal was blocked for well over a year.

Some ships were trapped in the Suez Canal. Ships carrying raw materials and components to Europe from the Far East had to divert around Africa.

Prices for some raw materials went through the roof. Components are made from raw materials and so their prices went through the roof, too.

JIT had not come in then, but some companies in Europe were crucified because of the temporary disruption to their supplies.

Our family had already started stockpiling. So at a time when most of our competitors were short of raw materials and had to stop production or had to reduce production Dad was able to offer components at reasonable prices to customers who would agree long-term contracts. We picked up Marcel's grandfather and quite a few other customers who are still customers now.

We could have made a quick buck by being extortionate. We have made much more than that over the years by not gouging customers.

I keep having expressions of interest from asset strippers who would like to purchase Byrams for a song. No chance!

When Marcel's father came over in 1980 Dad showed him the stockpiles we had at that time. When Marcel comes in January I will show Marcel our current stockpiles.

Marcel's family company sources from the Far East as well as from us.

The long term contracts agreed in 1967 have long expired but the customers still give us significant business to keep us sweet. If they did not give us the business now then should

there be another crisis there is no certainty that we would wish to help them. This way they know that we will help them.

The profits that the family trusts have made from the interest rate differences are loaned out on very short term loans on the money markets. If I ever need a significant chunk of money to purchase a failing competitor I can have it within days from the family trust funds. I said earlier that I struggle to manage what I have. I would be absolutely crazy to expand further or to buy an additional business.

We are poised to seize an opportunity when it arises. We are struggling for adequate management of what we have.

I had to work out how we could increase our company maybe eightfold inside a month without undue managerial stress.

It took me a while but I have cracked that problem.

My most significant and most urgent problem at the moment is succession. Karen is my and my mother's only heir.

Fortunately Karen has her head screwed on.

But what kind of man will Karen attract? I have worried about that since Irene and I learned that we could have no more children.

We want a man who can make Karen happy and not be an idiot.

Were he to be a competent manager that would be a bonus. If he is a sculptor or a carpenter it doesn't matter provided that he can give Karen the emotional and practical support she will need. And hopefully he will give Karen children.

This Mark Johnson lad is straight. There are so many rubbish lads out there that Irene and Mum and I would bite Mark's hand off.

We have to be careful that Karen does not get cross because we are too enthusiastic about Mark.

Mark is only sixteen. I had thought that all one can look to at Mark's tender age is his character.

I was wrong.

Mark Johnson already has a track record.

The DD company operates on a Chinese Walls practice where the investigators do not know who the client is.

My DD researcher did a good job. He interviewed the General Manager of the Tryton Hotel. The General Manager (GM) readily accepted the DD researcher's cover story that Mark is being considered for a fast-track junior management position in industry that Mark has not applied for. The GM says "take him".

Mark is an excellent shift leader, and in his own right Mark is an excellent chef. The General Manager is quite calm about Mark leading the catering for a wedding of two hundred and fifty people as sometimes has happened. The General Manager would like to recruit Mark into hotel management but Mark has said that he does not wish to have a lifetime of working unsocial hours.

A senior teacher at Tryton High School told the researcher about three incidents of violence in a two year time frame. If a lad is attacked by four older lads and he decks three of them the lad cannot be blamed. There was an incident in Florida where an unarmed Mark chased and caught a purse snatcher, being stabbed in the process. Apparently a shopkeepers association gave Mark a reward for catching the criminal. A creditable action. The third was where Mark and some other lads intervened to prevent a couple of drug dealers from kidnapping a teenage girl. The drug dealers had a gun!

Normally three incidents of violence in a two year time frame would cause concern. In the circumstances, Mark is to be commended.

Mark is not particularly academic. He is academically adequate rather than outstanding. Mark's bank statements (don't ask!) show that Mark's wages from the Tryton Hotel are never touched, but they are just building up. Presumably they are intended to fund Mark's service as a missionary in a few years time. The only outgoings are the tithes that Mark pays to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. There was a slight discrepancy between the tithing amounts sent and the income received. This is because Mark also tithes his pocket money, his free meals, and his share of tips.

The windfall from the Florida heroism was almost immediately followed by a significant cheque from Mark to the local Mormon "ward" or parish. A senior Mormon explained that before the Johnson children were taken into local authority care the local ward had given the family financial help to pay utility and other bills.

The Mormons had regarded the payments as gifts rather than loans, but they respected Mark's wish to repay.

The Mormons could not accept repayment, because the payments had not been loans. They accepted a donation from Mark that was paid into the fund from which the Johnsons had been granted the hardship payments.

The only thing Mark has done with his windfall is to repay that money. The balance is still in his bank account.

Charlotte's payment to the hardship fund was even more unexpected.

Mark's sister Charlotte wrote and recorded a hymn "The Lord Loves Us", from which Charlotte is already a millionaire. Charlotte has also made a significant donation to the ward's

hardship fund. Charlotte has said that she will top up the hardship fund when more money is needed.

The foster carers are not Mormons. Despite this Mr Hewson is very welcoming and co-operative with the local ward (Mormon parish). Mr Hewson regularly gives sacks of recycled clothing to the ward. Mr Hewson was awarded the Military Medal for heroism in Northern Ireland.

Mr Hewson's adopted son Max has twice given a series of bone marrow donations to save the lives of children. The family choir raised well over a thousand pounds for a charity a couple of Christmases ago. It is that kind of household.

Although some Hewson fostered children have earnings or capital it is all salted away for the future. The rich children have only their normal pocket money for day to day living.

Mark Johnson has been incredibly kind and supportive to a younger lad in the household who is wheelchair bound.

Mark's social circle consists of:

Abdullah Daar - Ballroom dancer at national level (16).

Robert Graham (the wheelchair child) - TV chef (11).

Ali Miah - Hero of the A320 near disaster at Manchester Airport this summer. Reading Engineering at Cambridge University (18).

Tohur Miah - TV chef, County judo fighter - aiming for the national judo squad (15).

David Wilkins - TV Chef. Now multimillionaire. (14).

Dennis Wilkins - Ballroom dancer at national level and actor in TV sanitary towel advertisements (15).

Nigel Williams - Schoolboy. Part time worker at Tryton Hotel (16).

A very new girlfriend Karen Byram (16). She appears to be Mark's first girlfriend.

Karen's family are significantly wealthy. The family company employs over 300 people, but the company does not seem to be very well managed.

The company has ridiculously high stock levels and significant expensive borrowings.

Profits are close to static. They make components.

Mark is very close to his sisters Rebecca Johnson (18) and Charlotte Johnson (14).

Mark and Rebecca have written for Mormon youth magazines in the UK. The articles "The Mormon View of Violence", "Living With Muslims" (Mark) and "The Experience of Being In Care" (Rebecca) have been reprinted in Mormon youth magazines worldwide.

The summary was,

"Squeaky Clean. Very competent as a manager.

Tremendous positive personal qualities.

Judges himself too harshly (every source)."

An addendum was

"As a fast track junior manager any business would take him. For the other possible position most decision makers would thank their lucky stars."

So this kid aged sixteen who started with nothing has significant savings from his own efforts. He is a certified hero, author, manager, chef, and humanitarian.

At sixteen I had nothing that could compare with Mark Johnson.

I turned out all right nevertheless. My silver spur helped I know.

Irene's parents are coming to dinner to meet Mark.

I cannot tell them or Irene or mother any detail from the DD report because that information would get back to Karen. It could damage the growth of her relationship with Mark.

I am not happy about a courtship lasting nearly six years. I don't imagine that Mark and Karen are ecstatic about that either.

I have made enquiries.

Mark would be under huge social pressure to do his missionary service and then marry.

In theory Mark could decide not to become a missionary.

The Mormons would have to accept Mark's decision. In which case Mark and Karen could marry during Mark's apprenticeship, or as soon as next week.

I cannot imagine Mark deciding not to become a missionary, so that idea is a non-runner.

I regard all religion as nonsense, and I think Karen does, too.

I think that Karen has not really thought out the implications of marrying a Mormon. Following a religion you do not believe in will lead to tears. A marriage between a Mormon and an agnostic is possible. I think it more honest than a pretend conversion.

Apparently a significant proportion of non-Mormon wives do convert within a few years of the wedding.

If Karen does convert before the wedding then we cannot attend the wedding unless we are Mormons by then. I do not think Karen would do that to us. If they wish to have a second fully religious wedding after Karen converts then they can do.

These are problems if and when they decide to marry, in six year's time. To put it bluntly they will decide and Irene and I will have to accept whatever they have decided.

If the lad was not a Mormon, which obviously I would prefer, he might not have the strengths and integrity that we value.

I can't have it both ways. The fact is that Mark Johnson is a Mormon and he is not going to quit.

To add to my stresses Vicky the canteen manager has emailed me. Her mother in Aberdeen has had a bad fall.

Vicky is an only child. So Vicky needs to tend to her mother. Vicky has no idea how long she will be away or whether she will ever be free to return. Vicky resigns as canteen manager with immediate effect. Sorry!

The canteen feeds about 120 people daily. They will go hungry on Monday. I have telephoned a dozen catering agencies this morning. They all say that everyone who is half way competent is already committed until the far side of Christmas.

Rosa the kitchen hand can peel vegetables, but she cannot take on the canteen manager role. She is not up to it.

I am stuffed on this one!

I am tempted to hit the sherry.

I know that were I turn to alcohol every time I am stressed I would soon become an alcoholic. Tea for now.

Irene's parents like what they have heard about Mark. Within the first ten minutes of meeting they are reminiscing about their ballroom dancing days. So Irene's parents and Mark and Karen will go ballroom dancing on Tuesday as a foursome. Mark is a hit in person.

Karen is so happy since she has hooked up with Mark that there has been comment in the factory. Everyone has assumed that there must be a boyfriend.

Everybody likes Karen and everybody is happy for her. Karen is getting a little teasing but she is so smiling and happy and proud that the teasing is water off a duck's back.

I have never seen Mark not smiling.

Irene's father has recently retired as a doctor. He does a few shifts a week at his old surgery just to keep his mind active. He always asks what is the latest woe? If you run a business of our size there is always something happening.

So I explained how Vicky has left me in deep difficulty.

Mark asked,

"How important is it that you operate a canteen?"

"Very important. There is no alternative catering for over a mile around. At the moment most of the departments send a car every morning for bacon sandwiches. There will be a lot of unhappiness if a hundred and twenty guys can't eat."

Mark turned to Irene,

"Sorry Mrs Byram."

Then Mark said to me,

"I have a suggestion for your problem Mr Byram. Shall we go into another room to discuss it?"

What the heck?

"No secrets among family, Mark."

Well I was not totally honest there.

"Okay. Almost every Saturday my sister Rebecca and I cook for wedding parties of between one hundred and two hundred people. So having one hundred and twenty meals ready for say one o'clock or whenever is no big issue.

"I bake baps and rolls and croissants at home all the time. Bacon butties and sausage sandwiches are not rocket science.

"I don't drink tea or coffee but the Tryton Hotel has trained me to make excellent coffee and very good tea, in quantity. We have Rosa still to help.

If I ask Rebecca to help and I hijack Karen to work the till, the problem is solved!

"So I suppose the real question is "What's it worth?"."

I was stunned.

I had not thought of bringing Mark into the factory. Here Mark is stepping up to solve my significant problem! And "What's it worth?"

Love only goes so far!

Good boy.

Put the way Mark put it, the answer was straightforward.

"What do you suggest, Mark?"

"I suggest that after dinner you and I and Karen go to look at the factory kitchen and dining area. I want to see how much cleaning is needed before we can open on Monday."

"I also want to see what stocks of food are there, what the current menus are like, and so forth."

"What financial terms are you suggesting?"

"Profit share."

"Profit? The catering operation makes a loss!"

Mark looked surprised.

"What do meals cost at the moment?"

Irene and her parents are totally silent.

Karen's mouth is open. Mark is displaying qualities that Karen did not know that Mark possesses.

"Two pounds for the main course. Fifty pence for sponge pudding and custard."

"So if one hundred and twenty people spend on average two pounds twenty-five, that is two hundred and seventy pounds a day. One thousand three hundred pounds a week."

"If half goes on raw materials, then that leaves six hundred and fifty pounds for fuel and for wages for two people."

The lad is a wizard at mental arithmetic!

"How can it be making a loss?"

A very good question!

"I don't know."

"If we provide bacon and sausage sandwiches mid-morning we will probably sell two hundred a day at least at two pounds each. That is another five hundred pounds gross profit a week.

"Tell you what.

"We say that every person involved is costed at minimum wage. That plus the raw materials cost is the production cost.

"Then whatever is left over above the production cost is gross profit."

Logical, I think.

"You get half of the gross profit out of which you pay for fuel, rates, use of space and anything else. Rebecca, Karen and I split our profit equally in proportion to the hours worked.

"And we also have the minimum wage for the hours each of us has worked.

"How does that work for you?"

I thought for a moment.

I was assessing this as a commercial offer and I was assessing the offer in terms of our family dynamics.

"It's the best offer I've had all week!

"I'll take it."

"May I phone Rebecca and book her for Monday please?"

"Of course."

Mark telephoned his sister.

"Rebecca, do you remember saying that you were so bored you were thinking of going to the hairdresser?"

An answer.

"I've got us a job starting Monday. We will have to leave the house at six thirty every morning but we will be done by three most days. No Saturday or Sunday working!"

An answer.

"I'll tell you about it when I get home. But I will be late home. Possibly after midnight.

"If you've gone to bed I'll wait until morning to tell you."

The meal continued.

Everyone was looking at Mark in a slightly different light.

You do not expect a lad to solve a serious adult problem. But he has.

Mark makes a challenging problem seem simple.

When we arrived at the factory the security guard was very surprised to see us.

I took Mark and Karen through to the canteen kitchen.

Mark looked a bit unhappy at the kitchen.

Mark opened a refrigerator and he held up a desperately sad lettuce.

As Mark went round the kitchen he made comments.

"Look at this meat. No wonder you have a low take-up. Where is the office?"

Then in the office,

"If you are paying this price for meat you are buying crap!"

"But how can you still lose money when you are paying these prices?"

A delay. After about ten minutes Mark said,

"Got it!"

"What?"

"On Tuesday you took delivery of sixty pounds of pork. But if you are only feeding one hundred and twenty people that is half a pound of pork per person."

"If you really were giving half a pound of meat on a serving people couldn't eat it. But you would have a lot of people eating here every day."

"I could be wrong, but I think some of your pork is walking. Either short delivery or evaporation."

"The official order is for sixty pounds of pork, but I'm pretty sure you did not serve that much meat."

"And the next day, sixty pounds of beef."

"That's why you are losing money."

"Mr Byram, I don't see how Rosa can't know what was going on. How you deal with that is up to you.

"Hear what she has to say. It may be that she told Vicky that she was going to shop her to you and that is why Vicky quit.

"The meat you have here is crap.

"I will change the supplier. The same for the vegetables.

"I will cancel the bread, too.

"Look at this oven. If a hygiene inspector came in, your canteen would be closed down and you would be fined.

"This will take Rebecca and me and Karen about five hours to clean properly tomorrow afternoon and evening. And on the way here we need to buy cleaning materials.

"I need about two hundred pounds cash to go to a supermarket to buy stock for Monday. Then on Monday I can place orders with suppliers.

"The bacon and sausage sandwiches will have to wait until Wednesday morning because we need to get the lunchtime meals right first."

I am an engineer. I know what I am doing in an engineering environment.

I can cook, but I rarely have time.

Mark Johnson knows his way about a kitchen in a way that I can only dream of. In half an hour Mark has uncovered a fraud.

Mark knows what to do with our canteen and I have confidence that Mark will do it.

I am amused that Mark has just assumed that Karen will wish to do five hours of heavy cleaning tomorrow.

Karen has generous pocket money and a good clothing allowance. Irene and I give Karen dollops of cash whenever she asks, which is not often.

Under Mark, Karen is actually going to be working for hourly pay. Well, girl, that is what happens when you hook up with a man!

I had to sack Rosa. The fraud has been running for years. Rosa has known about it for years.

By the time Mark and Karen went dancing with Irene's parents on Tuesday night the factory was alight with positive comments.

From one hundred and twenty meals on Monday the team served one hundred and fifty people on Tuesday, and they ran out of food. Everyone is excited about the bacon sandwiches and sausage sandwiches starting tomorrow morning.

A very good marketing ploy was that at Tuesday lunchtime there were small pieces of bacon and sausage to sample, with cocktail sticks.

Everyone was curious to see Karen's boyfriend of course.

I do not have many female staff, and most of them ought not to be interested in young lads.

The general consensus is that Karen is a fortunate girl.

The men are reasonably approving of Mark. He seems wholesome and not a wimp.

Rebecca Johnson is attractive. A number of the younger men would like to have conversation with her.

Rebecca's work rate is phenomenal. Rebecca clears and wipes tables in a flash, working her way through the dining room like a whirlwind. She smiles happily as she does it. Karen on the till maintains the customer contact with a cheery word for everybody. Karen knows everybody.

Karen cheerily acknowledges that Mark is her boyfriend,
"So hands off!"

I do not know where Mark and Rebecca learned their marketing skills, but they are brilliant. I am never quite clear which ideas are Mark's and which are Rebecca's ideas. They are a team. Mark is the apparent leader.

The menu begins with "soup of the day". It is made in the kitchen from ingredients rather than coming from a package.

The rolls look utterly gorgeous. They taste even better. Little pats of butter are on sale.

There is a modest selection of sweets and crisps on sale, and bottles of water.

The first lunch was broccoli and stilton soup, roast lamb with carrots and garden peas and mashed potatoes not made from a packet. Terrific. The gravy was very good.

The apple crumble and custard was incredibly good.

I have had much worse meals in restaurants.

The coffee and the tea are receiving rave comments.

With my permission the lunch breaks have been staggered to reduce the pressure on the eating space.

Mark has taken on a worker to help in the kitchen in place of Rosa.

The young woman is a sensation!

I am happily married but even I think "Wow!"

She wears a wedding ring which confused me a bit because she is the girlfriend of Ali Miah. I met Ali Miah playing Scrabble® at the Hewsons.

Rebecca explained that the wedding ring warns off a lot of men, making it easier for Georgina to do her work without interruption. We have six Georges on the staff, so she is Georgina to reduce confusion.

The ballroom dancing evening went well. Irene's parents don't get out that often so they really enjoyed the event. They are full of praise for Mark as a person and as a dancer. Karen is very happy that Mark dances well.

Karen is walking on air at the moment.

Karen was happy already because of her relationship with Mark.

Mark has huge respect in the factory. The catering side is so transformed, and Mark Johnson did it!

Karen has additional happiness because her man is so respected.

I don't think Karen has ever respected any young man. Karen respects her man, and she likes that.

Karen would bed Mark today if he would.

Happily, Mark won't.

On Wednesday they began selling breakfast food.

The men clock in for eight o'clock. Georgina runs a stall in the clock room that sells breakfast goods. There are endless supplies of bacon and sausage and baps arriving from the kitchen every few minutes. There is a good range of chocolate bars, crisps, home-made biscuits, and Danish pastries. There is tea, coffee, hot chocolate, bottles of water, and bottles of pop.

Meanwhile, near Georgina, Karen is taking orders for the mid-morning delivery. People are paying for bacon and sausage sandwiches, hot and cold drinks, and pastries. They will be delivered to the room in which each man works.

Karen keeps a chart with each room marked on it, and she writes each order into the appropriate box.

Rebecca, Karen and Georgina deliver the orders on trolleys. They will go to the same rooms each day so that Rebecca and Georgina can get to know their customers.

Each trolley has a range of goods for sale.

Every day Mark gives me a copy of his daily report, complete with profit calculations.

"How can you provide this quality at these prices?"

"I am not paying for premises or for fuel.

"I am paying about forty percent more on meat and about a third more on vegetables."

"There is no gristle or waste. With good ingredients our good cooking can generate exceptional "value added".

"Your workers feel that they are having restaurant quality food at works canteen prices.

"They do not complain about portion sizes because it is all edible. It is more than they expect and better than they expect for the price they are paying.

"It is a lot better than what they were being given."

"The thirty extra customers generate an additional ninety pounds a day, which more than compensates for the cost of the better materials."

"The soup costs buttons to make and sells at 50p a portion. The rolls cost buttons to make and sell at 25p each. We make six hundred per cent mark-up on the butter pats."

"The tea and the coffee are about a four hundred per cent mark up. We sell two hundred cups a day at 50p each."

"The average lunch "take" has gone from £2.25 a diner to £3.00, and people are happy.

"On the hot sandwiches we make more than two hundred per cent mark up because we make our own baps."

I had my regular monthly meeting with the union.

The union says that everyone is very happy with the catering arrangements.

I am very happy with the catering arrangements.

I had not realised the extent to which poor catering or good catering can affect morale.

Morale in the factory is hugely high. I cannot remember a time when everybody was so cheerful.

The men are happier now that they have their mid-morning bacon sandwiches delivered to their work rooms instead of having to send a car to fetch them.

The sandwiches are excellent.

The men like that the delivery is by an attractive young woman.

Time is now not wasted by people driving off for bacon sandwiches. Productivity is up 4% and rising. There appears to be less sickness and absenteeism but that may be a statistical blip.

Catering is generating significant profit.

Mark has established catering as a going concern.

Mark is going to help me to recruit someone to run the operation to begin after Christmas, because Mark will be off to Luton in February.

Mark has attracted some more attention. Mark showed off by demonstrating that he can do one armed press-ups. The younger workers are trying to copy him but they just can't.

Mark's effortless superiority!

Fridays are more popular than they used to be because on Fridays the catering team supply croissants.

Mark's croissants are the best croissants that I have ever eaten.

The team also sell pats of butter and small portions of jam. The plastic knives and the paper plates are free.

A lot of the guys had never eaten croissants before but now the warm croissants sell like hotcakes.

Mark makes the croissants during the week and he freezes them. On Thursday night Mark puts the croissants out to defrost and to rise. On Friday morning Mark paints the croissants with egg wash and he bakes them.

I have a standing order with Karen for half a dozen frozen croissants which our family eat on Saturday mornings. I have to pay for the croissants as Mark says "to keep the books straight".

CHAPTER 17: Mark Johnson

I am wildly in love with Karen Byram.

Karen has a wicked sense of humour. Karen is intelligent, and she is mentally strong. She has an impish smile.

Karen is not the most beautiful girl I have ever seen but I would put Karen in the top ten. I tell Karen that she is the most beautiful girl I have ever seen because that is more romantic than telling Karen that she is the seventh most beautiful girl that I have ever seen.

A Mormon is not supposed to tell lies but I am using what Ali Miah calls "poetic licence".

Karen is a bit of a monkey. Karen thought that I might be frightened off by her family's wealth so she deliberately did not tell me that her family has money.

I suspect that Karen gets guys who want to bed Byram's Bearings rather than to bed Karen Byram. I would be very happy bedding Karen Byram if Byram's Bearings did not exist. When I can bed Karen, that is.

We are looking at a courtship of six years.

I could shorten that period by about eighteen months if I just got a job instead of taking on a three year apprenticeship.

My head tells me that I should do the apprenticeship. My heart would like to marry Karen as soon as possible.

I am a young man. If I were not a Mormon I would probably have bedded Karen by now because Karen is keen and I am keen. Even Karen's granny seems to be keen that Karen and I should have sex.

Ali Miah was telling me about a Christian saint called Saint Augustine. Apparently as a young man Saint Augustine prayed to God,

"Oh Lord make me chaste!"

"But not yet!"

It's dead easy to be chaste when there is nobody who you particularly wish to bed. It's hard now to be chaste.

