

DON HEWSON'S CHILDREN TRAVEL

Charles James

The fifth book in the Don Hewson series

Chapter 1: Linda Donkin

My brother Derek is bringing girls home from the High School.

Derek thinks that the girls are just friends but at least one of the girls is completely smitten with Derek. Derek does not realise how attractive he is.

I talked with Emma about Derek.

We decided to leave Derek innocent for now. Derek has just turned twelve so Derek's innocence will not last much longer.

My younger brother Colin has a mate called Eric who is very shy.

Max Hewson and Colin and Eric used to be at the same class at Tryton Junior School before Max went to the Cathedral Choir School.

When Eric saw me roll Max on the carpet and tickle him Eric nearly wet himself with laughter.

I told Eric that if Eric is cheeky I will do the same to him. But if Eric isn't cheeky I won't.

I could see Eric thinking about whether he dared to be cheeky and deciding not to risk it. I hugged Eric anyway. The poor lad was embarrassed.

Eric comes to the bowling on Friday night and sometimes Eric stays over. There is a spare bed in Derek and Colin's room.

Rebecca's room is not occupied at the moment.

Max has a room to himself. Damien will move from Alice's room to Max soon.

Then Arthur is going to join Alice to free up Mr and Mrs Hewson's bedroom for the new baby when she comes.

Derek was cross that he was not selected to be an accompanist for Charlotte Johnson.

Gerald Butler and Peter Wilkins and Max have at least a year more experience on the piano than Derek.

I said to Derek that I am going to try to do some singing outside the house. Derek is working with me on two play-lists of music. One is the kind of singing I can do in front of the Mormons or my elderly aunt if I had one. The other is what Malc Dow said was “after the watershed” raunchy nightclub music.

The TV program Director of Music is coming soon.

Derek has learned drumming for the TV program and Derek is on top of that. Derek also has a song that is very funny. It is about how grown-ups don't listen. Derek will demonstrate that he is now very good on the piano, with me as singer. I have another chance to be noticed.

Colin is doing really well on the piano now. His guitar playing is great. Colin was a good singer anyway but Don arranged singing lessons for him.

Colin's trombone playing is not good enough yet. Nor is my guitar playing or my euphonium playing.

My euphonium teacher is Colin's trombone teacher. The teacher says that we need to play with a brass band.

He says we are technically competent. Now we need to be stretched. Nothing will stretch us faster than actually playing in public.

I can believe that!

The teacher says there are four brass bands within half an hour's journey from Tryton. All of them would like a euphonium player. One of them is desperate for a trombonist. The teacher suggested we should go to see each band perform and then decide our order of preference.

Emma Hewson is very happy to be pregnant. She says that this child is the last. Emma is slowing down a bit.

We all help Emma.

My Mum has moved out of hospital. She has a one bedroom flat in a reasonable area of Meldon. Mum still goes to the hospital every day but she is free at the weekends and in the evenings.

We all go to see Mum twice a week.

Don gives us an early supper straight after school and then social services takes us to see Mum.

On Sunday afternoons we go to see Mum, too. We take biscuits for snacks because Mum is poor and she is not very well organised.

I do a bit of cleaning every time I visit Mum just to keep her head above water.

Nobody can say when Mum will be fit to take some of us or all of us. I do not think it will be any time this year.

Derek is still doing his wood carving and his golf.

George Aaron moved out of the Hewsons' house.

George is a beautiful woman with a very good wage and a company car.

George is hoping for another pay rise this summer.

I am not sure how George and Ali Miah are getting on.

George says that although she is asked out on dates two or three times a week she hardly ever goes out on a date.

So George does go out on dates!

Ali is beginning to look like a fallback or a second string.

I think George is just too mature for Ali.

There are girls who would kill to be going out with Ali Miah.

I would.

Amina Daar and Shahida Daar both fancy him.

Andrea Wilkins still likes Ali.

I am sure there are girls in Cambridge who (whom?) I do not know about.

I do not have a hope with Ali.

George is very bright and absolutely gorgeous. I am neither.