Rebecca has been working on a comic song about religion and hypocrisy. The working title is "When it suits".

The song is about people who will stand up for the Lord when it is safe to do so. They would give to a beggar but they do not have any coins and they do not care so much about

the poor person that they will give a banknote. They will not commit adultery unless they are tempted. I will give Rebecca my thoughts on chastity to add to the song.

The fact is that I am a newly ordained Mormon priest.

I am not going to have sex before marriage. Once I am married I will not have sex outside our marriage.

Karen is pretty pissed off that I am sticking to my religion so strongly. That is unfortunate.

I am going to stick to my religion. I hope that Karen will stick to me.

The catering side is going great. For 320 staff we are doing 200 lunches and 350 bacon or sausage sandwiches daily. We are selling 600 coffees and teas daily.

With the rolls and pastries and other stuff we are grossing over £2,000 a day. After raw materials of about £500 our gross profits are £1400 a day.

After giving Cecil his share we are still earning more than £35,000 a year each plus our minimum wage hourly pay. Very good pay for youngsters!

I went to see Cecil. I gave Cecil the draft advertisement to place in "The Caterer".

He read it.

I was surprised to see Cecil looking uncomfortable.

"Look, Cecil. Karen and Rebecca are leaving in January.

"I am going to Luton in February. We need to have a chef in place in early January. We have to advertise now!"

Cecil just looked uncomfortable.

Cecil was silent.

Then,

"Mark.

"You have been absolutely fantastic.

"The whole factory is buzzing and happy. You are personally popular.

"Productivity is up 5% just because of your catering. Catering now makes money instead of losing money.

"I don't want to lose you. You are an important contributor to the operation."

We were both silent.

I sensed that Cecil was going to say more.

"In January there will just be you and Georgina. If you put Georgina on any wage you like, hire a couple of minimum wage catering assistants, then the profits will be yours.

"If I put you on 75% of the gross profit instead of 50% you would be earning about £200,000 a year."

I was stunned.

I was silent.

"You want to know why I am being so generous?"

"Yes."

"The 5% improvement in productivity that you have created will generate several million pounds of profit for me. I can't risk losing that.

"If an external consultant could come in and increase our productivity 5% at no additional cost I would have to pay him a lot of money. If he charged me only £200,000 a year to earn me several million pounds a year it would be a steal.

And of course it all comes from money you are making for me anyway."

"I know you intend to go to Luton."

"I have to make you an offer that is so good that you cannot refuse. At £100,000 you might refuse. At £200,000 I don't think you will refuse."

Cecil's offer blew me away.

But I want to follow my apprenticeship.

"I need to think and to pray.

"May I give you an answer tomorrow?"

"Yes.

"I have not told Karen. This has to be your decision."

I decided not to involve Karen yet. I need to think and pray.

I told Karen that I have had an interesting offer from Cecil. Karen knew nothing of it.

"Karen. I feel bad about not sharing with you.

"But I do not want to tear you between your Dad and me. Your Dad feels the same.

"So we are negotiating man to man. We will tell you what we have decided when we have agreed.

"And don't go running to Daddy.

"This is between your Dad and me. If I have a future with you I have to be able to argue or negotiate with your Dad without you getting in between us or getting trampled between us.

"It doesn't mean I don't love you.

"It doesn't mean that your Dad does not love you.

"It is because we love you that you that you have to learn not to get between us when we have differences.

"Your Dad is strong. I am fairly strong. We will bang heads together for hopefully the next forty years.

"If you get between us you will get hurt for no good purpose.

"So, darling, you have to learn to keep out between the two men you love most in the world."

Karen was frustrated not to be in the negotiations but once she realised I was not going to tell her more she shut up.

Karen sulked, but I can cope with that.

Georgina drove me and Rebecca home as usual.

Georgina told me about her thoughts on what she will do when we finish catering at Christmas. She is going to suggest to Mr Byram that she should first do a skills audit in the factory. Then she would like to visit the ten largest customers to ask what else they would like Byrams Bearings to supply.

I thought that was a good idea. I did not know what Cecil would think.

When we got home the house was in uproar.

A few weeks ago Tohur and Charlotte and Linda and Freda and Derek and Robert were coming home from the High School.

Robert has to move his own wheelchair to build his strength. Everybody walks a bit slower so that Robert can keep up.

Tohur has been hoping to be called for trials for the England judo team. During the walk home Tohur received a text message from the Yorkshire judo coach congratulating Tohur on being called up.

Tohur shouted out and Charlotte who was nearest leapt to hug him. Tohur hugged all three girls.

They thought nothing of it.

The Sunday Scandal is as the name suggests a Sunday newspaper that specialises in reporting scandal. On the front page of the paper yesterday was a photo of Tohur and Charlotte hugging. The headline was "How Is His Kebab, Charlotte?"

The article said that "saintly singer Charlotte Johnson is enjoying her passionate affair with TV chef Tohur Miah".

The article suggested that Charlotte and Tohur are having sex.

Bishop Collins has telephoned Don. Bishop Collins is concerned for Charlotte's reputation, and he would like to know the truth.

Don knew nothing of the article. Don said that he is 100% confident that Charlotte and Tohur are not interested in each other let alone having a relationship or having sex.

Mr Driburg has telephoned Don. Given that Charlotte is well under sixteen Tohur would be committing a criminal offence by having sex with Charlotte.

The supermarket has cancelled the contract and the TV company has cancelled Tohur's show. Some other chef will take Tohur's slot this week.

By the time all this hit the kids were at school. Charlotte and Tohur heard about the article from other children at the school.

Tohur has had a text message. His call up for trials for the England judo team has been cancelled because of these allegations.

Charlotte is incredibly upset at the newspaper article. It is lies and it hurts Charlotte's reputation. Tohur is also incredibly upset.

Elder Bob was round. Our social worker Mary and Tohur's social worker Jane and the Hewsons' social worker Elizabeth have all visited.

Don is taking Charlotte and Tohur to London tomorrow. They have an appointment with a leading libel lawyer in the early afternoon.

Rebecca and I spent a lot of time comforting both Charlotte and Tohur. They are such nice kids and they really do not deserve this shit.

Both of us and George hugged both of them.

It was not until I was in bed that I had any chance to think over the amazing offer from Cecil.

Cecil was right. At £100,000 I would possibly go for the apprenticeship. I would be a fool to turn away £200,000.

I actually got out of bed and I prayed for a bit.

I had a sense of calm.

Then I slept.

In the morning I woke up with a scheme that would work.

I will put a counter offer to Cecil. It allows me to have my cake and eat it.

Karen is sulking again this morning.

Karen I think is not used to being told "Keep Out".

Having suffered Rebecca having a screaming punching paddy at me I can cope with Karen sulking. And I am busy anyway.

After lunch I went to see Cecil.

"Well?"

"A counter offer."

"OK."

"There are two major problems with your proposal.

"Number One is that I have my heart set on serving an apprenticeship.

"It does not have to be an aircraft mechanic apprenticeship. I could serve a fitter apprenticeship here at Byrams Bearings just like you did."

Cecil looked interested.

"Go on."

"When I am eighteen or I finish my apprenticeship I will go on my missionary service. It would make sense if I have set up an organisation that can run without me when I disappear."

"Yes?"

"So my proposal is that I replace Karen and Rebecca and Georgina with good kitchen hands, and I hire a chef.

"I supervise closely throughout January.

"By the end of January the operation should be running smoothly and I should be close to redundant."

"I start an apprenticeship as a fitter here in February instead of in Luton. That allows me to keep an eye on the catering on my own time.

"It should not happen, but if I need to step in during working hours I lose a day's apprentice pay."

"So it won't happen very often!"

"When I turn eighteen, which is about eighteen months away, I have leave of absence from the apprenticeship to do my missionary service. The Chef is given a big bonus to operate in my absence. Half the bonus is held back until I return and I have gone through the records and accounts.

"When I come back I finish my apprenticeship.

"If Karen and I still love each other we will probably marry while I am finishing my apprenticeship.

"A lot of guys come back from missionary service to find the relationship has broken down.

"It is easy for us missionaries to stay chaste because the host communities keep an eye on us. We are doing what we want to do and we are serving the Lord.

"But for the girls it is very hard. They are lonely. They meet guys. They are exposed to temptation. Love sometimes fades.

"The mature man who comes back is different to the immature man who went away.

"And the girls have changed, too.

"So you and I have to work on the basis of what is best for Byrams Bearings.

"If Karen and I break up then I finish the apprenticeship and then I leave. I get on with my life somewhere else.

"If Karen and I marry then obviously I am around."

I sat back.

Cecil thought hard for a while.

"You are a clever young man.

"You give me continuity on the catering side. You have your apprenticeship and a high income. You can marry Karen sooner.

"It looks like "win-win-win".

"One problem though is that I have to run this past the union.

"We have a fair hiring agreement. When my father negotiated that clause Karen was not born yet.

"I will speak to the union. I hope they will agree to my creating an additional unpaid apprentice post."

"Okay.

"May I raise something else?"

"Go on."

"Georgina wants a job. She wants you to hire her to do a skills audit. Georgina wants to interview virtually every production worker to see what they produce and what they could produce. Georgina will also ask for suggestions for new products."

"Then Georgina wants to visit your ten biggest clients to find out what they would like Byrams Bearings to produce. And silly things like would they like nuts and bolts packaged separately or together? Would they prefer two hundred and fifty widgets to a box or twelve dozen? Would they like us to sell items by weight?

"I thought "Product Development Researcher" would be a good job title."

"Yes. I can live with that.

"What pay do you suggest?"

"I don't know. Twenty thousand a year? Twenty-five?"

"We'll call it twenty-two."

"Starting First January?"

"Fine."

Karen is still sulking because her father will not tell her anything either. Hopefully when Karen learns that the marriage can take place eighteen months sooner than we previously thought Karen will stop sulking.

So then I went home.

In the car I told Georgina about her new job.

Georgina is very pleased.

The gang are not back from London.

Don has telephoned to say that the lawyer has emailed a letter to the newspaper before they left his office. The lawyer is happy.

Charlotte has stopped crying. Tohur has stopped clenching his fists.

Ali has phoned Emma to learn what is happening.

The Daars and the Wilkins have telephoned.

Bob has visited again.

Dennis phoned.

The lad who took the TV series part that Dennis turned down has been stabbed by an idiot. Dennis is even more pleased that he did not take that opportunity.

I should have gone dancing with Karen but Karen cancelled because Karen is having a major sulk.

The next day I went to see Cecil again.

The Chief Steward says that the union is not happy with nepotism. Creating an apprenticeship so as to allocate it to your future son in law is clearly nepotism.

But.

Mark Johnson is already a competent manager of his small department. If Mark stays at Byrams Mark is likely to become a senior manager.

It is in the interest of the workers that Mark Johnson should be properly trained as a manager.

Cecil gets full credit for recognising that a managerial training scheme in an engineering company should incorporate an apprenticeship.

The Chief Steward does not want it to be said that the union made it impossible for Mark Johnson to stay at Byrams Bearings.

So the union agrees.

The union has no problem with Mark Johnson following an apprenticeship whilst simultaneously managing a small unit within the business.

The decision will be ratified at the scheduled union committee meeting on Thursday evening.

We shook hands. Then we embraced.

"Now I have a request." I said.

"There is a young man who wants to meet you.

"He thinks you are a very clever very determined visionary with balls.

"He is only fourteen years old but he is already working on his third or fourth million so he is not stupid either."

"Who is this prodigy?"

"His name is David Wilkins. He is a TV chef called "Dave The Chef". He has just moved from children's TV to having his own programme. Dave The Chef is very popular and Dave has a good agent.

"So Dave has earned a lot of money very quickly."

"How does Dave know I exist?"

"Dave was in care alongside me.

"When Dave heard I was getting involved with Byrams Bearings he looked online at your returns to Companies House.

"So now David thinks you are a genius and he wants to meet you."

"It is pretty rare that anyone thinks I am a genius.

"Phone Irene. I

"If it is OK by Irene he can have dinner with us on Saturday."

CHAPTER 18: Don Hewson

I have overheard conversations amongst the children from which I glean that Dennis Wilkins and Nigel Williams have had interesting experiences.

Dennis had caught a man stalking Charlotte. Charlotte did not know but this guy had positioned himself in the woods and he was photographing Charlotte.

Dennis had seen what was happening and Dennis had some kind of conversation with the man.

The man agreed to return to London, not to return to Meldon, and never again to be within 50 yards of Charlotte. Knowing Dennis I suspect that Dennis may have been violent.

On the other hand if the man could still walk and still speak Dennis must have been moderate in the use of his persuasive powers.

Nigel some time later found a similar guy taking photos of Charlotte. Nigel had conversed with him.

The man had denied being a sexual stalker. He is a paparazzi. Nigel pointed out that Charlotte is a child. The man agreed. The man was taking photos of Charlotte. The man agreed. So the man was taking photos of a child? In this instance, yes. So the man is a paedophile.

Did the man know why we do not have a great paedophilia problem in Yorkshire?

The man did not know.

Nigel explained that here in Yorkshire,

"We bury you bastards the first time you are caught.

“We do not waste police time and court time.

“We don't get repeat offenders either.

“There are three paedophiles buried in these woods to my knowledge.”

The man was desperately explaining that he was a paparazzi!

Nigel said that Nigel did not care if the man is an Italian paedophile. We don't like foreign paedophiles either.

It took the man quite a while to persuade Nigel that a paparazzi is not an Italian paedophile.

Once Nigel accepted that there is a distinction between paparazzi and paedophile Nigel negotiated with the paparazzi that the paparazzi would give Nigel his camera memory card and that the paparazzi would leave Meldon forever.

I am pretty sure that Nigel used violence.

Nigel knows the difference between paedophile and paparazzi but Nigel pretended not to know.

There is a determined journalist called Jes Holt who has been stalking our household over the past few years. Mr Driburg obtained an injunction against her in respect of the Wilkins boys.

It was Jes Holt who took the photo of Tohur and Charlotte. She wrote a story that according to Jes Holt was altered by the Sunday Scandal subeditors.

Our lawyer has thrown the book at the Sunday Scandal. He has explained the context in which the photo was taken including the hugs with Linda and Freda and the reason being that Tohur had been called up for a trial to fight for England.

In respect of Tohur there is a clear indication in the story that Tohur has had sex with Charlotte. This is an allegation of a criminal offence against Tohur because Charlotte is under sixteen.

Tohur is a strict Muslim who runs a web site for Muslim children in care. Tohur despite his youth has an A level in Islamic Studies. Tohur is undertaking Quranic studies well beyond the norm for Muslims called Quranic tafsir studies. Tohur is a Muslim role model.

As a devout Muslim Tohur is not allowed to have sex outside marriage.

The story is a clear allegation of a sin that Tohur has not committed as well as a crime that Tohur has not committed.

The story is extremely damaging to Tohur.

Tohur's lucrative contract with the supermarket has been abruptly cancelled. On top of this Tohur has lost his opportunity to try out for the England judo team.

The solicitor is asking for apologies and for eight million pounds compensation to reflect the economic and reputational damage to Tohur.

Charlotte is a Mormon. Given that Charlotte is a saintly singer the damages to Charlotte's income and reputation are enormous.

Again there is an allegation of sin.

The solicitor is asking for apologies and eight million pounds damages.

Given that both children are under sixteen, then even had the allegations been true the children have a right to privacy under Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

There cannot be any justification for interfering with their privacy in this case because the allegations are utterly untrue.

The kids are really cheered up by the solicitor. The solicitor said that the only issue is how much the damages will be.

The solicitor is asking for the apology to be as prominent as the original article. The solicitor has drafted an apology to go on page one that begins with the headline "The Sunday Scandal are child abusers".

The newspaper won't print that, but it is part of the solicitor's negotiating position.

The solicitor said that he will settle for a huge number of apologies published in every Mormon publication in the world, many UK Muslim and judo publications, and several times as advertisements on TV before Tohur's cookery programme.

The payments will probably be of half a million pounds damages each. Libel damages are not subject to income tax, unlike earnings.

If Tohur's TV cookery programme is not restored then Tohur's damages will be even larger. So the kids are just waiting to see what happens.

The solicitor has told them not to speak about anything to anyone.

Mr Driburg rang me. I filled him in on where we are.

Mr Driburg said that he will not charge his commission on the libel damages because they are similar in kind to personal injury damages.

Like me Mr Driburg is utterly furious with the journalist and with the newspaper.

Malc Dow and Phil Thee from Dower Productions who came to the family concert were bowled over by the quality of our kids.

What also hit them was the way that none of our children are bothered whether Dower Productions takes them or not. The whole session was fun and entirely relaxed.

If Robert Graham were not already a TV chef Robert would be hired because of his personality and his musical skills. However, Robert would be too expensive.

Dower Productions say that they love the teenagers, Linda, Abdullah, and Rebecca, but Rebecca, Abdullah and Linda are just too old for this programme.

Dan Wilbey wowed the TV guys. Kali Daar and Sally Johnson were incredibly good.

Max is a stand out because of his good looks and his versatility and with Max so obviously being a brother to Dan.

Colin, Derek, Peter and Gerald also impressed hugely but they missed the cut.

There are other children whom Dower Productions like, but they are mostly in the South of England. It is just so convenient to have a gang of kids who are all together in one locality.

So now the TV company will write scripts based on the skills of the children.

They want Dan to learn drums. They will pay for a drum kit and for lessons to begin immediately.

Sally is to be lead singer.

I first have to think out whether I think this a good idea.

Mary Pickles is social worker for Sally.

Kali's social worker is Nancy from Doncaster.

Max and Dan are not in care and so do not have social workers. I understand that filming will not start until after Christmas.

I have told the TV company to avoid the 28th of December because it clashes with our annual reunion.

Mr Driburg needs to sign up Sally and Kali as clients and then Mr Driburg will negotiate fees.

I will discuss with Emma and Max about Max.

I will speak to the Wilbeys.

Mark's lass Karen Byram seems to be a fine girl. Karen came to Mark's ordination so Karen knows what she is getting into.

Georgina Arron is utterly gorgeous and she is such a lovely girl. Ali is a strict Muslim so presumably they are not shagging yet. At that age I would not have had Ali's restraint. Or at Mark's age Mark's restraint.

Mark has told me about recent developments. I really want to see Mary Pickles' face when she learns that Mark will be an apprentice on around £200,000 a year.

Really it is all credit to Mark.

Yes there is luck involved, but it is Mark's personal qualities that have made it possible.

If Mark marries the boss's daughter, that should be good for him. This deal is independent of any possible marriage.

David Wilkins came to see me.

Mark is involved with Karen Byram and has started working for Byrams Bearings.

David has quite understandably checked out Byrams Bearings.

David just does not believe what he has found.

David wanted a second opinion.

I said to David that some of what David saw from the accounts could make sense.

The Managing Director, Cecil Byram, draws a salary that has to be disclosed because he is a Director.

For somebody managing a factory employing three hundred people Mr Byram's salary is not exciting. If by now Mr Byram has cleared his mortgage, as is likely, then Mr Byram's income is more than adequate for most people.

If Mr Byram were to take the dividends his company earns, he would pay the highest rate of income tax on it. So Mr Byram waives his dividends on the shares that he owns in the UK.

Under the rules for British taxation for private companies, Byrams profits are taxed whether the profits are distributed or not. So the answer is to not make much profit.

Given that any sensible company makes profit, Mr Byram has to find ways to reduce the declared profit.

The increase in each year in inventory is significant. If those increases had not taken place, then the company's declared profit each year would have been significantly higher.

The company's tax bill would have been higher.

By putting the profit into increasing the inventory Mr Byram has reduced the declared profit and has reduced the tax "take".

Mr Byram has avoided tax and Mr Byram has increased the company's assets.

Mr Byram has a company with inventory equivalent to more than two years' turnover. No public company that David has seen has such a high inventory.

Does Mr Byram just have an aversion to income tax or is there a cunning plan?

What is the cunning plan?

That was as far as I could help David's analysis.

I was surprised that the company is increasing debt rather than reducing it.

I told David I suspect that there must be some kind of tax avoidance scheme involved because otherwise it would make sense to reduce debt rather than to increase it.

CHAPTER 19: Mark Johnson

I thought that Karen would be pleased by the deal I reached with her father.

It took me a while to understand what is upsetting Karen.

Karen basically thinks that she owns her father, because Cecil has been the rock of her household all her life. I am Karen's man, so Karen owns me.

Yet Cecil and I have cut a deal towards which Karen has had no input.

Nobody consulted with Karen about any aspect of the deal.

We told Karen afterwards.

It is not the deal that we reached that has upset Karen. It is that we reached the deal without any input from Karen.

It did not help that I told Karen not to go running to Daddy.

Nor did it help that when Karen did go running to Daddy, Daddy told Karen to keep out.

Irene helped Karen to cry about it, but Irene agreed with Cecil and me about the issue being between us two only.

Usually when Karen stamps her foot and cries Irene gives in. Irene does not give Karen a smack like my mother used to do to us.

So whereas us older Johnsons all knew by the age of four where a tantrum gets you, Karen had to learn the same lesson at sixteen.

Irene did not smack Karen, but Karen got the message.

Cecil actually shouted at Karen when she went to him for a second time. Cecil has not shouted at Karen since she did something naughty at the age of nine, so that was a second shock to Karen.

I pieced all this together over the two weeks after we agreed the deal.

Karen was a bit snippy over the first few days after the deal.

Rebecca is snippy sometimes when she has period pains, so I just thought that Karen had period pains.

I am not at the stage with Karen yet where we can talk about Karen's period pains, so I said nothing.

My failure to react to the message Karen was sending just got Karen crosser!

I have a lot to learn about a relationship with a woman. Karen has a lot to learn about a relationship with a man.

The workers at the factory are incredibly pleased with me. I have improved the quality of life for all of them.

I said somewhere "restaurant quality food at works canteen prices", and that gets fed back to me or to team members virtually every day.

I advertised for a chef.

I also put up a notice in the canteen asking for four canteen staff.

I have had twelve applications from friends and relations of current staff. Rebecca and I

will be interviewing over the next few days.

Karen wanted to know why she is excluded.

I explained that Rebecca has far more catering experience than Karen. That put Karen's nose out of joint.

What also got Karen's nose out of joint was that I reached that decision without consulting her.

I said to Karen that I was hired by her father to do a job. I am doing that job.

I cannot operate as a manager or as a man if I have to go running to Karen every five minutes.

I also said to Karen that outside the works we are equal. In the works I am Karen's line manager.

I love Karen but I have a job to do and Karen's attitude is not helping!

We agreed that Karen will leave the team as soon as I can find a replacement.

That sounds a lot calmer than the actual conversation was!

I am calm and placid and I don't shout. Having dealt with Rebecca for years I am not going to faint just because Karen shouted at me.

Karen had another tantrum at home to the effect that I was firing Karen for insubordination.

Cecil said that the way Karen has been behaving over the last few days Cecil is not surprised!

Karen went wailing off to her bedroom.

A couple of hours later, when nobody had come upstairs with hot milk and cookies, Karen came downstairs.

Karen apologised to her parents. Karen is now right as nine-pence with me,

We have agreed that it is better for our relationship if Karen does not have to take orders from me so I will replace Karen as soon as I can. Probably a replacement for Karen will start on Monday.

I have never been in a relationship before.

I know from living with Rebecca and Charlotte that what a woman raises as an issue is often not what the real issue is.

Karen is capable of taking a straightforward statement from me, embroidering it, and then getting incredibly upset about it. As an example I showed Karen the web site for the Daar sewing collective, because they are my friends. Karen took that as me saying that Karen does not dress well enough!

Don tells me that all women are like that. It is not just Karen and it is not just me.

Karen was the princess of the factory.