I have a good bust and I am fairly pretty but I am not in the same league as George.

When you have lived with the real fear of being raped for two years and then that fear is removed you do not rush out straight away looking for relationships.

I will find a lad sometime.

Tohur Miah is enjoying fighting judo for England. Every weekend Tohur is away training or competing.

Tohur is very relaxed about his GCSE exams in a few months time. He says that he will do well enough without busting a gut, so why fret?

Tohur had some tutoring this academic year, so Tohur will do well enough.

Tohur's catering course at Meldon College is arranged, so Tohur sees no problem.

Dennis Wilkins has stopped dancing to concentrate on his exams and Nigel Williams has stopped working at the Tryton Hotel until after the exams.

Dennis has a tutor to coach him for the exams.

Peter Wilkins has a tutor for Latin and French because the choir school is worried about his progress. Peter is the youngest child in his age group at the school and he struggles a bit.

Max is only a week older but Max is doing fine at the school.

All four of the brass bands Colin and I might join are competing at Huddersfield Town Hall next Saturday. Don Hewson is taking us.

Then on Sunday the Music Director for the TV program comes.

Charlotte is very happy with the CD that Sahid has prepared. It is tremendously good.

Mr Driburg the family's agent says that he will market the CD and Charlotte starting in September for the Christmas sales season.

Charlotte will have a singing appearance with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir in October. There will be American chat show appearances.

In November Charlotte sings at a charity gala in London where her cream satin dress will be auctioned. The white satin dress that Charlotte wore when filming the CD will be auctioned, too. There are chat show appearances scheduled.

In December Charlotte will be in a Christmas Special for "The Terrible Tykes". "Terrible Tykes" is the provisional name for the TV series that many of our household will be in. The "Tykes" will have their own CD out but there is room for both CDs to be promoted.

The "Terrible Tykes" Christmas Special is being recorded in October.

"Tyke" is a word for a Yorkshire person, particularly a Yorkshire child.

There will also be magazine articles in as many publications as Mr Driburg can arrange.

There will be one article and photo-shoot that will be syndicated across all the Mormon publications. This will concentrate on Charlotte's character and the interplay between her Mormon faith and her musical career. It will be a wide ranging article covering tithing, lads, school, being an orphan, being in care, her big sister on missionary service and so forth.

The Mormons will get the best piece.

Other pieces will appear in the music magazines and the religious magazines.

Mr Driburg is trying for the girls' comics and the glossy gossip magazines.

We all know that Robert Graham is trying to exercise his way to being able to walk normally. Mr Driburg has arranged for a documentary TV program to visit every two months and to film Robert.

Robert's story could be an inspiration to thousands of paraplegic children. If Robert is successful the documentary could change many other lives as well. Robert is well behaved at school and he does all right.

Robert is obsessive about exercise and he is obsessive about cooking. Robert is always experimenting with cakes and biscuits and meat pies. In fact anything he can bake.

Robert will be filming over Easter, so Robert is trying to work out what people will wish to cook and eat between Easter and the summer holidays. Puddings of course, but not every session!

Robert says that it will be too warm for casseroles but too cold for salads.

Robert has been practicing a few cold roasts with hot vegetables. Robert can't teach all that in eight or ten minutes but he can break down a meal into sections and teach each section.

Robert will be fully planned before Easter.

I don't think that the cold roasts is Robert's best idea. It is up to Robert. I am sure that David and Tohur will have good ideas for Robert. I suggested syllabub and soufflé surprise (Baked Alaska).

Tohur is looking forward to the next bout of cooking for his show.

Tohur showed me his draft schedule and it all looks so appetising! Tohur has to fit his filming in around his judo.

Sahid had a session with his careers teacher at school. Sahid gave the careers teacher an up to date CV.

Sahid told the teacher that Sahid earned four thousand pounds for building the Byram's web site. Sahid is earning very good money for maintaining, upgrading, and other work on the Byrams web site. As things are going Sahid expects to be earning more than thirty thousand a year by Christmas just from Byrams. Sahid earns over a thousand pounds a week for his work on three cookery programs which are now filmed four times a year, so that is another eight or nine thousand pounds a year.