I have come in and I have raised morale incredibly.

When folk learned that I am not leaving in February but that I will be around for the foreseeable future, they were all very happy.

In contrast, Karen pushing off to France for six months does not bother anybody.

That must be hurtful.

It has got around the factory that I have fired Karen. Not from me and not from Georgina or Rebecca.

The general reaction is that it takes balls to fire the boss's daughter.

If I continue in management at the factory I will be a real kick-ass manager. But I do deliver the goods!

On Thursday the Sunday Scandal folded. They will apologise in their next edition.

There is a lot of urgent negotiation going on about the wording of apologies, how widespread the apologies will be, and the level of damages.

The Sunday Scandal has begged the TV company and the supermarket to reinstate Tohur.

If they refuse to reinstate Tohur that will increase Tohur's damages hugely.

In the meantime the TV company and the supermarket have hired a chef to replace Tohur.

They have contractual liabilities to the new chef.

The English Judo Federation has also been approached. The Federation has not immediately jumped to reinstate Tohur.

The Sunday Scandal has sent emails to every Mormon leader between Bishop Collins and President Henderson grovelling for what they published.

The journalist Jes Holt is in deep doodoo.

The newspaper is blaming Jes Holt, and Jes Holt is blaming the sub-editor and the headline writer.

Mr Driburg is insisting that part of the settlement is that Jes Holt never comes to Meldon again. Mr Driburg also insists that Jes Holt must make a personal apology in the High Court.

Some of the online scandal sheets and some American scandal sheets have repeated the story.

Mr Driburg has organised American lawyers to obtain further damages and apologies.

The session with David Wilkins and Cecil was amazingly interesting. Cecil asked that Karen and I should sit in. There are things Cecil has been waiting to tell Karen, and this is as good a time as any.

Irene was there because it was a discussion of family business. So was Cecil's mother Marjorie.

Cecil started by agreeing with David that what David learned from this meeting would remain confidential. Then Cecil asked David what David had discovered from the published accounts and David's researches.

David explained that if Mark was getting involved with Karen, Mark effectively was becoming involved in Byrams Bearings. So David looked up Byrams Bearings online at Companies House.

David had started off by looking at the most recent set of accounts.

Previously David has only looked at the accounts of public companies. David was amazed by what he found at Byrams Bearings.

The accounts show significant borrowings at a relatively high rate of interest, and stocks roughly equal to two years turnover. The company makes profit. Mr Byram waives the dividend on his shares.

Instead of using the waived dividend and the undistributed profit to reduce debt or to build reserves, the money has been used to increase inventory further.

For each of the last five years the pattern has been similar. As a matter of arithmetic the stock piling process has probably been going on for something like twenty years or more. Instead of reducing the high interest bearing debts the money is being ploughed into building yet more inventory.

The company could have cleared these high interest debts if they had set about debt reduction. The company can clear its debts any time it likes by selling off inventory.

David suspects that the debts and the interest must be a tax avoidance mechanism.

The next question has to be why the company is building inventory to such ridiculous levels.

Don Hewson once told David that when somebody competent and intelligent does something apparently crazy, the answer is usually that the other person knows something that you do not.

Byram's management is competent and intelligent.

The true profits being made by Byrams are in the order of eight million pounds a year, artificially reduced to two million pounds of declared profit. The true profit is about twenty-five thousand pounds per worker which is very good for the components industry and for the engineering industry.

The answer must be that the inventory levels are not ridiculous.

Byrams must have a reason or a plan.

It took David weeks to work out what the plan could be.

In normal times Byrams does not need such a huge inventory.

In abnormal times, if there is disruption to the supply chain, Byrams could continue to produce components. Maybe three months stocks or even six months stocks could be justified on this basis. But why accumulate so much more than is needed?

David thought a bit more.

If there were to be a sustained disruption to supplies, commodity prices would go through the roof. This creates two opportunities.

One is that Byrams could sell off some of its inventory for shed-loads of money. If metal prices were say to triple, then the profits from selling the stockpiles would be immense.

The second opportunity is that a number of competitors would be unable to produce goods because they have no raw materials left, and they cannot buy any. Their customers will be desperate for components, which Byrams could supply at significant profit if Byrams has the manufacturing capacity as well as the stocks of metal..

The competitors will still have debt to service and other expenses so they will go bust or they could be bought for virtually nothing. Premises and production machinery can be acquired at fire-sale prices.

There will be thousands of skilled workers desperate for jobs.

What puzzles David is how Byrams would manage a possible huge expansion?

Byrams presumably will hire some of the management from the firms that went bust.

How do you identify which are the best people to hire when you are in a rush? Even if you can locate and employ experienced managers there will still be significant management problems in scaling up maybe fourfold in a month.

Byrams must have a plan or strategy for this, but the problem has defeated David.

Cecil congratulated David. David's analysis is spot on. The true genius was Cecil's grandfather who started stockpiling in the early 1960s.

His thinking was much like David's.

The stockpiles have largely been accumulated by reinvesting profit before financial year end. Tax rates in the 1960s were very high, so the profits reinvested would otherwise have been taxed at 70% or more.

"The company accounts reflect only the historic cost of the purchases.

"In the 1990s for example metal prices were only a third of what they are today. The accounts have never been revised to reflect the increase in the value of the metals.

"The truth is that Byrams now has more than five years' supply of metals in our stockpiles.

"You are right David that the loan interest is a tax avoidance ploy.

"The Byram family has offshore family trusts that have accumulated a lot of money over the last fifty years. All of this money is loaned out on the financial markets on extremely

short term loans, none longer than a week. That is the war chest for the first purchases."

"Buying competitors as going concerns is potentially dangerous because one does not know about undisclosed liabilities, loss-making contracts, or underprovided for liabilities like pensions.

"Simply buying the plant and machinery from the liquidator is cleaner.

"However, as David pointed out, one then needs managers and staff who can bring the machinery into operation as soon as possible.

"Although there are tens of thousands of companies making components, Byrams is simply not interested in buying a small business employing say twenty people on an industrial estate. That is more trouble than it is worth.

"Byrams is looking at businesses that currently employ at least one hundred people.

"Byrams is not looking at any plants currently owned by a public company or by a multinational. Those are very unlikely to be put on sale in the first three months of a crisis.

"Reduce further then to the hundred biggest independent competitors whose carcasses Byrams might consider buying.

"They have been researched a bit.

"Their annual accounts have been analysed.

"Of those one hundred biggest independent competitors there are sixty competitors that always have less than two weeks stock of raw materials at financial year end.

"Of those sixty competitors, fifty have less than two weeks cash at the bank for operating expenses at year end. All fifty have loans or overdrafts.

"The banks always pull loans and overdraft facilities at the first whiff of trouble, so those fifty companies are virtually certain to crash in a crisis."

"Remember, we are not buying the businesses, just the premises and plant.

"Some of the companies do not own their premises. We might be interested in their machinery, but buying their machinery is not going to be a priority for at least six months.

"We are not interested in their staff, in the short term at least.

"Any company of a hundred plus employees has maybe four really key people. These are the Production or Operations Manager, the Finance Officer, the Chief Executive, and generally one other. Anyone in the plant can tell you who that person is.

"We are only interested in the Production or Operations Managers. We are not interested in the other three key people.

"If any of the Production Managers have a significant financial interest in the plant, then Byrams will not employ them afterwards.

"So we are looking at a pool of nearly 50 current Production Managers to tap as

Production Manager for the plant where they used to work.

"Whoever is tapped will be told that they should employ half the numbers they used to have, and these people must be available to work immediately.

"If you take a factory that was operating normally on Thursday, and you can start again a week later with half the staff, the new Production Manager will hire only the proven competent people. The dead-legs and the trouble makers will simply not be hired.

"I employ a firm of Due Diligence investigators. I agreed a special price for the job. They investigated those 50 people. Ten of them have drink problems, criminal convictions, or they are notorious bullies to their staff.

Another ten are over sixty or they have significant health or relationship issues. It is very likely that they would not be up to managing in an even more stressful situation. Or they may well have retired before the crisis hits."

"That leaves 30 people who might be suitable."

"Every year my Due Diligence investigators re-investigate these people to make sure that they have not developed problems.

"The computer systems we have here at Byrams are not perfect, but they will be replicated across the group. That way the systems are compatible and all the information provided is consistent.

"I agree that I do not have people at Byrams today who are capable of taking on Group Sales Manager, Group Financial Officer, Group HR and so forth.

"On the other hand, how hard is it to be Group Sales Manager when you are the only components manufacturer in the country who has goods to sell?"

"How hard is it to be Group Finance Officer when you are awash with cash?"

"So my existing people will step up to Group Officers. Quite soon there will be experienced Group Officers literally begging for jobs.

"Now, David, I agree I could sell some raw materials at very high prices. That would liquidate our debts nicely.

"The companies who need components will be desperate for components. Instead of gouging them I will offer them components at reasonable prices but tied to long-term contracts.

"I will choose only customers who I believe will be around a long time. Well run companies.

"I can supply those components from my new factories and their reduced workforces. We will have spare machines at every factory so when necessary the managers may take on extra staff to man those machines.

"I have financial reserves for the odd hiccup. There will be hiccups.

"I have the stocks of raw materials for my factories. If I sell enough or I use some raw materials at high prices then the remaining raw materials will have cost me nothing.

"It will give confidence to customers that they know I keep enough raw materials to meet any potential crisis. It means that even when the long-term contracts expire they will still put significant business our way. Because they know that we can be relied on to deliver.

"Byrams at this point will have absolutely no debt, a huge stock of raw materials, and a number of factories supplying mainly long-term customers on long-term contracts. The company will be profitable and fairly sweet to manage.

"About five years later I float the company on the Stock Exchange or I put it up for sale to big investors like your hero Warren Buffet.

"When Byrams go public the offshore family trusts will sell their shares and they will pay no tax on their capital gains. I will sell my shares, or most of them, and I will reinvest in sound companies.

"In two years time or twenty years time, whenever the crisis occurs, I have no idea what Karen's wishes will be.

"You will be twenty-two at least Karen before Byrams Bearings becomes a public company. You might be thirty-two or forty-two.

"As I begin the sale process I will consult with you. You might be running Byrams by then, anyway."

"Wow" said David.

"I am so impressed by you Mr Byram, and your grandfather.

"What vision!

"You have so much tenacity to stick to a strategy for decades.

"Thank you so much for this discussion.

"I will keep this confidential. And I am so grateful. to you.

"Do you have a target for the number of acquisitions or the number of people or the combined turnovers?"

"I do not have a target that I will live or die by. I am thinking to grow eightfold in capacity in two months, but at half staffs that will be only fourfold in numbers. That would be another twelve hundred or thirteen hundred people. Hopefully we will have enough extra business to justify a fairly rapid increase in staff beyond that according to the needs of each factory.

"After my experiences here catering will be contracted out to one or two of the large chains.

"I am undecided about transport. My initial thought is to carry on using carriers rather than to invest in a transport fleet.

"I don't intend to purchase vehicles if I can avoid it."

Karen was shocked to learn of Cecil's plans. Karen has never before heard any suggestion of selling Byram's.

Nor has Karen ever thought about the stockpiles.

Karen is thinking about what she has learned.

Karen was happy to give way to Maria in the canteen. Karen and I are working on building our relationship.

Karen is not in the factory much.

Karen is flying a lot. She wishes to pass her flying test before she goes to France.

We see each other at least four times a week.

We dance on Tuesday night. Karen comes out with the Hewsons on Friday nights. On Saturdays I visit the Byrams, and on Sunday evening Karen visits the Hewsons. Cecil or Irene drop her with us and one of us takes Karen home.

I go for the ride.

When I changed suppliers for the canteen in a hurry I used the same companies that supply the Tryton Hotel. I chose them because their quality is reliable, and for no other reason.

It is traditional in the catering industry to give "little presents" as a "thank you" for the business given over the past year. The presents are delivered to one's home address.

The suppliers must have obtained my home address from the Tryton Hotel.

Don accepted the deliveries because I was at work.

Byrams Bearings works canteen buys about five times more food than the Tryton Hotel.

My first unexpected gift was a crate of whisky from the company who supply the vegetables. They also delivered a twenty pound frozen turkey.

The meat guys delivered a side of beef and another crate of whisky.

What does a Mormon do with two crates of whisky?

Our house operates as a halal house, so the side of beef and the turkey were no good to us either.

There was a long time when we Johnsons could not afford a turkey for Christmas. Every year we nagged our mother or Rebecca for a Christmas turkey. Every year, whoever we were nagging burst into tears and said that we could not afford a turkey. So a Christmas turkey has huge emotional resonances for us Johnsons.

I gave the frozen turkey to Bob and I asked Bob to make sure that it went where it was needed. I did not wish to know where it landed.

I have mentioned a struggling construction worker. At Church the following Sunday his wife

came up to me and she gave me a kiss and a huge hug. I assume that is where the turkey landed.

I took the side of beef to work and I butchered it. We sold one thousand raffle tickets at one pound each. There were twenty-four bottles of whisky and twenty pieces of meat in the draw on the Friday before Christmas.

One of the capstan lathe operators has the cutest little granddaughter triplets one could imagine. They came in to draw the prizes. Grandad read out the winning numbers. The children took away a huge box of really nice chocolates for their help.

When the draw had finished the capstan lathe operator asked for Rebecca Johnson to step forward.

Rebecca and I were surprised.

"Rebecca, you have only been with us a couple of months.

"In that time you and Mark have gained the respect of all of us."

There was applause.

"Any religion that can turn out people like you and Mark must have something going for it.

"We understand you are going off to be a missionary!

"We have had a collection for you. This money is to help with your missionary expenses.

"Enjoy your time as a missionary."

This was totally unexpected. Rebecca was in tears as she thanked everybody.

We sent our raffle cheque to the Save The Children Fund.

Mormons do not believe in gambling. Bishop Collins confirmed that organising a raffle among non-Mormons to raise money for charity is acceptable.

CHAPTER 20: Elizabeth Mountford

Social work training does not equip you to deal with some of the questions that the Hewson household throws up.

As Charlotte and Tohur are both in care the local authority had to ratify the libel settlement reached.

The Council Chief Solicitor says that he has no relevant experience. The solicitors the children are using are national experts in libel, so the Chief Solicitor says to go along with them.

The supermarket decided to reinstate Tohur's cookery program. I think they have negotiated a raft of cheap or free advertising from the Sunday Scandal newspaper group. Tohur's programs were already recorded so they will start again soon.

The judo federation has not called Tohur for trials. Tohur is upset about that.

Tohur says that this season and next season Tohur will be the most feared teenager in competitive judo because he has a point to prove.

That makes me shudder.

Jane is going to remind Tohur that his opponents are innocent people whom Tohur should not hurt because he is cross. Breaking somebody's back is really not a good idea.

There are to be apologies published in Islamic and judo magazines and on air before Tohur's programme for a few weeks.

Tohur's damages are an amazing half million pounds. Amazing to me, anyway.

Charlotte also has half a million pounds in damages, and apologies published in every Mormon magazine in the world, and on You Tube. Charlotte has satisfaction from this cash injection towards Mormon organisations.

The Sunday Scandal is to publish a grovelling apology for three weeks running. The Sunday Scandal will not mention Charlotte or Tohur again while they are children.

The journalist Jes Holt has given another court undertaking, this time never to come to Meldon and never to write about Charlotte or Tohur again.

She had to apologise in person in the High Court.

Charlotte and Tohur went down to London to see her apologise.

There is already a system of trustees in operation for Charlotte and Tohur. The trustees are keeping a tight hold on the money.

Charlotte insisted on tithing from her damages.

Don said that he would sit on the money for a month. If Charlotte does not change her mind then Don will pay the tithe.

Mr Driburg has arranged for Charlotte and Tohur to appear on TV chat shows to talk about their experiences of the last few weeks. Mr Driburg also advised them what to say and what not to say.

If asked, they are to say "I have been advised by my solicitor not to say what I think about the Sunday Scandal."

About the journalist, "No comment."

About the judo federation Tohur is to say

"It is very important for every sport that all the athletes who represent England or Great Britain are of good character. I fully understand and I fully support their original decision to withdraw my opportunity to try out for the England team.

"Now that the truth is known I hope to have another opportunity."

Then there are the Hewson media issues. The TV production company project has changed because the Hewsons have so many talented children. There are now two child

bands supposedly in competition. One is Derek and Colin Donkin, Peter Hewson, and Gerald Butler. They are a boy band. The other band is Max Hewson, Daniel Wilbey, Kali Daar and Sally Johnson. Other children like Linda Donkin may come in as siblings of some of the children, but not in every episode.

Instead of setting up a raft of trust funds Don is setting up one trust fund to cover all the actors. Doncaster and Meldon Councils each supply a trustee.

Mummy Donkin, Deborah, is doing very well in hospital. She no longer has a home. Do I find single person accommodation for her or do I find accommodation where the children may visit her and eventually may stay over? She can't go from hospital in-patient one day to caring for five children the next.

Realistically, how long will the process take?

I am not concerned about Ali Miah's girlfriend. Ali is eighteen and he is a sensible lad.

Mark's girlfriend Karen and Mark have their rows.

I think that Karen is a spoiled young madam, so she is having a challenge to adjust to a strong minded lad like Mark.

Mark put up with Rebecca in her desperate days so Mark has a yardstick by which to gauge Karen's tantrums. I hope that they can grow together.

I was utterly stunned by the deal that Mark has negotiated with Karen's father. Karen's father must think as highly of Mark as I do.

David Wilkins has joined a youth theatre company. He seems to be enjoying it.

Don and Emma have both said that they wish to stop taking new foster children. They say that Don will be about eighty before the last child is properly launched, so it is time to stop taking new children, especially young children.

Emma will produce a child in May that Emma says will be their last child.

The planning permission has come through for the gym beside the garage.

Robert does not need the gym yet. Work will begin in March and it should be completed in April.

If Don Hewson can make the lame walk then Don truly is a Saint.

My new area manager who joined us from being on long-term sick leave has gone sick again. So I am back to my role as Acting Area Manager.

There is a lot of pressure from the area team for me to apply for the permanent position.

Don Hewson is organising Christmas again. He is ordering presents on the Internet.

Nothing seems to faze him.

"Elizabeth.

"I take in kids. I do my best with them. The kids respond.

"I have such rewards and such happiness and I get paid for it."

"When Sal died I thought my world had ended."

"I am happier now than I have ever been in my life."

CHAPTER 21: Don Hewson

I enjoy sex. So does my wife. We have fifty-one children living.

We have three natural children and another on the way. Our first child Max I suppose must be described as our unnatural child.

Emma and I met through Max, so we owe our happiness to Max. We adopted Max while Emma was pregnant with our first natural child, Alice.

The forty-seven other children are children whom we have fostered or whom we currently foster. I am pretty sure that the number is forty-seven. I don't count Alan Wilkins because he died after a car accident. I loved Alan.

I do not go out shopping for foster children. I do not select the children. At irregular intervals the social workers open a tin of kids and the social workers decant the tin onto my plate. Then I have to deal with the skinny waifs. The children are usually skinny. They are usually unhappy when I first meet them.

The social workers are often responding to emergencies. That is how I was assigned the the Miah family, the Daars, the Famous Four, the Sachs, and the Grahams, In these situations all the information I have before the children arrive is their names, genders, ages, and religion if they have one. I am also told how the emergency has arisen.

The Famous Four were an exception because they were already on a sleepover with us when their mothers' taxi was in a traffic accident.

Sometimes the social workers are responding to difficult situations that are not emergencies. Examples are the Wilkins, the Johnsons, the Donkins, and the second placement of Ali and Tohur Miah.

The social workers often have trouble finding appropriate accommodation for the children affected by these difficulties. The social workers negotiate with me, and they negotiate with the children, too.

Meldon Council tries very hard to keep families together. It is bad being parted from your parent or parents. It is even more terrible if you are then parted from your siblings.

The larger the family group, the harder it is to find accommodation where the children can all be together. I have a ten bedroom house, so it is often possible to land a relatively large group of children on me.

Sorry, I should say it is possible to place a large group of children with me.

Meldon Council tries not to move children at all because every move and change adds to the distress of the child. A child often reacts to its unhappiness by behaving badly. The more distressed a child is, the more difficult a placement becomes. There are horror stories of children who have had over a hundred placements and they are still in care! You can imagine the state those poor kids are in.

So if Meldon Council places children with me, the children are only moved again if the move is clearly in the interests of the children.

I have huge respect for a foster carer who takes one badly damaged child and who works with the child towards a normal life. It can take years and years before a damaged child really trusts you. Only then can you be confident that this child might have a chance at a decent life. That foster carer deserves a medal.

I have been given bruised children and difficult children, but no really badly damaged children. I can't take really badly damaged children because our natural children are too vulnerable.

I love helping the foster children to grow and to develop. I work to build their self confidence and their skills base. I have been described as "relentless" in praising children for their successes and achievements however minor.

I make sure the children are well dressed and well groomed and that they look as good as possible. Then I tell them they look good. Day in, day out, for years on end, I tell each child at least daily that she or he looks beautiful or handsome or good.

It becomes true.

I give each child unconditional love and plenty of it.

I play with and I read to the younger children. I hug a lot. I kiss the smaller children until they want me to stop.

I encourage all the older children to hug and to kiss their siblings.

Derek Donkin told me that he had never had a present bought for him other than at birthdays and Christmas so I now give "no reason" presents.

I try to give the children all the advantages that middle class children take for granted. I give them activities like music, ballroom dancing, judo, camping, and foreign holidays. For different children I have funded sailing, rock climbing, sewing, wood carving, golf, religious camps, a religious conference, boxing, weights training, unarmed combat, first aid, horse riding, driving, and flying.

I will support any activity the children wish to engage in.

I fund subject tutors for the older children.

Every older teenage girl at some point has a makeover weekend with a friend of her

choice.

All the children will learn to drive a car.

For middle class children these opportunities are a matter of course. In Army parlance these opportunities "come up with the rations". For my own Hewson children these opportunities are just there.

My perception of foster care is that I should bring up the foster children as best as I am able. Fostering is not just a hotel and bum wiping operation.

I suppose I am a social engineer. Or a perhaps I am a class warrior.

My approach may seem astonishingly expensive. If I were an ordinary person fostering one or two foster children I could not afford to be so generous.

I have no mortgage or debt.

I have tremendous economies of scale from fostering so many children. Even after expenses I earn a good living from fostering.

I could be described as a people farmer, but that is usually a pejorative expression. I prefer to say that I have an immense capacity for love.

I believe that engineers and chefs and artists and musicians are more necessary to our society than lawyers or accountants. We have enough construction toys to keep half a dozen children active at once. We have art materials. I encourage the children in these directions.

As a student I worked part time in the kitchen of a four star hotel. I am a good cook, and I teach the children to turn out excellent food. I regard good cooking as a life skill and a potential employment option. I see music as a life pleasure.

I am not religious.

My experiences as a soldier in Northern Ireland have made me pretty disgusted with clergy. The Bible says "Thou Shalt Not Kill". Clergy often conducted the funeral of a killer without saying bluntly that the man was a killer.

I have no time for clergy. I understand that a clergyman might be under pressure from his congregation, but part of the job of a clergyman is to proclaim the word of God whether it is popular or not.

There probably were good clergy in Northern Ireland but certainly there were bad ones.

I am a killer myself.

I would like whoever conducts my funeral ceremony to point out that there has not been a day since the incident that I have not thought about the deaths of that day including the deaths for which I am responsible. I do not regret my actions but I do not glory in them either.

I don't agree with the Catholics on abortion but I respect that they are clear on what their view is, and that they don't waver. It gets pretty farcical when the Catholics are against contraception but tens of millions of Catholics use contraception.

I suppose the Catholics would answer that people have been committing adultery for centuries but still the Church is right to preach against it.

If you think that marriage is for the procreation of children then at first sight contraception is a bad thing. I think that the possibility of bringing children into the world only when you know you can support them is better for the children. It isn't my religion and it isn't my problem.

I take Muslim children because I am given Muslim children. I cannot think of any religious group I would refuse. As children, anyway.

There are some pretty nutty religions out there. I have never had any interest in making an extensive survey of nutty religions.

There is no mosque or madressa anywhere near us so I have an imam come to us twice a week for the Muslim children. We use halal meat whenever we have resident Muslim children.

When we do not have resident Muslim children I always have some halal meat in the freezer for visiting Muslim children.

I have Mormon children. The religion's full name is The Church of Christ of Latter Day Saints. They follow the Book of Mormon, so they often call themselves "Mormons".

Mormon adults visit our house at least once a week to monitor the Mormon children.

I encourage the children to bring friends home. It is natural that my Mormon children tend to have Mormon friends.

We have Mormon missionaries to dinner about once a fortnight. They just love the huge family and the excellent food.

I have Ruth Lightfoot during the week for cleaning and laundry. Ruth is a Mormon so Ruth gives support to the Mormon children. Ruth helps me with all the children.

I currently have another Mormon, Isobel Harris, to help on Saturdays. Isobel replaced Daisy Peters who left us to go to Salt Lake City for training. Isobel or Rebecca Johnson will help me if I have to be in two places at once in the same evening.

Rebecca Johnson walks the Johnsons to Church on Sunday mornings.

The Johnson children have their own in-house religious meeting once a week. They spend Sundays at their Church. Charlotte Johnson goes to religious study classes every Saturday morning. There is also a Mormon youth club that Charlotte often attends. Mark or Tohur or Rebecca usually escort Charlotte if Charlotte leaves the house.

It is not because Charlotte cannot be trusted. I am paranoid about protecting all my girls all the time.

Charlotte has had some publicity because of the hymn she wrote and sang. Charlotte has had stalkers. So far the stalkers have been intercepted by my boys. The stalkers have agreed to go away and to stay away.

Charlotte is a target though and I worry about her.

There was a Mormon woman called Alison who gave specific support to the oldest Mormon child, Rebecca Johnson. Alison has gone off on missionary service. By then Rebecca was thought not still to be in need of special support so Alison was not replaced. Mark Johnson has now been ordained as a Mormon priest. Mark sometimes has to go out of the house on Church business.

Bob told me recently that because everything is fine in my household Bob and Geoff will be reducing their input significantly. The Church has other uses for their time.

We have frequent "no reason" parties and barbecues where the children are encouraged to bring friends. I really do want to know the children my children are running with.

Both Muslims and Mormons abhor alcohol, so we can't cook coq au vin. I don't find that a significant problem.

Christmas is a bit tame without rum butter or brandy butter or sherry trifle or Christmas puddings made from fruit steeped in alcohol but we have a good time anyway. Mince pies made without lard are not quite right, but the children and I still eat them.

I have fostered Jewish children, but I was not hugely successful with them. They are now placed with a Jewish family which is much better for them.

When Robert Graham was preparing his series of TV segments for the autumn Robert went to the Wilkins' house to practice making traditional mince pies, sherry trifle and the like. The Wilkins were happy to eat them.

I have sherry and whisky and wine in but I don't drink that often.

I used to drink sherry with my in-laws but they are now fostering the Daar family in Doncaster and they do not visit very often. Sometimes I share a bottle of wine with my wife Emma after the children have gone to bed.

The children are usually in their bedrooms by ten so that Emma and I may sit together quietly at the end of each day. That keeps us sane and it preserves our relationship.

Many of my children are agnostic. It might be more accurate to say they have no religion, as agnostic is a religious position.

Meldon Council no longer pays me for Ali Miah who is away at Cambridge University, but we keep a bed here for him. Our house is Ali's only home.

Nor am I paid for Rebecca Johnson, who is just about to turn nineteen and then go off to become a Mormon missionary. Our house is Rebecca's only home. We will keep a bed for Rebecca.

It is hugely important to a youngster to know that they have a home, even if they do not live at home.

A trust fund set up by my stepchildren and their spouses provides financial help for any person whom I no longer foster. Middle class kids expect to turn to the Bank of Mum and Dad. My foster children expect to turn to the Sal Hewson Memorial Fund.

Sal Hewson was my first wife.

I foster children. That's what I do.

The vocabulary these days is that one is supposedly a "foster carer" rather than a foster father.

One of my failings is that I am too possessive of "my" children and I can't "let go".

Guilty!

The kids feel far more secure as "Don Hewson's kids" rather than as "nobody's kids".

The children's happiness is what matters to me. It is amazing how often the children's happiness accords with what I wish to do anyway.

So many working class children do not believe in themselves.

Just one adult who believes in a child can make a huge difference to how that child turns out. For a foster child, that an adult wholeheartedly believes in them can be life changing.

My children are sometimes naughty.

I chide them or growl or sometimes I even shout. Once in a blue moon do I actually punish a child.

Punishments are extra kitchen shifts or early bedtimes for a week.

Very bad behaviour like starting a fight might mean that an older child loses his or her double bed and has to sleep in a single bed for a week. The message usually sinks in.

I caught Linda Donkin sampling my cream sherry the other week. Linda has a troubled background and really Linda has been incredibly good while she has been with me.

I said to Linda that if she had asked to sample the sherry I would have agreed. Drinking my sherry without my permission is bad manners.

"So what do you do if you have displayed bad manners?"

Linda thought.

"Apologise?"

"Go on then."

"I am sorry Don for drinking your sherry without permission."

"OK Linda. Ask next time."

"Now, a disciplinary hug. You hug me."

Linda came to me and we had a good hug.

Then we had a glass of sherry together and another hug.

What am I trying to achieve? Do I want to set up a cycle of bad behaviour and punishment, or do I accept a minor transgression and try to resolve it in a positive manner?

Linda already has a caution for shoplifting cosmetics from a major chain store. That was two and a half years ago and so much has happened in Linda's life since then. Linda has a part time job, and Linda really is growing up.

Compared with what I was doing at the same age Linda is an angel. So why make a big issue of a child's minor transgression?

Since you ask, at fifteen years old I was fighting, shagging, drinking, truanting, stealing, and committing criminal damage.

I was never a good child. Nor was I a nice teenager.

It was a bit of a toss-up whether my first boarding experience would be with the Army or at a juvenile detention centre. The Army got me before the police did.

Fortunately the children do not know about my youthful depravity.

When counting my children I did not count Nigel Williams and Grace Adams who have spent a lot of the last few years visiting here and who are part of the family.

I did not count my two adult step-children from my late first wife Sal or the nine grandchildren.

I expect there are other folk I have not counted. Dan Wilbey, for example. Dan is Max's half-brother.

I have never fostered Dan, but Dan is often here. Dan is family now. Dan's father Stephen Wilbey is Max's biological father.

Max is Stephen's family, too. I pretend I don't know.

I agree my attitude is unreasonable and rather sad. I have never claimed to be a perfect human being.

I was at first very upset by the Stephen situation. I was afraid that Stephen was a threat to my relationship with Max. I am now not afraid of that.

Max is happier for knowing Stephen and his half siblings. I am still not happy but I am too grown up to take it out on little Dan.

Dan is a very nice child. Dan is physically a smaller edition of Max. They are so obviously brothers. They are both very good looking, and they both strongly resemble Stephen Wilbey.

The local authority reserves my house for large families because there are so few foster carers who can take large families. The advantage for me is that five children in one family unit are so much easier to manage than four or five unconnected children.

I take huge pride in the successes of "my" children.

Helen Wilkins is now nearly a teacher and she is doing well. I gather that there is a boyfriend but Helen has not shown him to anyone yet. Helen will introduce him when she is ready.

Ali Miah has gained an Engineering scholarship from an airline. Ali has free flying lessons from the airline and more free flying from the RAF University Air Squadron. Ali is as happy as can be.

Helen and Ali are two happy and successful adults.

In January Rebecca Johnson is going to be a missionary for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Rebecca will serve eighteen months.

Apparently the Mormon missionaries move on every six months, so Rebecca will serve in three different appalling Scottish pit villages. Most of the pits have closed, and the villages have no other reason to exist. I suppose Godforsaken economically disadvantaged villages might be fruitful territory for Rebecca's evangelical religion.

Rebecca has no idea what she will do in life, but that does not worry me. Rebecca is one of the most determined and forceful people I have ever met.

Either I or the Sal Hewson Memorial Fund will support Rebecca in anything she wishes to do. So when Rebecca returns she will tell me what she wants to do and I will support her.

Rebecca is really confident and happy going into her missionary adventure. Rebecca knows it will not be easy, but the way of The Lord has never been easy. Rebecca does not count herself as an adult yet, not until she has completed her missionary service.

Mark Johnson has fallen into a good situation where he is managing a works canteen despite being only sixteen and a half. In February Mark will start an apprenticeship as a fitter with the same company.

Mark is in a relationship with the boss's daughter. They got together before Mark knew anything about Karen's family and its factory.

We had to adjust our arrangements after Mark started working.

As Mark is earning extremely good money it is right that Mark should pay board. Mark had agreed terms with a landlady in Luton when he thought he would be serving an apprenticeship in Luton. So Mark pays me what he would have paid the landlady in Luton.

Mark's board is deducted from my foster care payments.

It makes little financial difference to me but I feel huge pride that Mark is so successfully

making the transition to becoming an adult.

I no longer give Mark a clothing allowance or pocket money, so there is a slight saving for me.

Andria Wilkins at one time just wanted to leave school as soon as she could. Now Andria is studying for A levels and she intends to become a nurse. I am so pleased for her.

Andria's child Angela is lovely, and so much like her mother.

Some of the high school children have done very well financially.

There is an adage that luck is where preparation meets opportunity and recognises it. I helped to provide the preparation. The children had luck and the children have helped each other. Apart from Dennis Wilkins and Mark Johnson none of the children have been successful without any help from the others.

It doesn't come without tears.

Charlotte Johnson and Tohur Miah have just had a terrible experience with a Sunday newspaper.

David and Dennis Wilkins were stalked by the same journalist for a while until the family media agent Mr Driburg obtained an injunction against her.

Mr Driburg arranged some television interviews after the libel settlement. Tohur and Charlotte were terrific.

Tohur is a TV chef but Tohur had never been interviewed before. Charlotte has no TV experience. Mr Driburg gave them some interview training before they went to their first TV interview.

Tohur and Charlotte came over as two lovely sweet young kids, which they are.

Tohur said that he and Charlotte are both orphans. They live in the same house with foster carers. Their relationship is as brother and sister. Charlotte is a really lovely sister.

Charlotte said that Tohur is like an elder brother.

One of the interviewers made the mistake of saying that the libel settlement must be a pleasant bonus to their finances.

Charlotte fixed her with a glare.

"How would you like it - if every person who has ever enjoyed your religious singing - is told that you are a fornicator?"

"There are still people out there who think I have had sex when I haven't!"

Then, by now shouting,

"Tohur wanted to fight judo for England.

"That opportunity has been snatched from Tohur because of the Sunday Scandal lies.

"Tohur has still lost out because of the Sunday Scandal!"

"Tohur is very upset about that!"

Silence. The interviewer I think was surprised to have evoked such a strong response.

Then Charlotte said quietly,

"In my religion – we recognise Hell."

The interviewer could not see where this was going.

"I think adults - who tell lies about orphan children - just to sell newspapers - should - fry in Hell!"

The studio audience applauded. Some actually stood!

"In my religion - we are supposed to forgive those who have trespassed against us."

Silence.

"I will eventually forgive the Sunday Scandal for what they did to me.

"But I will be a very old woman before I forgive the Sunday Scandal for what they did to Tohur!"

More studio applause.

One shocked interviewer.

A Deputy Editor of the Sunday Scandal contacted Charlotte's agent Mr Driburg to complain about Charlotte's interview.

Mr Driburg told the Deputy Editor that if the Sunday Scandal cannot take "fair comment" on their lies then the Sunday Scandal should not publish lies.

Mr Driburg then told the Deputy Editor,

"I also hope that you fry in Hell!"

Well said!

The Sunday Scandal has already agreed not to mention Charlotte or Tohur while they are children.

I hope that the Sunday Scandal has enough sense to leave them alone when they are adults.

Our lawyer has told the Sunday Scandal that if they libel either Tohur or Charlotte a second time he will enjoy taking the Sunday Scandal Group to a full court hearing to ask a jury to award exemplary damages.

Exemplary damages are punishment damages over and above normal damages to show the court's disgust at the behaviour of the Defendant.

The Sunday Scandal has been warned!

I am fiercely ambitious for my children. There is a famous English family called Denning where the four brothers became a bishop, an admiral, a general, and the Lord Chief Justice of England.

I will support my children in whatever they want to do.

They do not need to earn exalted positions. All I want is for the children to have productive and happy lives.

I want "my" children to be happy and successful. I would like them to be relatively virtuous and law-abiding. All most parents want is for their children to have happy and productive lives. I imagine religious parents want their children to follow their religions and to love God.

I never intended to create a media oriented family but that seems to be happening.

The latest enterprise is that a TV production company is interested in a raft of our children for a TV series. The theme seems to be that there will be two bands in competition with each other. In Band Red we have our biggest son Max, Dan Wilbey, Kali Daar and Sally Johnson. In Band Blue we have Gerald Butler from the Famous Four, Peter Wilkins, Derek Donkin and Colin Donkin.

The production company is funding Dan and Derek to learn drumming.

The company has also asked that all the boys should grow their hair longer.

I generally encourage short hair but I will permit a boy to grow his hair long if he wishes.

They now wish, even the boys who have not been selected.

Tohur, Mark and Ali are not growing their hair long.

The three choristers (Max, Peter, and Gerald) each had two private singing lessons a week at the Meldon Cathedral Choir School as part of their musical education. That was in the first academic year. They do not need singing lessons.

For the five children who are not choristers I have organised singing lessons to begin immediately. Andrew Johnson, Linda Donkin and Freda Graham are having singing lessons, too.

Sally Johnson does not play an instrument so she has decided to learn the piano.

Linda Donkin, Freda Graham, and Andrew Johnson are now learning the guitar.

After Christmas a writer is coming to spend a few days with us. The writer could write scripts without knowing the children but the scripts will be much better if the writer knows the people he or she is writing for.

In late January the children will be given their music to learn and to practice. Then over the Easter holidays they will be filming a pilot programme in Manchester.

If the pilot programme is successful, filming of the series will take place in Manchester or possibly in Sheffield.

It will probably be filmed over the school holidays ready to broadcast in the autumn. If the project is a success the children will be filming every holiday and some weekends.

One issue is that because the children are so young the local authorities have to approve their employment. That should not be a problem.

The children in care need their social workers to approve this activity. I am sure that will not be a problem.

More of a problem is that each child may work for only two hours on any one day.

Scheduling that will be a challenge for the producer.

Given the two hour daily time cap for each child it is very important to the TV company that the musicians are spot on musically when filming, so there are no repeats needed because of musician error.

They will also expect the children to know their lines.

Some of our other children may be used as siblings or in other parts.

Rather than set up eight or more trust funds I have set up one trust fund to hold the earnings of all the actor children.

The most important event of the coming year is that Emma will be producing our baby in May. She will be called Kate, after Max's biological mother. Emma says that this is our last child.

The second most important event of the coming year is the building of the gym for Robert Graham. There is a huge amount of work that Robert has to do.

I will help Robert in his exercises and other people will help Robert. If in a few years' time Robert can walk and dance I will die happy.

These two events put everything else into perspective.

I have to organise Christmas again this year.

Linda Donkin is working at the Tryton Hotel still, but everyone else from our house has dropped out over the year. Nigel and Amy are still working there.

The Johnsons have successfully lobbied for turkey again. It will be the last Christmas the Johnsons have together for six years because Rebecca, Mark, and then Charlotte will be away on missionary service.

The Johnsons will cook for Christmas Eve and for Christmas Day. Robert Graham, Max, and Derek Donkin will make mince pies before Christmas. The same gang will cook on Boxing Day. Freda Graham, Ali Miah, Colin Donkin and Tohur Miah will cook on the 27th and for the reunion.

The children who have left us always come to our annual reunion on the 28th of December. All children who have lived here are welcome, together with partners, significant others, and children.

None of the children have children yet. Andria had baby Angela while she was living with

us so I count Angela as a child rather than as a grandchild.

There are no partners yet, but Ali Miah and Mark Johnson have significant others. In fact Ali's girlfriend George has been living here because she works at the same factory canteen as Mark. She sleeps in Rebecca Johnson's bedroom. I could say that George sleeps with Rebecca Johnson but that could be misunderstood.

With so many resident children it was necessary to book our holidays early.

Tunisia was a very successful holiday last year so we are going to that hotel again in August.

The children enjoyed their camping holiday so I have booked the entire camp site again for late July.

My biggest current problem is what Santa will buy the children for Christmas.

Santa bought bicycles and tricycles last year. I think that this year Santa is likely to buy musical instruments.

We already have a piano, a keyboard, and a drum kit. Around the children we have two accordions, a saxophone, a violin, another drum kit, and several guitars.

The saxophone teacher suggested I should buy a euphonium because there is a desperate national shortage of euphonium players. There is also a general shortage of drummers.

The singing teacher suggested cello, harp, and fiddle.

The piano teacher suggested a clarinet.

The drum teacher suggested a xylophone or a trombone.

Some of the children who originally had small guitars need to move to adult guitars. Santa also needs to buy several selections of sheet music.

Rebecca has to travel light when she is on missionary service, so I think a flute. I always ask the children, and then Santa buys what I think is right.

CHAPTER 22 : Amina Daar

We were so happy when Emma's parents Arthur and Joy Brown agreed to foster us Daars in our family home in Doncaster.

We had to wait for the Browns to be approved as foster carers by Doncaster Council.

Then we had to wait again for the Browns to be trained.

These delays gave us time to clean and decorate our house from top to bottom. We moved home just before Christmas last year.

We three older Daar girls already loved Joy.

Joy was so kind and helpful when we were learning to sew. Joy is a very motherly lady.

Joy treats each of us as if we are her favourite grandchild. Her favourite grandchild will still be told off if it is naughty. Beneath that really sweet exterior there is an iron hand. I see where Emma Hewson gets her toughness from.

Arthur Brown is a nice man. He was a warrior. He has been in combat. Arthur has trained young men to be soldiers.

Arthur Brown is good for our boys.

Arthur and Don Hewson were both Army sergeants and they can both give "that look" that makes boys behave. Our boys are good anyway but Jabril, Amal or Ahmed sometimes do something that earns them "that look".

At the moment Arthur is teaching my cousin Amina and me to drive. Arthur has taught us to change tyres, to check oil and water and brake fluid, and to top up windscreen wiper water. Arthur says that we tie our shoelaces before we start walking. So we should do the equivalent for our car before we drive it.

I prefer the Browns to the Hewsons. Mr Hewson is a really nice man but he is paranoid about his children having bad experiences. The Browns are much more relaxed than Don Hewson.

Abdullah is even more tall and good looking than he used to be. We liked his first dancing partner Diana Green and we like his current dancing partner Amy Waters. They are both nice girls. It is so good that Amy and Abdullah and Diana and Dennis are all good friends even though they compete against each other.

Abdullah should have stopped ballroom dancing in the few months before his GCSE examinations. Abdullah said that he studies hard during the week and he needs something like ballroom dancing to relax him. I think Abdullah missed only two dancing weekends. When Abdullah was chosen to take part in the sanitary towel advertisements he had to learn to play "As Time Goes By" on the piano. The advertising company paid for a daily music lesson and for the hire of a piano.

Abdullah practised that tune continuously for five weeks.

I do not mind if I never hear that tune again in my life. It drove us all mad.

When Abdullah was not on the piano Kali was on, perfecting "Nutrocker". That is an exciting tune, but you can get sick of it.

Abdullah did all right in his GCSE exams and he is now studying for A levels. When the advertisements were broadcast Abdullah found that the girls studying with him became even friendlier. They all want to know about the exact relationship between Dennis and Amy and Abdullah and Amy.

Abdullah has been told just to smile and to say nothing because anything Abdullah says is

likely to be twisted.

Abdullah says that some of the girls tried very hard to obtain information from him.

Abdullah had a broad smile when he said that.

Shakoora and I are really enjoying college. We are studying Fashion Design. We are among the best students in our year. Shakoora has applied to universities to read Fashion Design.

I will need to be at home to look after my father when he comes home so I am not going to bother with university.

My father and Shakoora's uncle Jalil Daar had an aneurism in September. We were hoping he might be home by January. With the aneurism it will be this summer at the very soonest before he is home.

The sewing business has gone incredibly well. We were doing fine, and then the Charlotte Johnson explosion generated hundreds of orders. We are also taking orders for other clothes from people who see our web site.

Sahid has added accessories to our web site.

We bought boxes of the accessories from China. We sell the accessories at reasonable prices on our web site.

Our mark-up is terrific, but we have these boxes taking up a lot of space in the cellar.

Poor Mina is our bookkeeper, so Mina prepares and prints the receipted invoices and she pops them into envelopes with the accessories.

Jabril helps Mina sometimes.

Amina and Mina and I are so busy with the sewing business that some weeks we do not have time to cook. The boys do virtually all the cooking.

It looks like Kali may be beginning a career as an actor and musician. Good luck to her! If it does not work out she will have to get on with life like the rest of us.

Shakoora and I do not wish to marry yet.

I expect we will marry Somali young men. There are young men in our community, but none whom Shakoora or I wish to marry.

We are young yet. When we want to marry we may have to visit other towns. Strictly speaking Abdullah or Uncle Jalil will have the responsibility for finding us husbands. If our mothers were alive they would do it for us. Shakoora and I may have to find husbands for each other!

It is also possible that young men or their mothers may approach our family.

Of course, there is no reason why Amina or I cannot marry a non-Somali young man if we see one we like. Ali Miah is a little shorter than I would like, but he is a really good guy. If

he approached us I would be very interested.

Ali has a gorgeous girlfriend at the moment. George is not a Muslim so I don't think it will last. The moment that relationship breaks up I will ask Abdullah to invite Ali over. I would happily comfort Ali Miah.

Or I might have somebody else by then.

Abdullah is having too much fun to think about marriage, and he is too young anyway.

Sahid is either a geek or a nerd. I am not sure which.

Sahid helps with our Daar Fashion web site.

He helps Tohur with Tohur's web site for Islamic children in care. Shakoora and I also help to run that web site.

Sahid helps David Wilkins with his filming. Sahid helps Robert Graham and Tohur Miah with their cookery TV programmes, too.

One way and another Sahid is earning a lot more money than most fifteen year old lads earn.

Sahid has a web site for his photography. Sahid is happy with life.

Amal is away almost every weekend, either dancing or practicing his dancing with Olivia Hudson. The Hudsons treat Amal like they would treat their own son.

Amal does well at school, too.

Everyone is fine at the moment.

CHAPTER 23: Karen Byram

I love Mark Johnson.

Mark is a warm loving human being. There are times when I want to slap Mark for insensitivity but Mark is so hugely good hearted.

When Mark is focussed on something he just goes at it.

At first I thought Mark simply did not notice distractions like my hurt feelings. Then I realised that Mark is sensitive to my hurt feelings. My hurt feelings are just not as important as whatever Mark is doing.

That is even more angering.

My mother says that all men are like that. They get their head into something and they just go at it.

Mark will focus on a project or a problem or an issue and Mark will worry it to death. Mark is able to strip emotion out of a situation and to work out priorities. Then Mark does what is needed.