Sahid has just produced Charlotte Johnson's double CD which will be released in September. Sahid was not paid. Sahid is on a miniscule profit share.

Sahid says that if Charlotte earns three million pounds from the CD then Sahid's earnings will be "only" seventy-five thousand pounds from about ten days work.

Sahid told his careers teacher that Sahid has already found his career path.

What does the careers teacher suggest Sahid should do next?

Sahid attends a tough inner city high school. Normally the careers teacher is trying to motivate the children to think about having careers rather than just drifting in life.

The careers teacher rarely has a child who at fifteen is already carving out a career. He does not normally have a child who already earns much more than the teacher.

The careers teacher said that he would do some research and then he would get back to Sahid.

We went to see the brass band competition. It was really good!

Colin is completely naive. Colin thought that we were just listening to the quality of the musicianship.

I was looking at that of course, but I had other thoughts.

The Tryton Silver Brass Band is probably the best band musically. All of the players are older than my Mum! The Willerton Brass Band has about a quarter of its members under twenty-five. No contest for me!

Now I have to persuade Colin to choose Willerton.

The TV program Music Director is an old man, almost as old as Don.

Carlo Stewart has a really lived in face. Carlo looks like he partied hard for thirty years or so.

Carlo really knows about music. He was a session musician in London and in New York. Carlo has worked on the musical side of films in Hollywood and in England.

Carlo says the TV series is about characters and children and interactions between the characters. It could be based around a farm or a circus or a street in Luton or a school. This series is based around music, but it is the characters of the kids that will carry the show.

A high level of musical ability is necessary but musical ability would not be enough on its own. Our kids have personality by the bucket load, which is also what the program needs.

Carlo liked what he saw when he viewed the film of our family concert. When the children unexpectedly all began dancing the polka the adults viewing the film burst out cheering.

Carlo heard the children perform the music they had been sent. Carlo had given advance warning that they should play without the sheet music. They could all do fine without the sheet music.

Carlo was entirely happy.

Carlo says that the musicianship is fine. Carlo says that the next step is showmanship. He wants to see smiles and lively facial expressions while the children are playing.

Carlo brought five large mirrors and stands from his car. The children no longer need the sheet music so instead they should smile into the mirrors all the time. Other expressions are fine, but Carlo wants the children to be conscious of how they look.

Carlo said that he had seen me sing on the film.

Carlo watched me play the euphonium. He watched Colin play the trombone.

Carlo saw all the children play instruments if he had not seen them on the recording of the family concert. Then Carlo left us.

I know that Max is supposedly the babe magnet but I think Max will have terrific competition from Derek.

All the boys are good looking. With their longer hair quite a few of the boys are pretty.

Kali and Sally are pretty.

Fulesa Miah and my sister Georgina and Margaret Graham are hovering on the edges hoping to be brought in. They are all having singing lessons. So is Andrew Johnson. Andrew is learning the guitar.

Freda Graham is not interested. Freda sings with the rest of us and she is learning the guitar but Freda is not that interested in music. She would rather draw.

Freda has drawn all of us a few times. I was looking through Freda's current sketch book when I saw Jacob Grundy.

Jacob is in Tohur's year.

Jacob has never been to the house.

I didn't know that Freda knows Jacob at all.

From the drawing Freda has seen more of Jacob than is generally on view. Or perhaps Freda has a good imagination.

Really that is Freda's business. Good luck to her!

I am interested in finding a young man. I am older than Tohur. I am not interested in any of the lads in that year group. I am more interested in Mark and Abdullah's year group, or older.

After my Mum's emotional disasters I am going to be pretty choosy. Emma says there are so many toads out there but very few princes.

Charlotte is just waiting until she turns sixteen, which is almost a year yet. Then Charlotte is going to take John TAaron out on a date. I think Charlotte's plans for that date include a dark cinema. Angelic Miss Pure definitely has a less angelic side.

Charlotte will have to be quick though because John turns eighteen a couple of months after Charlotte turns sixteen. Soon after that John will be off on his Mormon missionary service.