Mark does not bother to ask me or to consult with me, which I find very difficult.

The whole canteen issue was surprising and impressive. Mark stepped up and he sorted out an immediate problem. In a week Mark turned the loss-making canteen enterprise into a very profitable business.

I never expected a sixteen year old young man to contribute to our family business the way Mark has.

Then Mark negotiated with Dad to start his apprenticeship with us. So I will see much more of Mark than if he were in Luton.

With Dad permitting leave of absence for Mark to undertake his missionary service Mark will be free to marry a lot sooner.

I ought to be really happy.

But I really worry about our two years apart. How much will Mark change? Will we still wish to marry?

It is hard to have a satisfactory row with Mark. Mark just won't get cross!

Mark doesn't shout.

Mark lets me shout.

I can even punch Mark. My fist just bounces off!

Mark is so physically strong that he almost does not notice me punch him.

Mark is infuriating.

Mark is just so calm.

As an example, we were out dancing one night when a drunken man came over to Mark.

The man I think had recognised Mark as young and possibly open to bullying.

The man said,

"Why don't you drink beer like a man?"

Mark stopped and thought.

"A man drinks what a man wants to drink.

"I don't want to drink beer, so I don't."

Mark smiled.

"So that leaves plenty more for you!"

"Are you a pansy?"

"No. I just don't drink beer."

The man was about to speak when Mark smiled at him and said,

"Look mate. I am on a pleasant night out with my girl. Just leave us alone."

The man thought for a minute and then he left us.

Mark explained that the guy had painted himself into a situation that was likely to escalate into violence. Mark had given the man an escape route and the man had taken it.

I asked Mark what would have happened.

"I would have ended up hurting him.

"That would really have spoiled our evening."

"He is much bigger than you."

"Yes. He is big, fat, and not sober. He underestimated me at first."

"I am fit, fast, and sober. I have had martial arts training.

"He saw in my eyes that I am not at all frightened of him. So he took the opportunity I gave him to pull out with his dignity."

At work Mark goes at things.

I do not work directly with Mark now, and that is better for our relationship.

When Mark decided to use Dick Forest's grand-daughters to draw the tickets for a Christmas raffle the factory was ablaze with surprise.

Dick Forest is only a long serving capstan lathe operator. Dick is not in any way important.

Georgina had seen a photograph of Dick's granddaughters and Georgina had put them forward to draw the raffle tickets.

So Dick was handing out the prizes.

Mark has no understanding that there are subtle differences between office staff, supervisors, shop stewards, apprentices, storemen, machinists, labourers and so forth.

Mark thinks that we are all on the same team. We are all Mark's customers.

The little girls are sweet, so what is my issue?

Where do you start with somebody like Mark Johnson?

The deal Mark agreed with my father is a wonderful deal really.

I was upset that Mark did not consult me or inform me during the negotiations. Both Mark and Dad have made it clear that I am not to get in their way when they are having negotiations.

I really do not like that.

In one of our rows Mark asked me if I wanted a man or a lap-dog?

That was so unfair!

My mother thinks that the sun shines out of Mark's bum. So do all three grandparents and my father. So do all the Byram's workforce.

The workers were admiring when Mark sacked me from his kitchen staff because not many managers would dare to sack the boss's daughter.

Some of the female staff have told me that I am fortunate to be with a real man. There are moments when I have difficulty in recognising my good fortune.

Mark has appointed staff. The new chef, Bert, does not start until early January. Maria,

who replaced me, has started already. Three new staff start in January to replace Rebecca, Georgina and Mark.

Mark intends just to observe and supervise during January, to make sure the operation is running smoothly. Then Mark will start his apprenticeship as a fitter in February.

In early January I go to Toulouse for six months. I will meet Marcel briefly and then Marcel will come to our house in England for his six months here.

Mark says he will take Marcel to the Hewson family Friday night outings.

Linda, Charlotte, Grace, and Freda need to exercise their French. If Marcel is good looking they will exercise their wiles, too!

I am pleased that Mark is a success with my family.

I am pleased that Mark is popular and respected in the factory.

I have not had a boyfriend before.

I had thought that a boyfriend would be all mine.

It is hard for me that Mark is independent. Mark is his own man.

I am having to learn how to manage Mark. Head-on attacks don't work. I have to be subtle to manage Mark.

On the relationship side Mark is slow. I had to lift Mark's hands to my bust before he would touch there. All Mark does now is to touch the outside of my clothing. His hands never wander where they shouldn't.

I don't want Mark to try to unscrew my breasts but I would like Mark to show much more interest in my body. Apparently Rebecca is responsible for Mark's slowness.

Rebecca, and Mark's Mormon religion.

A normal lad would be more adventurous and I would be telling him to stop. I would be saying "Stop that!" and "No sex yet". That's normal.

Instead, Mark is saying "No sex before marriage" and "No marriage until I have completed my missionary service". It is enough to drive a girl wild!

I complained to Irene.

She laughed.

Irene said that Mark is a wonderful first boyfriend. If we do marry, then Mark was worth waiting for. If we break up then Mark is a great benchmark for any future boyfriend.

Mum is very happy with the situation.

I am pretty frustrated.

My going off to France for six months will be hard.

When it was arranged I did not have a boyfriend. Now I will be apart from Mark for six months!

And then not long after that we will be apart for two years! After Mark's missionary service we will have spent twice as long apart as we will have spent together.

CHAPTER 24: Rebecca Johnson

Don Hewson is a strange man.

Don interviews every young adult and child in the house about what they want from Santa.

Then Don disregards whatever we say! Every year!

This year Don asked me what I would like for Christmas?

I said that I am the girl who has everything.

Don said that as I am going to be moving around a lot he was thinking that my present should be physically small or at least light.

I agreed.

I really had no thoughts about a present.

Don said that Santa could run to a portable music player like an MP3. Would I prefer a musical instrument like a flute or a harmonica?

I was not sure.

Don said that the other thing he was thinking about was a harp. Don thought that a large harp would be cumbersome. A small harp would be limited in range. What do I think?

I asked to sleep on it.

Later I told Don that the MP3 is probably best. Under the rules for our missionaries it must not contain anything other than religious music.

At our Mormon Christmas party Charlotte sang of course, with me on piano.

Band Blue gave "Once In Royal David's City" and "Silent Night", which Gerald and Peter respectively are to sing at Meldon Cathedral on Christmas Day.

Band Red also played carols. Sally and Dan and Max belted out "Good King Wenceslas" and "God Rest You Merry Gentlemen".

Kali was not there so Max played the piano.

Then the boys all put on wigs and they sang "Long Haired Lover from Liverpool". They sang it very well. Everyone was in a good humour.

We Johnsons cooked a halal turkey for Christmas, with all the trimmings.

Santa gave me a MP3. Little Arthur gave me the flute!

Ali had a huge dictionary between Quranic Arabic and English. Ali was ever so happy with that.

It is something Ali will always treasure, but it is not something that Ali would ever justify buying for himself.

Mark had a toolbox with engineering tools for his engineering apprenticeship. Mark is like a puppy with two tails.

Tohur had some textbooks from an advanced Catering course, so he is happy.

Linda had gone for a euphonium once she realised that through the euphonium she would meet dozens of older lads and young men. Linda is continuing with her guitar lessons.

Damien's present to Linda was a bottle of cream sherry.

I have never seen a bottle of alcohol as a present in the Hewson house before.

I expect Don has his reasons.

Linda kissed Damien and Linda hugged Don.

Charlotte wanted some CDs of religious music. Charlotte had written out a list of exactly what she wanted. Santa bought some, and Don released money from Charlotte's trust fund to purchase the others.

Freda had gone for a cello.

Robert thought that a fiddle would be fun.

Derek had woodworking tools including a lathe that will screw onto Derek's studying desk.

Max decided on a violin. His uncle Gordon in Australia and his aunt Susie in Devizes have sent books of sheet music for a violin.

Robert is lending his violin music.

Colin decided on a trombone.

Georgina Donkin had a sewing machine.

Sally already has a sewing machine. Sally wanted a judo suit because she is going to try judo.

All the children are happy with our presents.

Don this year has largely given everyone what they asked for.

Emma's present to Don is a stack of books of sheet music for the instruments that Santa has given to the children.

The reunion was great fun.

Everybody likes Karen and George. It was sweet to see Andrew and Michael sat on Karen's lap. George was beside Karen on the sofa with Moklus and Monika on her lap.

Karen and George like each other. For a while they both worked with me in Mark's factory canteen.

For me, the only problem with Karen Byram is that Karen is not a Mormon.

Two years ago I would have been telling Mark to break up with Karen because she is not a Mormon.

I am a bit older now, and a bit wiser.

When I return from my missionary service Mark will already have left on his missionary service. It will be nearly four years before Mark and I are together again. I am pretty sure that Mark and Karen will not be together then.

So why make a fuss? Why have Mark blame me for his relationship with Karen breaking up, when it will break up anyway?

It is better not to start a relationship with someone who has not completed their missionary service. It is better not to form a relationship until you have completed your own missionary service. The long separation usually breaks the relationships. Most missionaries lose their partners over their missionary time.

If they are still together after being apart for two years, then Karen will have shown a lot more grit than most Mormon girls can do. I will worry about that situation in four years time, if it is still a problem.

I am nervous about going on missionary service. It will be the first time I have been apart from my family for more than a week.

Don Hewson may be annoying but Don is effectively my father. Don is my rock.

Emma is a continuous source of advice and reassurance.

I am sure that the host wards will be nice to us.

It is my partner or partners that worry me. If they are good people then I will have a good time.

We missionaries always share bedrooms. It is part of the master plan to keep us focussed on our Mission. I have heard horror stories of room-mates who snore like foghorns. Or of room-mates who chatter incessantly and inconsequentially. I suppose I will be the crazy room-mate who practised the flute all the time!

We go to Preston on the eighth of January for a short orientation session, to meet our partners, and to meet our hosts. We spend the rest of the month having training on how to be a missionary, including role play.

We also have to learn to understand the Scottish accents and vocabulary.

I am fairly confident in speaking to people.

Mark was a bit pointed when he said that I also have to learn to listen to people.

I am glad to have had that pointed out to me in a loving fashion in private. I would hate to be admonished publicly in a training session.

The training is hugely important.

I normally don't spend a lot of time worrying what to wear and what I look like. First impressions are important so I will have to brush up in that area.

The makeover course I had as a present last Christmas will prove useful. I have a

hairdresser booking for the fourth of January.

I want to come over as attractive but not as distractingly beautiful.

Charlotte said,

"So no change, then?"

That was nice.

My finances are fine. The Church will pay me an adequate living allowance. I have a lot of savings.

Don has given me a debit card with very significant money on it. Don says that the money is from the Sal Hewson Memorial Fund for me to use either during missionary service or after it. The current PIN Code is Mark's birthday.

After my missionary period I will return home.

Mark will be away on his missionary service by then.

I will have to decide what to do next.

The Sal Hewson Trust Fund will be there to help me.

Charlotte I am sure would invest in whatever I wish to do.

Mark is earning amazingly good money at the moment so I expect Mark will have savings, too. Even Sally will have savings if this TV programme takes off!

I will be the only poor adult of the family.

A few years ago we were all incredibly poor. We are pretty good now. When I return, I will go out and get a job. Or maybe I will go to university if there is something I wish to study.

Don says I should consider a degree in Business Management.

The Hewsons have been good to us. The Hewsons have been good for us.

I still do not fully understand what makes Don Hewson tick!

CHAPTER 25: Emma Hewson

We have had a very long period of stability. It is fourteen months since Ali and Tohur Miah rejoined us. The Donkins have been with us for nearly twenty months. The Grahams have nearly clocked up two years. The Johnsons have been here more than thirty months. Long-term fostering is so much easier than short term fostering in terms of building deep relationships.

The children all attach to Don as "Dad", even Rebecca who sometimes still twitches when Andrew and Michael use the word.

I am sometimes "Mum", but the Donkins still have a living mother who is part of their lives. Rebecca and Mark and Charlotte never call me "Mum". I am usually called "Emma".

Max calls me "Mum" sometimes, even when he does not want something.

Max now also cuddles even when he does not want something. Max has not forgotten his biological mother Kate but at last I am "Mum".

The Johnsons are lovely children.

Don and I decided very early on that we must not get into conflict with the Mormons. Bob is the adult Mormon we deal with most of the time. Bob is a straight guy. Bob is pretty good about giving us advance warning on sensitive situations.

I was utterly furious when the Mormons broke up Charlotte's romance with John Tarron. John is a lovely boy. There was no way that Charlotte and John were going to misbehave seriously.

I think girls should have boyfriends when they are ready for them. Learning about boys is part of growing up. John was as safe a first boyfriend as one could ask for.

So I was very cross with the Mormons.

Don and I had to back the Mormons whatever we privately thought.

I vented to Mary the Meldon Council social worker and I vented to Don. I do not vent very often but when I do vent I vent thoroughly.

Having vented, I got over it and I adjusted to the new situation.

Mark having to give up paid Sunday work that clashed was not a great problem.

I am not much impressed with tithing but it is part of the Mormon religion.

What gets to me is that the Mormon kids worked really hard at their part time jobs but they never spent the money they earned. Rebecca and Mark stacked up their money to pay for their missionary service. Only now is Mark spending any money, and that is because Mark has saved as much as he needs. Mark takes his girlfriend ballroom dancing once a week, and that is it.

Mark has an amazingly good profit share from his catering. Mark pays his board and he banks virtually all the rest. Sometimes when Mark is in a hurry to see his girlfriend he may take a taxi rather than make two bus journeys.

In roughly two months of full time work I think Mark has bought himself a few new shirts, and that is all he has spent. I don't agree with extravagance but Mark lives like a monk.

Except for the girlfriend, of course!

Charlotte is a millionaire twice over because of the hymn she wrote and sang. She has more money from her libel damages. Charlotte happily tithes to the Mormons.

Charlotte should not have tithed from her libel damages because they are compensation rather than earnings. Charlotte said the libel damages are a gift from God. The money Charlotte tithes will be used for God's Work so Charlotte is happy.

I have had to bite my tongue over the Mormons tithing so much money from a child. I think

it is wrong.

I know that Charlotte gives the money voluntarily but it still isn't right.

All the children who have had windfall earnings have agreed with Don just to invest their cash.

David Wilkins is even richer than Charlotte and David has very high earnings.

David took his family off benefits and he bought a big house for the Wilkins to live in.

David takes only ordinary pocket money for himself.

David's sister Helen runs the Wilkins family with an iron hand. With boys like Dennis and David one needs an iron hand. They would be a bit wild without Helen's restraining influence.

Charlotte has to pay board to us because she is rich. Charlotte still only has ordinary pocket money. The same applies with Tohur Miah and Robert Graham.

Social services deduct some board from our payments. It makes no financial difference to us.

Don and I make a lot of money from fostering children. Don beats himself up over Robert Graham because it took Don a year to discover that Robert has not had any attention to his back injury virtually since the accident happened. Then using the National Health System it took seven months to get the boy to an assessment at the Stoke Mandeville Hospital.

The Hospital says that they think they can help Robert. Robert's spinal cord is damaged rather than broken.

The first step is to build Robert's strengths and stamina. We are looking at more than eighteen months of exercises to turn Robert into an amazingly fit young man. The very long length of time is because we have to exercise Robert's lower body to build the strength in those muscles.

Don decided that for Robert to move down to Stoke Mandeville for treatment while his siblings stayed up here in Yorkshire is not practical.

Finding accommodation near Stoke Mandeville for five children, including one in a wheelchair, would be very difficult.

The Grahams saw their father kill their mother. The Grahams are now emotionally attached to us. It would be cruelty to separate them from us. With our links up here in Yorkshire we cannot move to Stoke Mandeville.

These problems are really the responsibility of the social workers. These decisions are not for a humble foster carer to make.

However, Don is not your average humble foster carer. Nobody has ever called Don

“humble”.

A few other words perhaps, but never “humble”.

Don has resources beyond those of most people.

No social worker could ask Don to build a gym just for Robert Graham.

Nor could the Council justify building a gym just for Robert.

Don says that travelling to a municipal gym once or twice a day is really not a sensible option. It is just too time consuming.

There is also a stupid budget issue. If a child in care has a health issue then the National Health Service should provide for that need, not social services. Social services would be responsible for transport.

Robert would be subject to the National Health system of priorities and delays for physiotherapy and exercise. Cumulatively these delays could cause further years of delay to Robert's progress.

Don has just cut through all this.

Mary Pickles, the Johnson's social worker, commented once about "Don Hewson's bloody chequebook".

Mary was not happy about it. Mary is the person who brought Don into fostering.

Don being Don, he has refused to let Robert contribute to the gym or to his own therapy, even though Robert has good earnings from his TV chef work and his supermarket deal. Don says that building a gym will add to the value of our house, so Robert ought not to contribute to that.

Don says that the expenditure for a private physiotherapist is a tax deductible expense so there is no need for Robert to contribute. If Robert paid for the physiotherapy himself then Robert could not claim tax relief.

Don has guilt about his delay in recognising that Robert could be helped.

Freda Graham is a really good young woman. She has been sketching and drawing almost since she arrived. Freda is a terrific self-taught artist. The younger Grahams are fine.

The Donkins are doing very well after their Tomatis therapy. They are all improved.

Linda Donkin still has a bit of a rough personality, but she is so much easier in herself after these last nineteen months.

The biggest breakthrough was the capture and arrest of the drug dealer who had threatened to rape Linda. I will always be grateful to the boys who rescued Linda from the attempted kidnapping.

I don't care that the boys broke some bones while dealing with the drug dealer and his

accomplice. It could not have happened to more deserving people.

Linda's mother Deborah is better for the drug dealer being removed from the scene.

The school is happy with Linda.

There have been no disciplinary issues.

Linda is a year older than her classmates. Linda is doing reasonably well in her studies.

Linda has been working part time at the Tryton Hotel for over a year. At first Linda was travelling in the wake of Mark and Rebecca and Ali and Tohur. They have all stopped working there. Linda is a valued employee in her own right.

Linda is valued by her employer and that is tremendously empowering for her.

Nigel Williams and Grace Adams still work at the Tryton Hotel. The three of Nigel and Grace and Linda are a valued group at the Hotel.

Over Christmas Linda will be working very long hours at the Tryton Hotel so Don has taken Linda off the household kitchen rota until January.

Linda and Charlotte are friendly almost all the time. The foursome of Linda Charlotte Freda and Grace is a very tight emotional group. I am pleased that they are such good friends.

Sister-like friendships like this often last for life.

I have always felt a little lacking that I was never in such a close group of friends.

Linda's mother Deborah it seems had no friends. For all of Linda's life her mother discussed all her issues and woes with Linda. That is too much to put onto any child. Linda was a really screwed up kid when she arrived.

Add the threat of rape to that bag and it is surprising that Linda could function at all.

There is a very strong person in there.

Linda sometimes flares and roars. If you know Linda's history you recognise that these eruptions are signs that Linda feels secure enough that she can erupt with us.

The eruptions are a sign that Linda is unlocking and that she is able to express her internal rage. The eruptions are tough to live through but each one is a positive sign.

Don is usually the target of an eruption because Don is the one who says "No". Linda then erupts.

Linda hardly ever erupts now because she has expressed all her rage. Her rages are minor compared to what they were.

Interestingly Linda does not slam her bedroom door because Don explained that slamming the door causes the whole house to shake. That would frighten the little children. Don encourages Linda to kick the skirting board instead.

So when Linda has an "uncontrollable" rage the fact that Linda is kicking the skirting board is a sign that Linda is channelling her rage.

Don says that Linda is better than his step-daughter Susie was at the same age. Susie turned out all right.

As I say, Linda does not flare very often now.

Derek Donkin is a lovely boy. Derek is physically beautiful and I can't help hugging him.

I heard Don call Derek "Alan" once and Derek did not express surprise.

Derek has been told by Ali Miah that the late Alan Wilkins was Don's favourite foster child.

So if Don calls Derek "Alan" it is because Don loves Derek the way that Don loved Alan.

I told Derek that Ali is right.

I did not say anything to Don.

Don would be hurt at evidence of yet another lapse from perfection.

Derek plays piano. Derek is learning to play drums for this prospective TV series. No-one seems to be clear whether the two bands are both to be Rock Bands or both to be Folk Groups or one of each or what. The script writer is coming just after Christmas.

Presumably the script writer will know.

Derek has attracted the attention of an older couple called Sebastian and Sara. Derek spends a lot of time either playing golf with Sebastian or woodcarving with Sebastian or cooking with Sara. Derek loves the people and Derek loves the activities.

Colin plays guitar.

Colin goes to a friend Eric who is an only child. They will often spend an entire day playing computer games.

Eric's mother is very happy with Colin. Eric's mother says that Eric was terribly introverted before Eric and Colin became friends.

Eric is still seriously introverted but Eric willingly interacts with Colin.

Derek and Colin both do ballroom dancing. They both like to look good, and they both like being liked by girls. They are both nice looking boys. They are usually happy and smiling.

The smaller Donkins are fine.

The Donkins' mother Deborah is likely to move out of mental hospital soon. She will be an outpatient rather than an inpatient.

It will be years before Deborah is fit to have all five children living with her. It will be a long job.

The management of Deborah's recovery is for the doctors and for Deborah's social worker, Andy. We will be kept informed.

We know the children very well and part of our role is to monitor the effects on the children of each visit to their mother.

The Johnsons are just a joy.

I do wish the Johnsons were not Mormons. There is not any particular religion I would wish the Johnsons to be.

I respect Bob. All the Mormons I have had dealings with have been sincere.

Karen Byram is not a Mormon. Karen and Mark will just have to work that out between them - if they stay together.

Charlotte Johnson says that she would be perfectly happy to be a typical Mormon missionary. As God has given Charlotte this gift of music the Church may use Charlotte differently.

One possible use of Charlotte's time as a missionary is for Charlotte to go on a singing tour. The tour would be planned well in advance. Local Mormons would invite their non-Mormon friends and contacts to come and listen to Charlotte for free. It would be part of the general Mormon missionary effort.

With rehearsing, setting up, the performances, and travel Charlotte might have an eighteen month road tour across three regions of the USA or all around Britain or wherever.

Charlotte's missionary buddy would be either a musician or another singer or a sound engineer. It's a shame that Charlotte can't take Sahid Daar!

Charlotte is learning the piano and Charlotte is writing more religious songs.

Charlotte can sing most of the standard Mormon songs but she would like three or four of her own songs to sing, too.

Charlotte does not find writing hymns easy.

Charlotte commented,

"Why should it be easy to write hymns?"

Fair enough I suppose.

Immediately after the reunion on December 28th Tohur and Robert and David are going to Manchester to film their TV programmes to be broadcast between New Year and Easter.

The three boys have planned all their programmes so there is no danger of all three using broccoli or soy sauce in the same week.

Tohur's "beat" is Asian and vegetarian cooking.

Robert prepares single dishes that Robert can teach in ten minutes.

David prepares complete meals that do not compete with Tohur or with Robert.

The TV broadcasting company is happy with all three of them. So is the supermarket that sponsors them.

There was not time to prepare Christmas goods for Tohur and Robert for this Christmas so David has no competition this year, except for the twenty other famous TV cooks. "Dave

The Chef" goods are still selling well this Christmas.

David says that he sells roughly twelve per cent of total Christmas chef goods. David is the market leader. There are three other chefs close on David's heels.

It is inevitable that Tohur and Robert will take some sales from David, but most of their sales will be at the expense of the other TV chefs. If Robert and Tohur and David between them could sell twenty per cent of total Christmas chef goods, that would be wonderful. As their goods will be exclusive to one supermarket chain, the supermarket will be very happy, too.

Rebecca and Helen are going to Manchester as chaperones, so they will be able to have an exhaustive natter before Rebecca disappears for eighteen months.

Ali Miah and Tohur are lovely boys. They are no trouble at all.

Everybody loves Georgina.

Early in January Charlotte is going to visit Mr Driburg to discuss her singing career.

Rebecca will go with Charlotte.

Charlotte is planning her first CD, a compilation of standard mainstream Christian songs and a few Mormon songs.

George is starting a better paid job at Mark's factory in January. George is already paying full board.

Elizabeth Mountford organised a CRB report on George and of course it was clean.

Max is a lovely lad. Max is ten and four months.

Max has perfected the art of looking into the eyes of a teenage girl and telling her sincerely that she is beautiful.

Max says that even the less pretty girls are beautiful in their souls.

Freda and Charlotte and Linda react by rolling Max on the carpet and tickling him and then kissing him. It works for Max!

Max is learning Latin and French and Spanish at school. The choir school is stretching Max, which is good for him. Gerald and Peter are both happy.

Heinz is still Max's dog. Heinz will love anyone, and play with anyone, but as soon as Max appears Heinz goes to Max.

Alice loves school. Having grown up in a large household Alice never had any fears about school.

Alice is beautiful, with my red hair and my strong personality.

Alice has Don's and my high intelligence.

Alice can be a stubborn and determined little madam at times, which Don and I both say comes from the other. Most of the time, Alice is lovely.

Damien is a little thug, which definitely comes from Don.

Damien was at nursery school when another little boy hit little Angela Wilkins in some childish spat. Angela cried.

A teacher Mrs Ellis had physically to lift Damien off the other lad.

Our older boys have stupidly taught Damien how to punch, and Damien had hurt the other child quite badly.

Michael Johnson was not far away. Damien was still struggling in Mrs Ellis's arms when Michael spoke to him.

"Damien Hewson. How dare you fight a teacher!"

"Mum used to work in this nursery school.

"Mrs Ellis is one of Mum's friends.

"How dare you try to hurt Mrs Ellis!"

Damien stopped struggling.

"When Mrs Ellis tells Mum that you were fighting her Mum is going to hit the roof!

"You are in so much trouble!"

Damien just stood for Michael's tirade.

"Early bed time for a week!

"In the bath before Arthur!

"No TV for a week!"

"You will get one telling off from Dad and a big telling off from Mum.

"Dad can't spank you but Mum might spank you."

Damien twitched at each lash stroke.

"Say "Sorry" to Mrs Ellis, and you mean it!"

After a short interval Damien turned to Mrs Ellis. Damien was in tears.

"I am sorry, Mrs Ellis.

"I never meant to hurt you!"

Michael was remorseless.

"Look what you have done to Tommy Harris!

"Tommy is crying because of you!

"You are a bully!

"You are a thug!"

Mrs Ellis was quietly amused at the way Michael was taking charge.

"Go to Tommy and you say you are sorry. You are very sorry. And you mean it!

"If Tommy punches you, just take it!"

Mrs Ellis said,

"Thank you for helping, Michael.

"I need to talk to Tommy first, before Damien says he is sorry."

"You go back to Mrs Burrows now and please tell her I said that you have been very helpful.

"Damien- just sit on the mat quietly until I call you over."

Damien was later brought over to Tommy to apologise.

Marjorie Ellis rang me at work.

Marjorie said that the sky has fallen in on Damien. Damien is just sitting stunned in the nursery as if he had been hit by a truck.

Tommy Harris is fine.

Marjorie will tell Don about the altercation when Don comes to collect Damien.

I suggested that Marjorie should bring Alice through to the nursery to sit with Damien.

"Tell Alice that I say that Alice is not to tell Damien off. Alice is to comfort Damien."

I rang Don. Subject to hearing what Damien has to say we agreed on early bed-time for a week and no TV for a week.

Damien will have an early bath to accompany his early bed. But Damien will still have stories in bed.

Damien will have just one telling off, from Don. Making a child wait hours for a telling off from Mum would be cruel.

Arthur is just a sweet child. He has inherited my father's placid nature.

All I can say about our unborn Kate is that she is no trouble at all. She is not due until mid-May. I will take maternity leave from the first of May, or maybe the Easter break. Don as usual will fund me taking the maximum maternity leave. I will again have to decide whether to return to work or whether to become a full-time mother.

CHAPTER 26: Mark Johnson

The factory closes for two weeks over Christmas. Maintenance men are servicing all the equipment.

Next Christmas I will be an apprentice fitter and I will be working then, too.

I have to go in over this Christmas to supervise the painters who are painting the kitchen and the dining area. It looks as though they haven't been painted in a long time.

We are having a second oven installed to allow us to widen the range of foods we offer.

We are going to provide a salad bar and we need another refrigerator for that. We are taking delivery of more tables and chairs just after Christmas.

The new chef Bert will start with everything he needs.

I have bought and wrapped my presents.

Rebecca and Charlotte and Sally have all said that I am working too hard. On the day before Christmas Eve they told me to leave the house in the morning and to spend the Christmas Eve day with Karen while they cook Christmas Eve and prepare for cooking on Christmas Day.

I am to have Christmas Dinner at the Hewsons and then I will eat again with the Byrams. Both my sisters and Irene have said that I am not allowed to cook or to wash up.

On Christmas Eve I spent the day with the Byrams. Karen and I inspected the summerhouse a few times. We also went for a walk.

Irene has bought in drinking chocolate and non-alcoholic ginger beer to cater for me.

Cecil drank tea in the morning but he moved on to beer in the afternoon.

In the afternoon Cecil chatted about his current thinking.

Cecil said that he has decided to hire a Factory Manager. Cecil is stretched too far. The fraud I had discovered in the canteen had been running for years. It should have been caught years ago. With hindsight, it is obvious that the canteen losses should have aroused suspicion.

George's idea of a skills audit is a very good idea. George's proposed survey of leading customers is so incredibly intelligent that it is embarrassing.

What all this tells Cecil is that the day to day problems of running the factory are taking up all Cecil's energies. Cecil needs a good Operations Manager just to run the operation.

It is not fair to the Operations Manager that Cecil should be in the same building. People are used to Cecil authorising everything.

Unless Cecil is physically absent the Operations Manager will have huge difficulty making decisions and in making the decisions stick. People will always try to go around the Operations Manager to Cecil.

It would also mean that Cecil would be bothered with stuff that Cecil had intended to delegate. So Cecil will have to be somewhere else.

One of the stockpile sites, at Willerton, has an unused office building near the gatehouse. It is big enough for Cecil and for a large staff.

Cecil is still undecided who to take. So far Cecil has decided to take the three sales staff. When the expansion happens it will be important to have a central sales staff instead of each factory having their own sales staff. Arguably the Chief Financial Officer should move with Cecil. At the moment, that's it.

Cecil has decided to study for a Masters Degree in Business Administration. He has an interview with Meldon University in January. While there Cecil will visit the University

bookshop and he will buy any books that look interesting. Cecil can read them at work while waiting for his course to begin.

I have been wondering when to mention Byram's web site. Now is the time.

"When did you last look at your web site, Cecil?"

"About a year or so, I think. Why?"

"It looks a bit clunky to me"

So we turned Cecil's laptop computer on, and we looked at Byram's web site. "Clunky" is polite.

"Who manages your web site?"

Cecil went quiet.

"The lad who set it up left about eighteen months ago. Someone in sales keeps an eye on it."

"Who?"

"Carol."

"How often does Carol look at the site?"

"I don't suppose she does.

"She just monitors the emails."

"Are there any emails?"

"I don't know."

"Look at this."

I showed Cecil the Daar web site. It has a wonderful opening page. You can click on ball gowns, bridal wear, Charlotte Johnson dresses, dancing dresses, ordinary dresses, night clothing, children's clothing, accessories to wear with the clothing, and accessories to sew to clothing. All of these are illustrated and each picture provides a button to click on. There is a Contact section and a shopping cart. It really is a great site.

Cecil was impressed by the sheer number of photos. The quality of the photos was astounding.

"The Daars have over a hundred orders a month from this site."

"The lad who built this site could build you a site. And he would maintain it for you."

"The other thing to know is that about a quarter of orders by value are for the accessories. They are all imports from China.

"Maybe there is stuff that you could buy from China and sell to your customers. You could even build a stockpile!"

Cecil was quiet for a moment.

We were all quiet.

Then Cecil stood up. Cecil went to his liquor cabinet.

Cecil poured himself a large whisky.

Cecil sat down.

Cecil took a very small sip.

"Mark.

"I do not know what will happen with you and Karen.

"I want you to stay with me whatever happens between you two.

"In a week you turned a loss making department into a profitable section.

"The catering section turn-round increased morale. It decreased absenteeism.

"People don't have to leave the plant to buy hot sandwiches.

"Productivity increased five per cent in two weeks. That is worth millions to my bottom line.

"Then you brought in George. She has come up with two brilliant ideas.

"Now you come up with two brilliant ideas in five minutes!

"I am going to make you an offer.

"Yes you can do your apprenticeship as a fitter.

"The union said that they think you are likely to be a senior manager at Byrams quite soon.

"They say the apprenticeship is part of your management training.

"They are right.

"When you finish your apprenticeship I will fund you to study management.

"You are a manager now, and I want to bring you on as a manager.

"This is independent of your relationship with Karen.

"That may last. It may not.

"You are both very young. You are even younger than Irene and I were when we started courting."

Cecil smiled lovingly at Irene.

"We were very fortunate.

"I know Karen too well to tell her what she must do.

"I do want Karen to join me at Byrams, but not yet. Karen should do A levels and a degree.

Ideally Karen should have some work experience away from Byrams. So I don't expect Karen to become full time with Byrams for six or seven years at least.

"But I need good managers now. I need to hire some.

"You are physically here and your face fits. You have demonstrated that you have potential.

"You are not the only manager I will hire, but you are hired.

"You are actually drawing more from the canteen business than I am from the entire

factory. So I am afraid there is no pay rise until you have earned one."

I was not expecting this. I looked at Karen.

Karen stood up and she kissed me.

"Say "Thank you"."

So I thanked Karen.

"Thank Dad you idiot!"

"I would have done if you had not distracted me.

"Thank you Mr Byram. I really was not expecting this."

I knew that Mr Byram was not drunk. He had had less than half a pint of beer by that point.

I was just totally surprised.

Apart from this bombshell, Christmas Eve was quiet.

Our Christmas Dinner at the Hewsons was very emotional because it is the last Christmas Dinner we Johnsons will have together for six years. Next Christmas Rebecca will be away. I will be away for the two Christmases after that. Then Charlotte will be away for two Christmases.

Apart from hugging each other we all hugged Don and Emma. Don is our rock and Emma is the nearest we have to a mother.

I was very happy with my tool kit.

Christmas supper with the Byrams was very good. Irene Byram prepared a really good roast pork joint with terrific crackling.

Boxing Day was fun! We all watched Don eat his black pudding and white pudding breakfast, and then we all had croissants and waffles.

I love the reunion. There are people I do not see from one year to the next, like the Sachs children. If it were not for the reunion we would lose contact.

The Sachs are so happy with the Greens.

Diana Green and I had a dance. I also danced with Grace and Amy and Karen and Linda and Charlotte and Freda.

Karen was very surprised to meet Abdullah and Dennis and Amy because she had not realised that they are linked to the Hewson house.

Karen danced with both lads and with Nigel.

Later Karen told me off for not telling her about Abdullah and Dennis beforehand.

I don't understand women. Why should I have told Karen about them? I didn't tell Karen about Nigel but I got no grief for that.

I didn't say anything to Karen or she would have given me more grief.

Women are not rational.

Andy Haines is the family social worker for the Donkins. Andy now lives with Sharon Kelner and Michael and Matthew Kelner.

I had a bit of a chat with Andy. He is very happy with his "instant family". I can see that Michael and Matthew are happy with Andy.

The script writer appeared for the reunion. The script writer's name is Emily. She is a woman of about forty. Emily is staying in the study.

At the reunion Emily just sat quietly in a corner watching all the interactions. David Wilkins sat next to her.

David made sure that Emily had enough to eat and to drink. David answered the questions Emily had about who is related to whom. David also briefed Emily about the religious issues.

Emily has established that Peter Wilkins is the person who tells awful jokes. These are the jokes that ten year old boys love. Elephant jokes, "knock, knock" jokes, and puns.

Emily intends to incorporate Peter as joker into the scripts.

Kali Daar is pretty. Kali is naturally the serious bossy organising child.

Gerald Butler is the slightly dreamy intellectual.

Derek Donkin is the gregarious good looking chatty lad.

Colin Donkin is slightly wild but very sweet and a bit innocent.

Dan Wilbey is just a sweetie.

Max Hewson is the babe magnet, but Max is not unrivalled.

My sister Sally is naturally the boy magnet.

Kali is pretty but being serious and bossy Kali is not a boy magnet. The magnets attract the opposite sex but they are not themselves interested in the other sex. Being so young they are close to innocent.

I think that all of the children are attractive.

Emily explained that with children it is easier to write to the personalities of the children than to ask children to behave out of character.

I think Emily has the children's personalities more or less spot on.

Dan Wilbey can be a little toad at times but Emily has not seen that side of him. Most seven year old boys can be toads at times.

We pumped Emily about whether the music is to be rock or pop or folk or jazz or what?

Emily said that there are great arguments raging in London. The children are good enough musicians to play any form of music. The programme is not intended to be a series of recitals. The story is in the interaction between the children, and interaction between the children and the adults. The interactions are almost independent of the type of music

played.

There is a lot of money to be made from films, Christmas Specials, live performances, music releases and the like.

The bosses are trying to agree on how to maximise revenue.

One option is a folk group, and a rock or pop group. In which case the bands are probably not rivals but they are friends. That makes it possible to split one or both sets of brothers between the two bands. All kinds of possibilities are opened up!

Emily's role will be to write the scripts once the bosses have agreed the type or types of music involved.

Whatever genre is chosen, some music will be written by specialist music writers. Most of the music will be "old" music that is already written. There will be royalties for the producers to pay.

Emily is staying for three days because Emily wishes to have a significantly long talk with each of the actors.

Emily also wishes to have good talks with the musical siblings who may have bit parts or cameo roles at some point in the future.

Ali Miah is really chuffed that in his first term at Cambridge he has qualified to fly the A320 and the Hercules. If Ali keeps up this rate of qualification then by the time he leaves Cambridge Ali will be rated to fly every heavy plane flown by the airline and by the Royal Air Force.

Ali is thinking to use all this free training to qualify also on helicopters.

Ali is very excited that he will be a speaker in a debate at the Cambridge Union in his first year. Ali is having a wonderful time at Cambridge.

The next major event at Byram's was Cecil's regular meeting with the union. This is a monthly meeting that has been going on for as long as anyone can remember.

At the meeting Cecil said,

"I am sure you all know Mark Johnson."

I was pleased that there was a generally approving murmur.

"Mark is training for management. Part of Mark's training is to sit in on these meetings."

There were nods.

"You will see I have put on the agenda "management announcements". Although these are traditionally taken at the end of the meeting I intend to make the announcements at the beginning. They will influence the entire meeting."

The stewards looked surprised. They were interested but wary.

"First, a bit of background.

"We are in a long recession."

The men looked concerned, and nodded.

"Well over ninety-five per cent of our production is for long-term customers on long-term contracts."

The men nodded.

"Our customers are not immune to the recession."

The men nodded.

"The long-term customers are slowing down their draw downs on their orders. In the last six months they have drawn down twelve per cent less than they did for the same period a year ago."

The men looked really unhappy.

"We have not worked short time at Byrams during the twenty years I have worked here."

The men looked really worried.

Short time is provided for in the contract of employment. If the employer simply does not have enough work for the men to do then the men work shorter hours and are paid only for the hours they work.

When an employer mentions "short time" it is very bad news.

"Unless I do something significant I can see short time and redundancies coming within the next few months."

The men looked really worried.

"In theory I could say to the customers that they have long-term contracts and that they must honour them."

The men nodded.

"The customers know this. They have been hit by the recession. I can huff and puff and shout, but they are not going to increase their draw-downs.

"I could sit with this situation.

"I could hope the recession goes away."

The men knew this was not a viable option.

Cecil started to get heated.

"I could accept short time.

"I could accept redundancies affecting maybe fifteen per cent of the workforce."

The guys were shaken.

Cecil said forcefully,

"Or I can do something about it."

The men looked very interested.

"One problem is that I have the day to day problems of running a factory, which distract from all the other issues I should be grappling with.

"So the company is going to split into four parts."

The men were very surprised.

"One part is this factory. I am going to advertise for and appoint a factory manager and an assistant factory manager. The advertisements will go out this week."

The men were shocked by Cecil's decision.

"I do not intend to appoint a manager who is anti-union."

The men looked relieved.

"To get through this crisis is going to need the full co-operation of everyone. Bringing in an anti-union senior manager is just asking for trouble.

"If I say that I am putting a union representative on the appointments committee that will deter the anti-union managers I do not wish to employ."

The men smiled.

"I would like a trade union representative to be involved in the appointment process.

Please tell me by noon tomorrow who that person is."

The men were relieved.

"There is the likelihood of redundancies."

The men looked troubled.

"We have fifteen men who are due to retire over the coming year."

The men nodded.

"We have eight guys who are on and off on sick leave. Eventually I am going to have to sack them."

The men looked wary.

"On average those men have fifteen years service."

"It would be better for them to be selected for redundancy because of their illness than just to be sacked because they are always ill. At least that way they get a pay-out."

The men looked sad.

"I am not formally declaring redundancies today. This is just an informal advance warning."

"I am going to try to get more orders in.

"Today I have no idea what the orders will be for.

"I don't want to find that I cannot take orders because I do not have enough men who can work the relevant machines because I made them redundant!"

The men nodded.

"I would like to use this quiet time to do a lot of training.

"The truth is that I can give the entire factory six hours a week to train and to be trained and still meet all our orders.

"I can either regard that as an immediate redundancy situation or I can regard it as a major training opportunity. Which would you prefer?

"You don't have to answer that.

"Just at the moment, if a worker came to me and asked for one year or two years unpaid leave of absence to study or to set up a new business I would look on that very favourably.

"It reduces my outgoings.

"It gives them an opportunity to take a leap into their future with the safety net of a job here to come back to."

"She does not know this yet, but Samantha McKenzie in HR is going to be assigned full time to organising the training. By noon tomorrow I want you to give Samantha her union liaison officer to make sure all the training goes smoothly."

"Obviously you have to meet after this meeting to consider this information. I will see you at three this afternoon if you have queries or issues.

"Moving on.

"The stock storage facility at Willerton has an empty office building, so I am moving out to Willerton.

"Willerton will be Group Headquarters. At the moment I am taking only five people with me. They are not members of your union and I have not told them yet. I may take one or two more people with me."

"Group Headquarters is part two."

The men were watching Cecil intently.

"As you know. Byram's has substantial stocks of raw materials. I will be appointing a manager to manage the stockpiles and hopefully to generate some profit from them.

"Stockpile management will be part of Group Headquarters.

"We are revamping our web site which is very poor.

"We are also sharpening our sales and negotiating team to be more pro-active. We will be contacting many more prospective customers to try to sell to them."

The men were positive about this.

"We all know that there are some components that the Chinese produce cheaper than we can do."

The men nodded but were obviously perplexed how this came into the discussion.

"Byrams will import components from China. We will sell them as part of our product range.

"This will widen the range of components that Byrams can supply, and that will make us a more attractive supplier."

The men were surprised.

"We do not have enough space on this site to expand significantly.

"I don't have any empty sites anywhere."

"I will buy a facility near Hull or Liverpool or some other port."

"The imports will be part three of the company."

The men nodded.

"We make components.

"There is no law that says we cannot use our own components to make products!"

The men looked shocked.

"We make nuts and bolts in our foundry. So we can sell packs of nuts and bolts on the internet. A lot of the parts we make can be sold on the internet. But that would upset some of our customers.

"So we look at what we produce that we can sell without upsetting our customers.

"We also look at what new products we can produce and assemble and sell that would not upset our existing customers.

"If push comes to shove we may have to risk upsetting customers.

"If they are on long term contracts they may just have to swallow their irritation.

"This operation will be based here at Neverthorpe until it grows big enough to need its own site - if it ever does. But it will be a distinct operation from the outset.

"That is part four.

"I have been working towards these decisions for months now. They did not come easily to me.

"I appreciate that all these decisions have landed on you all at once.

"The decisions I am announcing today are probably well overdue. But the decisions are now made.

"I am open to representations about any of these decisions. Now you see the package I hope they all make sense.

"The other items on the agenda I suggest we leave for a week. I assume you will want another meeting next Monday to discuss developments.

"And as I say I am happy to see you again at three today.

"Mark is here for another reason."

Everyone looked at me.

I looked at Cecil.

Cecil had given me no warning.

"Over the next year I will be missing some of these meetings.

"I may be in China or Hull or Liverpool or France.

"There needs to be some continuity across these meetings. Normally that continuity on the management side is me, but I will be missing some meetings.

"I will have some new managers starting over the next few months. They will take time to bed in.

"Mark will be management's continuity for the next year or so"

Well that was a surprise!

After the meeting I asked Cecil,

"Why didn't you tell them about "Plan A"?"

"It will happen sometime in the next twenty years or thirty years. No point bothering them with things that may not happen until we have all retired."

"These steps I have announced do not interfere with Plan A. They lay the groundwork for Plan A. They expand our present opportunities."

"A year from now I will have half a dozen competent managers who are used to working together as a team. That will make Plan A easier to implement.

"Or Plan B."

"What's Plan B?"

"Organic growth. The big obstacle to organic growth is the lack of long-term contracts."

"Any factory trying to make components on short term contracts is a nightmare to manage. Profitability is up and down like a yoyo. There is a strong temptation to take unprofitable contracts just to keep the men employed. So very quickly you have a managerial nightmare that isn't making any profit!"

"How do you find long-term contracts?"

"With difficulty. That is the trouble. That is the biggest barrier to organic growth.

"Building the sales negotiation team and the internet sales is going to be hugely important for organic growth.

"If we sell our own products on the internet, then that is another long-term contract! A contract we can't ever lose. And no transport costs!"

The meeting at three was brief. The union guys have had a long hard look at the future.

They are going to cooperate with the major training programme. They are also grateful for the opportunity to have an input into the appointment of the factory manager and the assistant manager.

They would like assurances that all new staff taken on will be union members.

Cecil said that almost all the jobs to be created are minimum wage unskilled jobs. Some of the packing jobs may be part time. Byrams will not require the workers to join the union, but Byrams will not try to stop the union recruiting, either.

Byrams would prefer to have only one union in the plant rather than to have several unions involved.

The men were concerned whether manufacturing jobs are going to be relocated to China.

"I thought about that.

"I decided I am better not to try to manage a factory on the other side of the world in a society that I do not understand.

"We have to stay competitive. I cannot say that the goods we make in the factory today will never be sourced from China. We have to find ways to stay ahead of the Chinese.

"Any suggestions are welcome!"

CHAPTER 26: Ali Miah

Cambridge does not start until about the middle of January, so I have a good long time with George. George is utterly amazing.

George is enjoying her new job as a Product Research Assistant. It will widen George's experience. It will look good on George's CV.

Experience in industry always looks good on a CV.

The Johnsons are all excited about Rebecca going off on missionary service.

Rebecca has been the leader of the family for all these years. Mark will take over as leader, although there will be a roughly three month period when both Rebecca and Mark are away when Charlotte will be the leader.

Mark is earning silly money at the moment. He is just stashing it.

When Mark comes back from missionary service Mark will assess his situation and then he will make decisions.