We have some good parties here. There is no booze because of the Mormons and the Muslims but the music is good and the food is always fantastic.

Tohur Miah is terrific at marinating pieces of chicken, lamb, beef and fish.

Mark Johnson is a wonderful baker.

Charlotte Johnson does those cheesecakes and other desserts.

Freda Graham is now a bit of an expert around salads.

My roasts are terrific. So are my soups and casseroles.

Robert Graham found a recipe for a punch that has no alcohol but is a sit up and beg knock-out attractive drink.

With Don's permission I experimented. Don was really nice and he bought strange drinks like Grenadine and Angostura bitters as well as vodka and brandy and vermouth to try in the experiments. Don also bought himself a book of cocktail recipes that Don immediately loaned to me.

Robert's punch is even better with vodka and White Martini®.

I mixed the drink at the Tryton Hotel for the Head Chef and for the General Manager. They really liked it.

I am too young to work with alcohol, but the Tryton Hotel Romantic Punch is my invention.

School is fine. I can't wait to leave.

The school leaving age was recently increased to seventeen so I can't leave until next summer anyway.

Don and Emma and our family social worker Andy Haines have all said that without qualifications beyond GCSE I will spend my life in badly paid jobs.

I expect I will do a catering course because I can already cook pretty well.

There is nothing much else I can do.

I think Mark Johnson and Karen Byram are drifting apart. Mark and Karen used to speak on Skype virtually every night. It is down to twice weekly now.

Mark is not looking for anyone else.

Marcel is a nice enough lad. He is interested in Charlotte but Charlotte is not interested.

Charlotte is not playing hard to get, she just is not interested in Marcel.

Marcel is about six months older than me. There is nothing wrong with Marcel. I am just not interested, either. Our romantic disinterest is mutual.

We do have some fun bowling on Fridays.

My French is better from my conversations with Marcel.

Carlo Stewart came back. He moved and he adjusted the mirrors so they are placed exactly where the TV cameras will be placed during filming.

Carlo warned all the children that there will be close-ups.

Carlo wants to see naughty twinkles in their eyes!

Even Kali Daar who is cast as the bossy child has to have twinkles, because Kali's character is going to have a romantic edge to her.

Kali looked a bit apprehensive. Kali is a good Muslim girl.

"Kali. You are an actor.

"Relax!

"This is children's TV!

"It doesn't get beyond longing looks, hand holding, and maybe a light kiss."

Kali relaxed.

As Carlo left he handed out the scripts for the pilot program. Carlo says that next Saturday there will be a read through.

On the Saturday after that the children must know their lines because the adult actors are coming for a read through.

On the Saturday after that there will be a dress rehearsal. Then on Tuesday and Wednesday there will be filming.

Time costs money, so the children are asked to be perfect musical performers and perfect actors.

If the series is approved then the children will be recording an episode a day for three weeks over the summer.

What are the children to wear? Carlo said that next week he will be bringing a lady with him who is a clothing specialist. She will decide what the children will wear. Before she comes each child should think out what they would like to wear.

Carlo left a pile of mail order catalogues for the children to look through.

Ali has telephoned from Cambridge. Ali has been invited to speak in another debate at the Cambridge Union Society, but he has turned it down.

Ali says he had one absolutely wonderful evening. Nothing could ever be better. So Ali has quit while he is ahead.

Ali's other news is that George Aaron is not returning to Cambridge. George reckons that her present salary is good. George's prospects in the present job are financially just too good to lose.

George's job requires George to spend a lot of lonely nights in hotel rooms. George can use the time to study for an Engineering degree with the Open University.

George has transferred her credits from her first year at Cambridge to the Open University. The course is supposed to be six years but George has done a third of it in one year at Cambridge.

Starting now, George's four year course will finish eighteen months after Ali's degree course. During those four years George will be earning good money and she will be gaining experience in industry.

George has done a deal with Byrams that George will be spend time in the main factory when the manager Garth and the assistant manager Barney are on holiday. This will give George management experience in industry for her CV. When George needs to do practical things for her Engineering degree or she needs to conduct experiments George may use Byram's facilities.

All the management at Byrams are pleased that George is staying on instead of going back to Cambridge.

Byrams are paying George's Open University fees.

George is living with her mother and George is saving like heck. George hopes to buy a house in about a year, when her wage should be able to support a big mortgage.

Ali was quiet about his relationship with George.

Nobody wanted to ask him in case the answer was not good.

Sahid's careers teacher came back to him. They are going to meet after Easter.

CHAPTER 2: Emma Hewson

The kids are growing up. Most of the teenagers are in romances or they are thinking about romance. When you see a girl like Freda Graham suddenly begin to glow you know there is something in her life beyond making salads.

I don't know who it is yet.

Linda is looking for a young man.

In my limited experience most of the young men in brass bands are not toads. They are serious young men rather than wasters. They may not be princes but they are definitely not toads.

Charlotte is still carrying a torch for John Tarron. Charlotte is waiting until she turns sixteen.

At least once a month at their finance meeting Tohur has the hard word from Don about journalists and girls. Tohur is aware of girls but Tohur is close to being not interested. His judo and his cooking and his Islamic web site fill Tohur's life at the moment. With Ali away at Cambridge Tohur sees his younger siblings at least twice a week.

Dennis and David Wilkins come for their monthly meetings. Dennis is filming some advertisements over the Easter holidays. Dennis has given up dancing until after his exams.

David is enjoying his theatre activity.

At the end of March their dad is being released from prison. The whole Wilkins family are excited.

Helen Wilkins is bringing a young man to dinner on Sunday night. Helen's boyfriends have all been of reasonable quality.

Is this "the one" or just "one"?

We have not heard from Rebecca Johnson.

If her missionary experience were an absolute disaster we would have heard I think. I just hope Rebecca is all right.

I will leave work soon for my maternity leave. There is no point in going back for a few weeks after Easter and then leaving. It is cleaner if I leave at term end. On past experience I have been very ready to go back to work when it was time.

Mark is happy in his apprenticeship. He is also enjoying his exposure to management as a junior manager.

I am not clear how close Mark and Karen are at the moment. Mark will tell me sometime. Young people's romances tend not to last.

Don is a bit worried for the children in this TV series. On balance the experience should be good for them but no doubt there will be low points.

If the program is a success the children will become celebrities. That can't be helped.

I know that Don worries about everything and everyone. It is a facet of his personality.

Don has raided the Mormons for a book-keeper. Abigail comes every Thursday evening and she writes up the accounts for David, Dennis, Tohur and Charlotte. When money starts to come in from the TV series Abigail will write up the accounts for that money.

Mr Driburg has done a clever deal for the children. After each program is broadcast the musical excerpts will be put up on You Tube. The production company and the relevant performer or performers split the proceeds equally. Any copyright fees are payable by the production company from their share. At half term in October the children will film their Christmas Special with Charlotte Johnson and Robert Graham as special guests.

Work has begun on the gym for Robert. It will be ready by the end of April. Robert is much fitter than he was but he has a long way to go.

Robert visits Stoke Mandeville Hospital again in May.

Once the gym is up Don is going to hire a physiotherapist to come two or three times a week. The physiotherapist will take his or her orders from Robert's consultant at the Stoke Mandeville Hospital.

Colin Donkin was trying to climb up one of the girders on the gym when he fell off, landing on some rubble. The rubble is not hurt but Colin is pretty bruised. Hopefully Colin has learned from the experience.

The kids had a great time trying to decide what to wear for the TV program, searching the mail order catalogues for ideas.

Sally and Kali intend to wear Daar made clothing. That will be ready for this weekend when the clothing specialist comes.

Although the children do not need to know their lines for this Saturday most of them do.

Helen brought her young man to Sunday dinner.

Not a toad. Not a prince.

Helen seems happy with him so I made polite noises. There is nothing actually wrong with him. I think that Helen could do better.

I noticed that Mark, Linda and Charlotte all said absolutely nothing about him after he and Helen had gone. They obviously have the same view of him as I do.