All the younger children are excited by this proposed TV series.

I am not sure they understand that this is just a pilot program at first.

There are some good looking kids in there, and some very talented musicians.

I am sorry that Fulesa was not selected, but such is life. With Tohur's very good earnings and my good earnings Tohur and I will be able to look after Fulesa and the twins financially.

Tohur has GCSE exams this summer. He says he does not need tutors any more.

Tohur is intending to study Catering next year. The entry requirements are not very high.

Tohur Miah the TV chef will have no difficulty in gaining admission to a catering course or

in finding work experience.

Everybody has told Tohur that if Tohur kills or cripples somebody in the judo ring that will destroy any chance Tohur has of representing England.

Tohur has to earn his place in the England side by high scores in competitions, not by being a psychopath. Tohur's behaviour inside and outside the ring has to be exemplary. Tohur understands this.

Linda Donkin has dropped a year, so Linda does not sit GCSEs until next year. She has really calmed down a lot. Linda can be quite a nice kid. Linda is like an older sister to Tohur, which is good for both of them.

I really like Freda Graham. She is a great youngster.

Robert Graham is desperately trying to break all records for exercise. Robert is determined and Don is determined. Exercising in the garage together they sometimes swear at each other, but there is no anger in it. It is an odd way to express love, but that is what it is.

I do some exercising with Robert. So do most of the older kids.

Charlotte has even recruited some Mormon teenagers to help to exercise Robert's lower body and legs. Apparently Mormon teenagers are supposed to do good things in the community. In the winter there are no gardens to dig or lawns to mow so the Mormons are happy to do indoor good works.

Social services insist they all have to have CRB reports in case any of them are criminals. The Mormons assure us that none of these teenagers have criminal convictions so the teenagers have been allowed to start before the CRB reports arrive.

Robert exercises I should think for three hours a day and longer at the weekends.

Don and Emma and Max are waiting for little Kate to be born. I never knew the original Kate, Max's mother, so for me it is just a Hewson baby.

I have heard that Don and Emma are planning their exit from fostering. They probably have the Johnsons for another twelve years at least. The Grahams also have nowhere to go. Meldon Council is very good about not moving children without good reason. So about eleven years for the Grahams.

By then Tohur and I will be long gone.

If Tohur or I marry then we could take in Fulesa and the twins.

There is a prospect for a woman to look forward to - marry a Miah and have three bonus Miahs immediately!

I somehow don't see George throwing up her career to mind my young ones.

Or we could marry and leave the other Miah children in care.

We have never talked about it but I suppose the same thoughts are running through

Rebecca's and Mark's minds about their siblings.

We are all four good friends but I don't think a joint household between us four would work because of the religious differences.

The Donkins may move out to their mother, but by the sound of it we are looking at three years and probably longer. Psychiatric problems often drag on a long time.

I have largely prepared my speech to the Cambridge Union.

I am not going to attempt to defend the American Government. In case the American Ambassador does not mention them I have statistics ready about American losses in World Wars I and II.

Given that Cambridge is constantly making new discoveries it would seem silly to wish that America had not been discovered. One might wish that the exploitation of the discovery had been handled better, but one could say that of many inventions and discoveries.

Would Britain and the world really have been better off without America? I doubt it.

I will continue polishing the speech until I deliver it.

I am making a major effort to see Fulesa, Moklus and Monika as much as I can.

I took Robert for a flight over North Wales.

I spend a lot of time with George. In Mark's phrase we are "inspecting the summerhouse". Andria Wilkins and I used to call it "playing table tennis".

I spend a lot of time just chilling with George.

George and I visit George's mother every five or six days. She is still shaken by the death of her husband. It was four months ago now, so she is not now as distressed as she was at the time.

George's mother generally approves of me. I think she is a bit puzzled that we are not having sex. I am a devout Muslim, so I won't have sex until marriage. George is cool with that.

George says that she must finish her degree before she marries - whoever it is. I think there is a coded message there, but I can't work out what it is.

George is technically a Christian, but she is really an agnostic.

We are good at the moment. Next year we will be in the second year together. We will graduate together.

George was ready to move out from her mother when Mark offered her a kitchen job. At least George has been close enough to Leeds to visit her mother at weekends.

George has a good job with Byram's now.

CHAPTER 27: Emma Hewson

Mark Johnson is in an interesting situation at the moment. The new chef and the new kitchen workers are an excellent team after only a few days together. They barely need Mark.

Cecil told Mark that if the team is working well Mark has to stand back and leave them to get on with it. So a very large part of Mark's life and effort disappeared just like that.

Mark does not begin his apprenticeship until February.

Mark has read all the books for his apprenticeship at least twice. Mark has practiced using all his tools.

Cecil gave Mark some reading to do. Mark had to read minutes of union/management monthly meetings going back for the last five years.

Mark might have become bored, but now Cecil has given Mark a big job to do.

Mark's job is to make sure the Willerton Group Headquarters is operational for when Cecil returns from China.

Cecil did not give Mark a budget.

Cecil's explanation to Mark was,

"You are much more capable than you realise. You are far too self-critical.

"I have a managerial job that needs doing. I have a manager with time on his hands. I have no other managers whom I can sensibly take off what they are doing, so you are elected.

"You are worried that you will make mistakes.

"You will make mistakes.

"I was twenty-two when I became a manager.

"I made mistakes.

"I still make mistakes now.

"The issue is not whether you make mistakes but whether you learn from the mistakes you make.

"When he was only seventeen Horatio Nelson was given command of a ship. There were a hundred crew members whose lives depended on Nelson.

"All I need you to do at nearly seventeen is to set up a headquarters office.

"Consult with Mike Appleyard and David Taylor because they will be moving into the office with me.

"Plan, and then execute."

Mark's big sister Rebecca has always been a huge influence in Mark's life.

On Monday Rebecca went off to begin her missionary training.

Then on Wednesday Mark's first ever girlfriend Karen Byram went off to France for six

months.

On Friday Cecil Byram set off for China.

Cecil gave Mark virtually no instructions.

Both Mike the Sales Manager and David the Chief Financial Officer are giving Mark advice. Neither is above Mark, so Mark just has to get on with organising Willerton.

For about three days Mark found the situation stressful. Then Mark wrote out a plan and now Mark is just working his way through it.

There is a man called Kevin Hanson at Byram's Bearings who physically is unable to stand at a bench any longer. Kevin was expecting selection for redundancy because of his poor health.

Kevin only has eight years service at Byrams, so his redundancy payment would have been only a few weeks' pay.

Kevin is perfectly capable to sit and to answer the phone and to be a receptionist and a general assistant to Mark.

With the blessing of the union and of Kevin's supervisor Kevin has been "temporarily" assigned to Group Headquarters under Mark.

Kevin actually lives in Willerton, so the move is a bonus for him. The transfer has rescued Kevin from possible redundancy.

With Cecil away the remaining managers are just operating the factory normally. All big decisions are waiting until Cecil returns.

Mark is using his evenings to read some of the management textbooks Cecil bought at Meltham University.

Mark started with the Project Management textbooks, for obvious reasons.

The children are all practicing their instruments while they wait for their music to arrive.

Santa gave all the guitarists either electric guitars or adult acoustic guitars for Christmas.

Peter Wilkins and Gerald Butler do not have pianos at home, so they use our piano.

Kali comes on Saturdays to practice on our piano. This allows Joy to spend a few hours with me and with her grandchildren.

The piano tuner comes monthly rather than quarterly because the piano is used so much.

Sahid agreed terms with Cecil for creating and maintaining the web site for Byram's Bearings.

There is a woman in the sales department called Carol who is working with Sahid. Carol comes in on Saturdays. Sahid has a contract taxi from Doncaster to be at the Neverthorpe works for ten. Then Sahid photographs items for the web site all day. Carol and Sahid bring packed lunches.

Sahid is building a "shadow" web site that will all be brought into action on one day. Sahid has taught Carol how to make amendments to the shadow web site. Carol is adding a lot of information to the shadow site during the week.

The system is a bit expensive because it doubles as a stock control system.

Cecil decided that it was cheaper to buy the system and to migrate his existing stock onto it than to pay for his existing stock control system to be tweaked to add a sales side and a web site.

Cecil has also paid for some pretty expensive security to protect the site physically and from hacking. Every half hour the site is backed up on a dedicated remote computer based at the Neverthorpe factory.

Tohur is being successful in his judo competitions. Tohur has not lost a judo fight since the Sunday Scandal piece was published.

All credit to Tohur, he is managing to be very successful without injuring anybody.

We now have a script synopsis. All the eight children are living in two adjoining large houses, sharing bedrooms, and with some siblings around. One set of "foster carers" are two actors in their late thirties. Both "foster carers" are musical. It seems that the "husband" was in a pop group that never quite made it. The "wife" used to sing folk music. Max and Dan are the kids next door, who live with their "natural" parents. "Dad" is hardly ever around because he works long hours in a fast food restaurant. "Mum" is also working long hours in a factory so the "foster carers" are a second home for Max and Dan.

The synopsis goes that Kali Daar, Derek Donkin, Max Hewson and Sally Johnson decide to set up a folk group. Kali is on piano, Derek is on drums, Max is on guitar, and Sally is a vocalist. They all sing.

Dan Wilbey playing Max's brother, Colin Donkin as Derek's brother, Peter Wilkins and Gerald Butler decide to set up a rock band. Dan is the drummer and the other three are guitarists. Peter and Gerald can play the piano and the organ. They all sing.

One of Peter's first jokes is,

"What time is it when an elephant sits on your fence?"

"I don't know. What time is it when an elephant sits on your fence?"

"Time to build a new fence!"

The folk group play mainly folk classics, but some songs are being written specially for them. At times each child will have solos.

Max will have "Greensleeves" because Malc Dow and Phil Thee really like how Max performs it.

Derek is going to have a comic song about grown-ups written specially for him.

Sally and Kali are having a duet written for them which is a humorous song about boys.

The rock band is having songs written for them.

The theme tune for the series is played and sung by all eight children together. That is being written specially.

The music will not arrive until the end of January.

Sally is still having piano lessons. She is doing very well.

Sally is also enjoying her judo.

Charlotte listened to all the CDs that were bought for her.

Charlotte has written out a play list of what she wishes to sing on a double CD. It is mainstream Christian songs, with "I Heard Him Come" and "The Lord Loves Us" added.

Mr Driburg is happy for Sahid to be the sound engineer and for Sahid to take the photos for the cover and for the information notes.

Our piano teacher will play on the CD. It will be recorded in a proper studio in Meldon over half term. There is a lot of rehearsing for Charlotte to do between now and then.

Don is pleased that all the children are practicing their music so well. Even the children who are not part of the main eight actors are working on their instruments in hopes that they may earn a bit part.

Robert Graham is relaxed about not having been selected for the TV programme. He may come in playing the accordion or the violin in a cameo role at some point.

Mark is bringing a French lad called Marcel to the Friday evening outings. The high school girls are practicing their French. Marcel has reasonable English.

Marcel spends some days at the factory and some days being a tourist, with Irene taking him to tourism venues.

CHAPTER 28: Don Hewson

I must admit I was surprised when I learned that Mark has been told to set up Group Headquarters for Byram's Bearings. Mark is not seventeen yet.

I realise that I have been influenced by Mark's low opinion of himself. Cecil Byram clearly rates Mark more highly than Mark rates himself.

Marcel is a nice enough lad. He finds our household a bit odd, partly because it is so large. Marcel has never socialised with Muslims or Mormons before. Marcel is pleasantly surprised to find that they are ordinary people.

Marcel's other surprise is the general shortage of wine. There is no wine at the factory canteen. We Hewsons do not normally serve wine.

Irene and Marcel have wine together, but Irene rarely has more than one glass of wine at

dinner. Drinking wine with a woman old enough to be your mother is not the same!

Irene took Marcel to a supermarket. They had a wine purchasing session. Apparently wines not made in France are rarely on sale in France.

Marcel is taking his chance to sample wines he normally never sees, from countries other than France. The good lad insisted on paying for some of the wine.

Charlotte is resistant to Marcel's Gallic charm, which is good for Marcel's soul and is amusing for me.

Ali has returned to Cambridge. George misses him, but they chat over Skype.

Mark and Karen talk over Skype.

There is a crashing silence from Rebecca, which is only to be expected.

Tohur has had an email calling him for England judo trials. Some other lad has broken an arm, and so Tohur is called up.

The change in that boy is astounding. Tohur walks around with a hugely happy smile on his face. I am sure that Tohur has grown two inches in the last two days. #

He walks taller.

Tohur had Linda shave his head because Tohur wants his hair very short when he fights.

Tohur got into trouble at school over his ridiculously short hair.

Tohur told the school that his short hair is related to his fighting judo for England. Tohur offered to wear a wig at school if his hair length is really a problem.

Tohur said that in the house we have long blonde wigs and a frizzy ginger wig. Which wig would the school prefer?

Neither would be appropriate.

Tohur came home with a note saying that he has a detention after school tomorrow because of his hair and because of his insolence.

I rang the school indicating my displeasure that they are troubling Tohur. Tohur brings glory to the school as a TV chef. Tohur brings the school further glory because he now represents England at judo.

It would be terrible publicity for the school if Tohur has to switch to another school or to home tutoring because of Tryton High's lack of support for Tohur representing England at judo.

Whom do I have to see to discuss the school's hair policy?

The school decided inside an hour that they do not need to see me. The school cancelled Tohur's detention.

It is a funny thing. I have offered to go in to discuss issues at the school three or four times now. Each time they revise their policy or their practice within hours and so they do not

need to see me.

Emma says that the Don Hewson charm is so effective over the telephone that face to face interviews are usually unnecessary.

I am taking that at face value.

I suspect irony.

I go to the parents' evenings religiously. Usually the children are doing fine. It is my positive parental influence of course.

I sometimes think that the teachers feel sorry for my children.

My giving Mark early bedtimes for a week after he was attacked by four older lads was regarded as savage and monstrously unfair.

I also gave Abdullah early bedtimes for a week after he was attacked at the school.

In the first week of the current school year I gave Robert early bedtimes for three weeks and no TV for three weeks. Robert struck the first and only blow. I replaced Robert's double bed with a single bed for three weeks.

Elizabeth Mountford told me that the school values the support I give the school over disciplinary issues. I am tougher on the children than the school would be.

For instance the school decided not to punish Mark or Abdullah because they are good boys who were the victims of attacks.

So if Don Hewson challenges a disciplinary decision the school does take notice and the school considers the objection seriously.

Tohur is in his GCSE exam year. Tohur leaves the high school in June anyway. Tohur is the only child in the school who already has an A level. Up until now Tohur has an immaculate behaviour record and a close to immaculate attendance record. My threat to remove Tohur from the school was taken very seriously indeed.

The social workers Jane and Elizabeth told the school that they were not aware of the situation that has blown up, but they know that fighting for England at judo is enormously important to Tohur.

Am I an unpleasant person whom the teachers would rather not meet if they can avoid it? Surely not!

Do I have the power as a mere foster carer to remove Tohur from the school? I don't think anyone wishes to go there.

In theory the decision is not mine to make. The social workers have the legal responsibility and the legal power. If Tohur decides not to go, though, no-one would expect me to use violence to make him go. How exactly would one use physical force against a member of the England judo squad? How hard would I try to persuade Tohur if I thought Tohur was in

the right?

I said to Tohur that he may shave his head on the morning of a match. Any other head shaving or cutting needs my prior approval.

Sahid Daar is a clever lad. He has wangled to do his work experience fortnight at Byram's Bearings. He and Carol are going to finish the Byram's web site and get the web site operational.

Then over half term Sahid is going to work with Charlotte to record her CD. Charlotte is rehearsing like crazy, with Max, Gerald and Peter pressed into service as accompanists. Derek and Sally are not good enough pianists yet, so they have escaped conscription. Derek is a bit cross about Charlotte rejecting him. Derek has redoubled his piano practicing, or he would do if he could get on the piano.

Sahid has also fixed to spend a week with Mr Dow's company during the summer, helping with filming the TV series the children are in. Mr Dow says that with the wealth of talent involved the series is a sure hit.

Cecil Byram is back from China. Cecil has made contacts in the components industry in Shanghai. Cecil is now looking for premises for his import operation.

Mark has officially started his apprenticeship. He is as happy as a lark.

Cecil is happy in his new offices. It seems Mark made no major mistakes in setting up the Willerton office.

The man Kevin is a find! Kevin Hanson has become the Group Headquarters office factotum.

David is enjoying his theatre club. Rather cleverly David is contributing off-stage instead of on-stage. David is learning new skills and techniques so he is very happy. David is currently learning how to apply stage make-up.

Dennis and Amy and Abdullah made a set of commercials that were very popular. They are making another set of commercials over the Easter holidays. As all three are so young there must not be any explicit sexual element. Any sexual element is only in the mind of the viewer.

The important message is in the voice-over, which is that with the right sanitary towels a girl can have fun anytime.

An important sub-theme is the supposed rivalry between Abdullah and Dennis.

In one advertisement the lads are competing doing press-ups. Just as the lads have shown off their strength Amy does her press-ups one-handed, which shocks the lads. Amy smiles as she does her one-handed press-ups.

In another advertisement the lads climb ropes to a balcony upon which Amy stands. Both

lads having got to the balcony together, Amy takes their ropes and she slides down between the ropes. Amy makes it look easy. Amy smiles as she leaps off the balcony and slides down the ropes.

The third advertisement shows the two lads vaulting a vaulting horse. When Amy vaults the vaulting horse she stays at the top and she demonstrates several exercises, before jumping off to be caught by the lads together. Amy is smiling all the time.

Amy's superiority is demonstrated throughout.

Amy was pretty when I first met her. Amy is now beautiful. The boys are eye candy. They are two good looking very fit young men.

The advertisement series has won the advertising agency responsible several industry awards. The main person in the advertising agency is Mr Hudson.

Mr Hudson's daughter Olivia dances with Abdullah's brother Amal Daar. They are both very attractive children.

The three pairs, Diana Green and Dennis Wilkins, Amy Waters and Abdullah Daar, and Olivia Hudson and Amal Daar are all fixtures on the national ballroom dancing circuit.

Olivia and Amal are in the top three pairs for their age group. The other two pairs are in the top six pairs in their age group.

The children are personally popular in the dancing world because they are just such nice kids. Yes they are competitive, but they are pleasant with it. Their dinner table is often rocking with laughter and good humour.

Dennis helped the father of one of the rival partnerships. Dennis went out to the car park with his suitcase to find Seth Jenkinson's father angry at his car battery. Mr Jenkinson said that this was the fifth time this week that he had found the battery to be flat when he came to use the car. Mr Jenkinson was holding jump leads looking for someone to help him by bringing their car near to his. Mr Jenkinson said that it was a new battery. Mr Jenkinson was going to be very angry with his garage on Monday.

Dennis has spent some time working in a garage, and some time involved with stock car racing. Dennis studied the miscreant battery. Then he said,

"Mr Jenkinson. Would you take some advice?"

"What?"

"Do you see on the bonnet some little scorch marks?"

Mr Jenkinson looked.

"Yes."

"When you have the bonnet down, the battery is shorting out across the bonnet. If you turn the battery one hundred and eighty degrees the terminals would be lower than the bonnet

and you would stop the shorting out.

"Would you like me to do it for you?"

"You are a clever lad.

"No, I'll do it myself.

"That does make me feel stupid.

"But well done, Dennis, and thank you."

So the Jenkinsons think well of Dennis Wilkins.

Dennis and Amy and now Abdullah are all making money from the advertisements, which would normally attract jealousy. However, very few teenagers have the sheer physical strength that these three youngsters display.

Emma says that baby Kate is causing no great difficulty. Emma is pleased that she is making progress at her school now that the Head Teacher has fully embraced the tick-box culture of modern education.

Emma is completely undecided about whether to go back to work after Kate is born.

I said that the decision is entirely Emma's decision. We do not need Emma's wage, so there is no financial reason why Emma must work.

I said that if Emma wishes to do more studying, or Emma wishes to work at something other than teaching, that is fine by me.

The idea of a job other than teaching surprised Emma.

Emma has spent her life wanting to qualify as a teacher and then working as a teacher.

Emma has never thought of doing anything else. Emma is now thinking what else she might do.

CHAPTER 29: Mark Johnson

Byram's Bearings has bought a disused mill in a village near Meldon for their Chinese import operation. The village is called Clickworth.

Cecil hijacked Kevin Hanson to be Cecil's on-site Clerk of Works.

Kevin is doing quite well. Kevin can telephone Cecil on his mobile phone if there are any decisions upon which Kevin needs guidance.

The first job is to demolish all the internal buildings to clear the ground. The next task is to put up the buildings that are needed. The containers of components are actually at sea at the moment, so there is time pressure!

There was not time to obtain formal planning permission from the Council. Cecil and Kevin chatted up the planners and it is unlikely that the permission will be refused. So the buildings will be up before permission is granted.

Kevin is at the Clickworth site full time.

The new Works Manager at Neverthorpe, Garth Stead, is pleased with the training program that is in progress.

Garth thinks that the union is very sensible to be co-operative rather than obstructionist. In the spirit of co-operation Garth declared that the old guys who are due to retire this year may go on "gardening leave", on full pay, with immediate effect. They may still use the canteen. Garth agreed with myself and Bert to permit a lunch club in the canteen on Tuesday afternoons for all retired staff.

The guys with health problems are meeting with HR to see if they wish to retrain for office based sales and administration jobs at Group Headquarters. As the alternative is very likely selection for compulsory redundancy the guys have to step outside their comfort zones.

Garth says that he still needs to lose at least twenty more production workers unless orders pick up significantly. They may move to packaging and despatch in the Chinese import operation or for the internet sales operation. There will be no loss of pay, but in return they must be willing to return to production if the production side needs them.

As a short term measure Garth is happy to grant unpaid leave of absence to almost any production worker for travel or study or whatever. A few people have decided to visit their relations abroad.

George has interviewed every section leader and about a fifth of the production work force. George reports to Garth and Cecil weekly with a summary of her findings and suggestions. Now George knows what Byrams does produce and could produce George starts visiting our customers.

George is starting off with the UK based customers, but after two weeks George will visit France and Spain and Switzerland. This is to find out what the customers would like Byrams to supply.

When George visits Marcel's family factory in Toulouse she will take a supply of Yorkshire Tea® teabags for Karen. Karen will act as interpreter for the French customers. In Spain and in Switzerland the factory owners have good English.

Cecil has told George that Cecil will have other jobs for George when she returns from abroad.

The new "Byrams" web site will be up next week. When the Byrams business first set up in the 1890s they only produced bearings. Much less than one per cent of the components produced these days are bearings. The "Bearings" is being downplayed and dropped. Some of the production workers have retrained as stores and despatch workers in

readiness.

Sahid has a day off school to press the button to put up the web site. Then Sahid will link the site to E-bay® and to other sales sites. Apparently there is a process called "white-hatting" that one can use to improve a site's ratings in the search engines. Sahid has prepared for "white-hatting".

Sahid and Carol have persuaded Cecil to agree to a raft of targeted advertising on search engines. They say that it will pay for itself quickly.

I cannot decide whether Cecil or Sahid has been the more clever.

Cecil paid Sahid an hourly rate to build the site. Now Sahid will do any maintenance and updating needed that Carol cannot do. Sahid is also leading on marketing the web site.

Sahid is to be paid one quarter of one per cent of internet related sales excluding VAT.

If sales are £100,000 or less a year then Sahid earns only £250 annually for maintaining the site. Potentially Sahid could earn £2,500 a year or £25,000 or £250,000. Cecil says that "the labourer is worthy of his hire". Sahid has plenty of incentive to help the site climb the search engines.