Embryo Kate has decided to try out for the England trampoline team I think.

I am pleased that Kate is well and active. I also know I cannot teach a class with this baby kangaroo jumping around. I will go on leave just in time.

Mark is still working his way through the books Cecil bought for his Masters in Business Administration. Mark has never been a great reader, but he is ploughing through these books.

Charlotte is back to writing hymns. These hymns are to go on her next CD.

Carlo turned up again with the wardrobe mistress, named Sheila. Sheila looked at each child's clothing wish list and she measured each child. Sheila will be visiting again just before filming in the summer because children always grow. Sheila really liked the dresses the Daars have made for Kali and Sally. Sheila said that the girls may wear these dresses for filming. Sheila ordered two extra of each dress in case of accidents during filming. Then she had Kali and Sally change into other clothing for the rest of the day.

Kali borrowed some clothes from Freda.

Carlo noticed that Freda was doing drawings during the read through. At a break he asked to see Freda's sketch book.

He looked through it carefully.

“Who is this?” he asked of one drawing.

“A friend.”

“He is a very good looking young man.

“Very muscular.”

“Yes.”

After a silence Carlo realised he was not going to be given any additional information. He carried on through the book.

When Carlo found the drawing Freda had made of the wardrobe mistress he smiled.

“Sheila.

“Come and look at this.”

Sheila came to look.

“That is very good.”

Carlo looked at Freda.

“Could you make a drawing of each actor today please?”

Freda looked surprised.

“I want to show them to the producer. If he likes them we will use them in the program. And if not I will bring them back next week.”

“Just their heads.

“And label them with their character names not their real names.”

The read through and play through was straightforward enough. Sheila and Carlo read the parts that the adult actors will play.

The children played their music perfectly. Carlo had nothing to say except to approve.

Carlo said that the children are fine now. He had only tiny suggestions for improvement.

“Next Saturday you will meet the actors who are to play these parts. The Saturday after will be the rehearsal at the studio in Manchester. Then on the Tuesday we start filming.”

“Any questions?”

“Have you organised halal food for us Muslims?”

“Yes.

“I understand that Gerald is a vegetarian. I believe that Kali, Derek, and Colin are Muslims. The rest of you will eat anything. Is that right?”

“Yes.”

“No problem. Our catering company is very good. I have told them that you normally have catering by Tohur Miah and by Robert Graham. That is the standard of food you expect.

“They blinked a bit but they say they will rise to the challenge.”

Ali telephoned. He had an exciting day yesterday.

Ali was taking off in a RAF cargo plane when he felt that something was not right. He told the control tower that he was aborting the take-off. That is not too easy to do once you have begun the run up to taking off but Ali managed to do it.

Ali spotted that one of the ailerons had a rag hanging out of it. There was a heck of a row.

Ali said to the officer commanding,

“Forgive me, sir.

“I am very happy that you are taking this so seriously.

“I certainly won’t fly this plane until you are confident it has been serviced properly.

“A thorough inspection will take all day.

“Do you have any planes that you know are right that I could fly while your men are working on this crate?”

So Ali was put up in another plane. He and another pilot flew it to Germany.

They waited for the plane to be unloaded, and then they flew it back.

Normally only one pilot would be needed.

The regular pilot was happy to let Ali do the flying.

The regular pilot said that Ali did two beautiful landings so Ali is very pleased.

Ali was very late back to his college but he didn’t care.

It is the first time that Ali has flown abroad.

Colin and Linda have joined the Willerton Brass Band. It is musically adequate but not the best, and it obviously struggles financially. For youngsters the Willerton Brass Band is probably a good band to begin with.

Mr Wilkins is out of prison. The Wilkins are always at home with Dad. We hardly see the Wilkins at the moment.

The adult actors came to our house for the rehearsal. They are nice enough people. They are professional actors.

They were very good to the children.

They were very impressed with the musicianship and the showmanship of the children.

Freda's drawings are almost certain to be used in the production. Mr Driburg is negotiating a fee.

Tohur flew to Stockholm for Easter to compete in a "friendly" against Sweden and Norway and Denmark. As usual Don gave Tohur the hard word about journalists and about Tohur's conduct.

"You know what worries me?"

"No."

"One day you are going stop chewing my bollocks off.

"That will be the day I realise you have stopped loving me."

They had a huge hug.

Ali went on a course to drive Heavy Goods Vehicles at an Army training centre.

We did not see Ali over Easter.

I went to the dress rehearsal and filming with Ruth Lightfoot. For the number of children involved two matrons are required. Don minded the other children at home.

At the dress rehearsal there was a huge hiccough when the piano in the studio was found not to be properly tuned. Kali was at the piano and Kali looked at Carlo with such disappointment.

Carlo went red in the face and he started shouting.

I asked Carlo if he would like me to telephone our piano tuner.

Carlo asked me to do that.

Carlo told our piano tuner that he was desperate and that he needed the piano tuner urgently.

The piano tuner was already fully booked for the day, but for a significant amount of money he agreed to reschedule some customers to another day.

The dress rehearsal took place without the piano.

The piano tuner arrived, and everybody except he and Carlo went to lunch.

The caterers had been told that our family eats well, and they were on their mettle. They did well.

After lunch we had a second rehearsal that went very well.

Max and Peter and Gerald had to sing at the Cathedral on Sunday and Monday.

On Monday night Tohur announced that he had won every one of his six fights. Tohur is well pleased.

On Tuesday morning we went to Manchester for the filming itself.

We heard Carlo discussing the faulty piano with the studio manager. We could hear Carlo from two floors above, and along a corridor. Carlo was extremely angry.

I am sure that Carlo did not know that the children could hear.

Peter said that he has heard most of these words before, but what is a "Sassenach"?

I explained that "Sassenach" is a Scottish word for an Englishman.

I did not tell Peter it is an impolite word because I simply don't know if it is or it isn't.

The way Carlo was using it "Sassenach" can be impolite.

The children are very pleased that none of them had ever caused Carlo to become angry with them. They had not realised that Carlo could roar like that.

In this pilot program the characters are introduced. Derek sings "Grownups Can't Listen" which is a very funny song with a jolly tune. Derek is just twelve. Derek's black curly hair, his black face, his black eyes and his lovely smile would be crowd pullers anyway.

Derek's cheeky happy smile and glinting eyes just make me want to hug him.

Derek's performance is excellent.

Kali and Sally sing "Boys Don't Care", which is a lament about how the thoughtlessness of boys makes girls cry. They were very good.

When Max plays and sings "Greensleeves" you can see a troubadour singing.

With Max being so pretty he just melts hearts.

They all four performed "Dance To Your Daddy" which is a happy cheerful song.

The other band performed "Wake Up Little Susie", "Leaving On A Jet Plane" and "Stairway To Heaven".

When Gerald Butler sang "Can't Take My Eyes Off Of You" the yearning in his voice and the tears on his face would bring anyone to an emotional resonance.

The tears were genuine, not contrived.

Gerald had to do another take, with yearning but without tears.

Then Gerald did a third take without yearning or tears.

Carlo said that all three are great performances. The Director will decide which one to use when he does the editing.

Mr Dow came to Manchester for the filming.

When the filming finished Mr Dow said that the program is a complete success.

Mr Dow says that our children are wonderful. Not a note less than perfect. Not a line fluffed.

Mr Dow likes it that there is not one star but that there are eight stars.

We have to wait for the editing and then Mr Dow will come to our house to show us the program.

Mr Dow is 99% sure the filming will begin immediately after the end of the summer term.

In about a month Mr Dow will be sending the children more music to learn.

Mr Dow says that at the rate of eight performances a program and thirteen programs plus the Christmas Special before Christmas we might need over a hundred pieces of music. Some pieces will be repeated, but there is still a huge musical repertoire.

Divided between the two bands we are looking at around fifty to sixty pieces per band. That will be tough.

Peter said

“Will we still be able to play on our own instruments? We prefer them.”

Carlo said,

“Yes.

“The studio manager says that he will personally make sure the piano is tuned next time. He is very, very sorry. He left it to someone else next week. He won't make that mistake again.”