Cecil says that current internet related sales are nil. For Sahid to earn £25,000 a year internet sales would have to increase to ten million pounds. If Sahid can do that then Sahid would be more than welcome to his high earnings.

Sahid has a strategy.

Sahid used some of his work experience time at Byrams to video the production of various components. Each week Sahid will put up a film on YouTube to publicise Byrams and to build links to the Byrams site.

At Easter Sahid will be working on more TV programmes and segments for David and Tohur and Robert. Sahid is earning very good money for a teenager still at school.

Tohur goes to Germany next week to fight in a tournament. He is very excited.

I have warned Tohur that he is still a target for the media and that he must be extra careful even when abroad.

Linda's drug dealer kidnapper has at last been sentenced. He decided to plead guilty in hopes of reducing his sentence. He was sentenced to sixteen years for attempt kidnap, possession of drugs with intent to supply, possession of an unlicensed firearm, and a suspended sentence that was hanging over him was triggered. He will serve only eight years if he behaves himself inside.

Mr Wilkins will be released in March on an electronic tag, and after another six months his tag will be removed. The Wilkins are very excited at the prospect of having their father back.

The music the children are to learn for the TV programme has arrived.

In three weeks' time the Music Director of the programme arrives. The children are working to be perfect when he arrives. He will be visiting weekly for the foreseeable future.

The piano teacher was supposed to be recording with Charlotte over half term. He has had to give back word because of family issues.

Charlotte has decided to use Peter Wilkins, Gerald Butler, and Max on the recording because they are all three experienced in accompanying her.

The three lads are splitting the fee the piano teacher would have earned, so they are well pleased.

I am really enjoying the apprenticeship at Byrams

The guys know I am a manager, so they only played one of the tricks on me that they usually play on apprentices.

I was sent to the stores for "a long stand". I told the storekeeper what I had come for. He told me to step against the wall so as not to block his counter. Then he disappeared.

I was stood for quite a while.

I was getting bored.

After a while the storekeeper came back.

"Was that stand long enough for you?"

I stared at him for a moment and then I burst out laughing.

"Yes, thanks."

"Tell you what. They don't know exactly how stupid I am. I could be stupid enough to stand here for an hour."

"Yes."

"I'll go to the canteen and scrounge a hot drink. Then I will go back to Matt."

Matt is the guy I work with most. It was Matt who sent me for the long stand.

In the canteen Bert is doing fine. The team is working like a long established well oiled unit.

I am the catering manager, but I have very little to do.

Matt recognises that I have read all the books for the apprenticeship course. I start a day release course in September. I will turn eighteen the following May and shortly after that I will have leave of absence for two years to go to be a missionary.

Matt says that by the time I go on missionary service I will have been trained as well as he can train me. Then when I return I just have to mark time until my apprenticeship expires.

I will have another year of day release, but that will all be teaching me stuff I already know.

The reason is that many employers do not have the range of machinery that Byrams has,

so their apprentices do not have “hands on” experience of some processes unless they do them at college. For me it will be more like revision and polishing.

Towards the end of my apprenticeship I will produce my “apprentice piece” that demonstrates my skills. Most places do not bother with the “apprentice piece” now but Byrams maintains the tradition.

We have some machines that are not currently in use. Matt is teaching me how to maintain them. Then as each machine is serviced it goes back into production and another similar machine is freed up for servicing. Matt explained that the alternative is to maintain machines at night and at weekends.

It is shameful at Byrams to have a machine break down because it was not properly maintained. It can also be damaging to your job prospects as a fitter if it keeps happening. Some machinery is unique in the factory. For those machines Matt has to negotiate maintenance timings with the management.

Matt is teaching me to make machine parts. I come in some mornings and Matt gives me a damaged part. Matt explains what the part is, shows me the damage on the part, and Matt tells me to make a replacement part.

About the fourth time Matt did this I queried how the damage had happened. Presumably the damage was caused by another part. So does that other part need repair, too?

Matt laughed.

Then Matt gave me the other part, which was in his other pocket. Once I could see how the damage was occurring I made replacement parts that would not damage each other.

I am very happy working as an apprentice at Byrams.

I help Matt to maintain the foundry. The foundry makes nuts and bolts and threaded rod. It also makes the rods from which we make ball bearings. The Chinese manufacture these things so cheap that we make virtually no profit on producing these components.

Cecil says that he is blessed (not the rude word Cecil actually used) if he is going to lose the capacity to make these components. So once a month the foundry runs for one hundred hours continuously, in eight hour shifts. During that time we make enough of each size of nut, bolt, and rod to meet our and our customers’ needs.

The unsocial hours work goes to men who wish to earn some overtime. This is usually the only overtime on offer at Byrams, so there is no difficulty manning the two extra shifts.

Matt has me on twelve hour night shifts as maintenance man. Matt takes the twelve hour days. The continuous run is because it is cheaper to keep the foundry hot for one hundred hours than to heat it up each morning.

Matt and I mothball the foundry at the end of each run.

Shortly before the run begins we remove the mothballing and we do a routine maintenance.

As part of my training Matt had me pull the foundry apart at a quiet time, clean and maintain it, and put it back together.

If Matt were off sick I could do anything that the foundry needs. I could run the foundry. Karen says that I am greatly honoured. Matt treats the foundry like it is his own baby. He normally does not allow his apprentices anywhere near it. There are only two other apprentices in the last ten years who have been given the same training. As they have both left Matt has been working 24 hour maintenance shifts, sleeping on a camp bed at night.

Matt is not giving me this training to suck up to a future manager.

It is because Matt trusts me.

I have done well to earn Matt's respect.

I visit the canteen every day, but hardly ever do I enter the kitchen. Engineer's oil should not be taken into a kitchen.

I have a weekly meeting with Bert, where we go over the daily profit calculations and we plan for future events. If things go as they should I will reduce the meetings to monthly in April.

I am enjoying the management meetings.

I am impressed that the union is being so reasonable. The union is not happy about redundancies.

Cecil would have carried the men without redundancies but Garth insists. Garth says that guys without enough work to do get in the way of guys who do have work to do.

A factory with idle hands becomes a rumour mill and an unhappy place. If everybody is busy the place is much happier.

So Garth wants the unwanted workers away from his site.

The spare guys are over at Willerton being trained in assembling and packing components. Some are being trained in telephone sales. They are not formally redundant because Cecil is hoping the internet and the Chinese sales will rescue the situation within a reasonable time frame.

Bert runs a car over to Willerton with food for the workers there.

The union is accepting all this because the alternative is to trigger a formal redundancy situation.

I have to say that the factory is running much better for reducing the number of people working here. We all know that we are needed. The recent training means that there are

lots of people able to work any machine that we need. If somebody is off sick we do not now lose production.

Maintenance is a lot easier because there are fewer machines in use. Matt trusts me now to do jobs, and Matt does not check my work if it is a job that I have done before. That puts a real responsibility on me.

The web site is producing a significant volume of orders already. The targeted advertising that Cecil paid for has generated many times its cost in orders already. Cecil has agreed that Sahid may step up the targeted advertising.

George's tour of the largest customers generated extra sales immediately, because the customers told George what they were paying for components that they were buying elsewhere. Byrams is able to supply large quantities at lower prices and still make a profit. George also came back with requests for components that Byrams does not make but which Byrams can make easily. Those are now in production and of course they are generating profit.

The ship from China arrives next week. The Clickworth depot is ready to receive the containers. The Chinese sales launch is ready and it will happen three days after the goods arrive.

George is now researching the next thirty largest customers before she visits them.

Mike Appleyard the Sales Manager has trained about fifteen guys to telephone potential customers. Our sales people are not the minimum wage ignorant young people one would expect to make such sales calls. They are all time served experienced technical guys who know a calliper from a jubilee clip. They are all over thirty. They convey competence and knowledge.

They understand Byrams products and they understand components users. They refer to the illustrated web site and they have it open in front of them.

The sales guys explain that Byrams gives discounts for quantity. They explain that Byrams will allow the quantity discount even if the initial order is spread over a longer period such as a year. Byrams really does want long term relationships with its customers.

The "hit" rate from these telephone calls is only one in ten, which apparently is incredibly good. The one hit in ten generates orders. One guy sold half a million pounds in a day! The sales team are very happy. They can see that they are contributing to the Byrams resurgence. There is no "us and them" mentality between sales and production because until very recently they were the same people.

Don Hewson had a visit from the tax man. Don was twitchy as heck for about three days before the tax person arrived. The tax man told Don that part of the general wear on

carpets and furniture should be set off against Don's taxable income as a foster carer. Don has never claimed this in his calculations. Don has documentary evidence to verify that he has replaced carpets and furniture.

Although Don claims for the people he has helping with the children, a share of the gardener's wage should also be claimed. Only five of the twenty people living in the house are Hewsons, so three quarters of the wear and tear and three quarters of the gardener's wage may be set against taxable income. Don will have a tax refund shortly.

The tax man was pleased that the trust accounts for the children are in such good order. There are no problems at all.

Charlotte recorded her music over half term. The accompanists (Gerald, Max, and Peter) were utterly perfect.

Charlotte got a bit tired during the recording until Sahid told her to sleep on a cot bed in an empty room for two hours between the morning recording session and the afternoon recording session.

Sahid has taken some wonderful photographs.

The three boys all have longer hair than usual. In the photos taken during recording the boys are wearing trousers and pastel shirts with ruffles and bow ties. In Sahid's photos the boys look beautiful.

Charlotte is beautiful anyway.

During the recording Charlotte is wearing a white silk dress similar to the cream dress she wore when recording "The Lord Loves Us" and "I Heard Him Come". Charlotte has grown a bit in the last five months so she needed a new dress.

Charlotte had two new white dresses made in case of accident.

With Sahid's lighting and photography Charlotte looks like an angel.

Charlotte's cream dress is going to a charity auction. It has only been worn four times but Charlotte has outgrown it.

A few years ago the Hewson Choir selected the Save The Children Fund to raise money for, so any money raised by the children usually goes to that charity.

The two accompanists who were not performing with Charlotte on each day have been practicing music for the TV programme because the weekend after half term the TV series Music Director is going to visit. All the performers want to be perfect before he arrives.

I reckon they are pretty good now.

Ali reports from Cambridge that he had a standing ovation at the end of his speech.

Standing ovations are very rare at the Cambridge Union Society. No-one can think of another student speaker who has earned a standing ovation.

Ali is enormously happy.

After Ali's first year exams and before Ali starts working for the airline Ali will have simulator training on an Apache helicopter. If Ali does well enough on the simulator training he will train with a helicopter squadron in the first term of his second year. Ali is in clover.

George is transformed. When I first met George she was just a gorgeous student.

George now dresses like a negotiator in stern black suits. The suits cannot disguise that George is gorgeous but they do make George look like a serious business person.

After only a month of visiting clients George has brought in more than five million pounds in orders. Cecil has increased George's pay from the £22,000 a year I negotiated for her to £40,000 plus car. Cecil says that he would like George not to return to Cambridge.

Cecil says that if George maintains five million pounds a month in orders for six months

Cecil will be happy to double her wage again. Mike the Sales Manager does not earn £80,000 a year himself but he says that he supports George being paid properly because George brings in so much business.

George says that people go to Cambridge so that they can earn a good wage afterwards.

George is earning a good wage now. George is seriously thinking about not going back to Cambridge University.

Mike Appleyard is riding a wave of sales.

Internet sales are running at three quarters of a million pounds a month and rising. This is partly because the Byram's site is very high in the search engine rankings. Sahid and Carol's budget for targeted advertising has been increased yet again.

Some of the spare production staff work in order picking, packaging, and despatch. If they are called back to work in production we will have to hire more staff to replace them. The new staff would be minimum wage staff so the internet operation would become even more profitable.

Cecil keeps chortling because Internet customers expect to pay for postage or delivery charges. We make a slight profit on packaging and delivery. This is a profit centre that Byram's has never had before. The internet sales are profitable despite the smaller volumes of the individual orders.

Cecil could reduce prices further but he says that he is not convinced there would be enough additional sales to offset the loss in profits. Cecil is prepared in principle to drop prices if that is the best thing to do.

It was fairly easy to identify that people who buy fifty bolts usually need fifty nuts and either no washers, fifty washers, or a hundred washers. Or they need repair washers. The online shop allows customers to purchase exactly what they need. Our pickers weigh the

numbers needed. The weights are adjusted to give the customer one extra bolt on an order of fifty, one extra washer on fifty, and so forth. Our customer satisfaction ratings are terrific.

Internet customers may buy anything that Byram's produce. Part of Carol's job is to look at what customers are buying and then to think how to package complementary products together.

We make hinges and we make screws, so it is not difficult to package them together.

Nuts and bolts and washers is a pretty obvious combination. With hindsight so are drill bits and lengths of threaded rod and spanners and spanner sets and socket sets and drills.

Where do you stop?

That is discussed on a case by case basis between Carol, Mike, and sometimes Garth.

I suggested to Garth and Cecil that with the increased volume of business we now give to the courier we should ask the courier for a rebate or some other incentive to prevent us looking for another courier.

The courier now gives us 3% of the fees we pay it. Cecil and Garth are very pleased with me for coming up with that idea.

Carol never thought of becoming a student. Carol is well over twenty-five so she counts as a mature student. Carol does not need to obtain any qualifications for university entry. In September Carol will begin a part time degree in Marketing.

Cecil has loaned Carol the Marketing textbooks that Cecil bought for his course.

Byram's is paying Carol's course fees and Byram's is giving Carol Day Release to study.

The Chinese goods have created opportunities that Cecil and I and Mike had never imagined.

Cecil had just intended to import standard components and to sell them at a modest profit.

The Chinese components are in our warehouse ready for immediate delivery. Customers who used to order components from China may instead have them delivered tomorrow from Yorkshire. Instead of having large amounts of their own money tied up in components in containers at sea they may conserve their cash and simply order components from Byrams in the quantities that they find convenient. They avoid having to pay rental on containers.

This all reduces their capital employed so it makes their return on capital employed much healthier. It also eases their cash-flow.

The customers may have a quantity discount if they order an entire container load of components for delivery and payment at weekly or monthly intervals or as they need to draw down. They conserve their cash.

We have our profit and our steady orders.

Once the customers have had the convenience of being supplied by Byrams they are unlikely to go back to direct importation again.

There are no long-term contracts for the Chinese goods because Cecil will not have them. Cecil refuses to be reliant on foreign component makers.

With some customers the container goes straight to their yard like it used to do, and the container sits there for the customer to remove components as it wishes. Kevin visits the containers once a month to make a physical stock-take. Then Byram's bills the customers for what they have removed since Kevin's last visit.

We have no transport costs, no packaging costs, no security costs or space usage costs.

We own the physical container so we have no rental costs. Apart from Kevin's monthly visit we have no personnel costs.

We own the contents of the container so Kevin may raid a container if we have a surge of orders.

Kevin has the day to day running of the Clickworth Chinese stock depot because he fell into it. There is only Kevin, and a forklift truck driver Karl who doubles as store-man. The orders are taken at Group Headquarters in Willerton.

I asked Cecil why it is profitable for Byrams to own containers and to hold huge stocks of components. If it isn't profitable for our customers how is it profitable for Byrams?

"If you are paying fourteen per cent interest to the bank to fund a million pounds of components that are just sitting there until you need them, that is one hundred and forty thousand pounds each year of lost profit.

"If you can find someone else to hold the stocks you need, you don't mind if he makes a profit provided that his profits cost you less than one hundred and forty thousand pounds a year.

"Byram's generates millions of pounds of cash each year. If I put the cash in the bank the bank would pay me a joke level of interest.

"If I were take the cash as income I would be taxed at the highest rate of income tax. If I hold the cash in the company I still get taxed.

"I have to lose the cash before financial year end to avoid being taxed on it.

"Sticking the money into stockpiles does not earn me any money at the moment, but it avoids tax. It prepares for the Plan A scenario. Putting the money into components from China where I earn five per cent gross eight times a year is very acceptable.

"The joke is that I am earning forty per cent gross on money that would otherwise go to the taxman. That makes it even sweeter.

"I have to make sure I have enough stocks on land to meet all current commitments, which at our present rate of growth is a challenge. Including the stocks that are at sea we are comfortable, but I would be much happier if we had enough stock on dry land.

"I would be even happier if we had stocks of Chinese components for Plan A."

The Chinese component customers tend now to buy other goods from Byrams to take advantage of Byram's quantity discounts. All additional sales are welcome. We make profit on all sales.

Cecil now employs a number cruncher called Daniel. Daniel Mason has qualified as a Costs Accountant, but Daniel is not part of the Finance Department.

Cecil uses Daniel as an analyst, working out how much profit we make on each product, on each line of products, on each machine, in each department, and from each worker.

Daniel is currently analysing metal usage across Byram's with a view to rebalancing the metals stockpiles.

Cecil's industrial research company produced a list of two hundred companies that import components from China. They were ranked according to the volume of materials imported in the last six months. Our best telephone salesman was put onto telephoning the two hundred companies. The companies all have current contractual commitments but twenty companies have decided to switch to us for at least some of their Chinese imports. This will happen gradually over the next two years.

From an initial order of five containers Byrams already has eighty containers at sea at any one time. There are another eighty containers at sea going back to China of course.

Sometimes they are leased out to companies who need to ship goods to China.

The sea journey from China is five weeks so there are sixteen containers arriving each week on average. Half the containers are delivered direct to our customers' premises.

Karl our forklift driver could empty three containers a day easily. He could set out and load the same volume of goods for the carriers to take away to customers. Everything from China moves on pallets.

The Chinese depot has lots of spare capacity at the moment. Karl spends a lot of time just tidying, and drinking tea. Kevin is away two days a week now visiting containers on customers' premises.

Another prefabricated storage shed will be built next week.

At the current rate of growth, and with the signed orders from the twenty current importers the Chinese operation will outgrow its present site within the year.

Within two years Byrams will have more than eighteen hundred containers at sea at any one time.

And Cecil still does not have even the beginnings of a stock pile for the Chinese components!

Cecil is looking for premises for the Chinese operation to move to. He is also looking for premises for a stockpile.

Cecil has advertised for a manager for the Chinese operation because it is growing incredibly fast. Good managers usually take time to recruit and then they often have to give three months notice to their present employer. Kevin and Karl are under-employed at the moment. That will soon change.

Cecil needs to be ready for all this growth.

Cecil is very grateful to me for suggesting the China operation.

It is not appropriate to consider me for the China manager job because I will be going away for two years as a missionary. Much as Cecil likes me you do not usually put a sixteen year old young man in charge of an operation likely soon to be turning over hundreds of millions of pounds each year.

The assistant manager Barney Stoker concentrates on the internet operation and packaging and despatch. And catering and cleaning and everything else that is not directly production oriented.

Barney sits in on my meetings with Bert, in readiness to substitute for me when I go off on missionary service.

Every part of the Byrams operation is working sweetly. We have more qualified forklift truck drivers than we need. We have more forklift trucks than we need. All the production machines have several people who can operate them.

The spectre of redundancies and short time has gone .We still have a few machines that are not in use. People who can operate those machines are working in sales and in despatch. They can move back to the production side if they are needed.

Mike says that these guys are good at what they now do. Mike would prefer for Garth to employ new production workers instead of recalling these workers to production.

Mike says that because of the recession there are skilled production workers who could be effective producers within an hour of starting work. The guys we have working in telephone sales are much harder to replace because of the amount of training any replacements would need.

Cecil was away for the next regular meeting. When Garth told the union that we intend to employ more production workers they were all smiles. Garth explained that we now have two hundred and forty active production workers.

“We need to expand a bit.”

“The guys who are polishing their arses in telephone sales are there because they are not fit to work in production all day. I can’t really use them.”

The men nodded.

“I want to pull the fit production workers who were transferred to picking and packing back to production work.”

Mike and Barney say the men are a good team. They do not want me to break it up.”

Mike and Barney nodded in agreement.

“I am intending to advertise for sixteen experienced production workers to start immediately or within a month. I am looking for experience, a work ethic, a willingness to be flexible, and willingness to have further training.”

The union men were pleased.

Garth may come over as a bit harsh at times, but he is very good at what he does.

I think that in some ways the men prefer Garth to Cecil who was just trying to do too much.

Cecil had spread himself too thin to be effective at anything.

Cecil is also a bit too nice, which is a handicap for a manager.

“Cecil wants to set up an arrangement where experienced production workers from other countries may come to Byrams for three months to gain experience of how we do things. They will be lodged locally. Any staff who can offer lodgings or who can suggest lodgings will have the chance to do so. Generally these will be men in their thirties rather than youngsters.”

“The idea behind it is to cement relations with existing customers.”

“We will get some work out of these guys, but it will be sporadic as and when they are here.”

“Some of our staff may be sent abroad on an exchange. We will ask for volunteers as and when.”

“It is the same idea that is behind the steady trail of factory owners’ sons that Cecil has been bringing into the factory these last twenty or so years. Young Marcel who is with us at the moment is the son of Pierre who came to us when he was the same age.”

“We have had that company as a customer since 1967. Hopefully if Marcel has a good experience here we may have another forty years of orders from his family company.”

The men nodded.

“I intend to start ten apprentices in September.”

The men were really pleased with this. A business that stops taking on apprentices has stopped investing in the future. Taking on more apprentices than in the past is an affirmation by management that the business has a bright future.

“One important issue. Five places are reserved for girls.”

The men were very surprised. If Garth had said “kangaroos” rather than “girls” I don’t think the men could have been more surprised.

“Engineering these days requires brain rather than brawn. We can’t justify not taking girls and women who are capable of doing the job. So we have decided to step forward before we are pushed.”

The men were surprised but they saw the point.

“Some of the language and attitudes on the shop floor are still the culture of the nineteen fifties. That is not acceptable now and it is not acceptable in the future.”

“I don’t think any of you shop stewards wish to defend men who molest young women.”

“Or to defend men who molest young female union members.”

Garth waited until each man nodded.

It took a while, but each man nodded.

“I will work with you between now and September to create an atmosphere where your daughter or my daughter may come to work in a non-sexist atmosphere.”

“Let me say that this is the future. There will be more women working here, and we must have an atmosphere where everyone is respected and everyone is encouraged to do their best.”

“I am expecting to sack at least five guys for gross misconduct towards the girls. It is a harsh way to educate people but it has to be done.”

“I do not want any of you to say to me that a man did not understand that the rules have changed.”

The men took Garth’s point.

“It is not because women are cheaper. There is a lot of discussion about whether men or women are cheaper employees. There is no clear evidence either way. With equal pay laws and a vigilant union I am pretty sure that will not be an issue here.”

“We just cannot justify a situation where there are more than two hundred men working in a workplace and there are virtually no women. This is the twenty-first century.”

“A lot of you are in jobs where you never break into a sweat.”

“Unfortunately.”

The men laughed. Garth’s concern that workmen rarely break into a sweat is well known.

“So if a man can work all day and not even break into a sweat it is nonsense to say that a woman is not physically capable of doing the same job for the same money.

“And if she has any sense she will join the union.”

The men nodded.

“Now, Friday twenty-seventh September.”

The men were interested.

“Doncaster Races.”

The men were amazed. Byrams just does not do firm outings.

“Cecil says that to celebrate getting through this year without compulsory redundancies or short time the whole company is going to the races on twenty-seventh September.”

The men were pleased.

“Coaches will leave here at eleven. Employees may bring one adult guest. Cecil is closing the factory and everyone will be paid whether they go to Doncaster Races or not.”

“Retired staff are welcome, too. With guests.”

“Cecil will pay towards two lunches at the Races. Cecil says he cannot afford to pay for your drinks so you will have to fund your drinks yourselves.”