I had thought that all eight children were going to play together on a theme tune for the program. Malc said that there isn't space for the theme music in this first pilot program. The good news is that the children will only have to record the theme tune once, not play it every day for three weeks.

While we were in Manchester Tohur Miah and Robert Graham and David Wilkins were filming their cookery programs in another building in Manchester.

They were filming for two weeks between them. Sahid was involved of course.

The following Saturday the Wilkins all came to dinner.

Mr Wilkins is badly affected by his years in prison.

He is happy that he and his wife are together.

He is bemused and understandably proud that David has made it possible for the family to live in a large house in a leafy suburb.

The family are living well on only part of David's income.

Mr Wilkins has never been able to dream of the life he has now. He is still coming to terms with the change in his life.

Mr Wilkins touched the silver birch that we planted to represent his deceased eldest son, Alan Wilkins. He is grateful to us for us looking after the family while he has been in prison.

It will be a while yet before Mr Wilkins adjusts to freedom and he adjusts to not living in poverty.

Mr Wilkins has spent all his life in poverty. It takes a long time to come out mentally.

Mr Wilkins had to be home by eight because of his curfew but most of the children stayed for the singing which went on until nine. Max and Peter have to sing at the Cathedral in the morning so we stopped at nine. Peter slept in Max's room.

CHAPTER 3: Cecil Byram

I had a heck of a job to find premises to which to move the Chinese operation. My industrial research group found a place big enough. It is the entire pit head area of a coal mine that closed more than fifteen years ago. There had been a half baked attempt to turn it into an industrial park but it failed.

The M1 motorway is only fifteen minutes away so it is great for our purposes.

The location has been for sale for five years. I could have it cheap if I had the cash, which I did.

There is only one entrance into the property and no roads anywhere near. The perimeter fence is fine.

Within days the site has been dubbed "Ming City".

We have to build storage buildings for the stock, and a covered loading bay. At the present Chinese site we already have a prefabricated hut with toilet facilities and a kitchenette to use as the office. We will obtain another for Ming City.

A bulldozer will do the re-grading work in a week. Within a month Ming City could be operational.

The planning Department of the local Council have informally given the go-ahead. The official approval will follow.

As we are not in a desperate rush I am waiting for the official planning permission. I have the contractors lined up.

The old premises will do to begin stockpiling, and I will find premises for a second stockpile. I am trying to decide whether to fence off part of Ming City as a stockpile.

Kevin Hanson is now our full time roving stock-taker going around customers' premises. Kevin is now based at Head Office.

Karl Styles the forklift driver is alone at the depot.

Twice a day Karl receives an email listing what deliveries are expected over the next few days and what stock to put out for carriers to collect over each of the next few days, with timings if known.

Karl is going to be in charge at Ming City. At first Karl will be there alone but as work builds up we will add staff.

I had to stop the telephone canvassing for Chinese business.

With the orders we have already taken we will eventually have more than a hundred containers arriving each week.

There is a tremendous attraction in earning a forty per cent return on investment year after year, but there is wisdom in keeping the operation manageable.

Once I am sure we are on top of this expansion I will sanction a further sales drive.

I really want to have a decent stockpile of Chinese components to be reassurance for the Chinese operation and hopefully also to participate in Plan A.

I took the new Stockpile Manager Daniel Mason and our young guest Marcel to make a tour of the stockpiles. Marcel was at first speechless at seeing piles of metal as high as a house and as long as a train, side by side in endless series. Eventually Marcel got bored with it.

Marcel has seen that we have huge stockpiles.

Daniel was impressed. Daniel will go round each site over the next month.

Daniel is going to start with a stock-take.

We know what should be at each site, but Daniel wants to be sure that none of the metal has been damaged by the elements or has been pilfered.

Daniel is taking an assistant to hold the other end of the measuring tape. He will also need to take a ladder. Marcel was invited to be Daniel's assistant but he declined with thanks.

Irene and Marcel and I are working through the wine they bought while I was in China. Marcel is really enjoying tasting wines that are not from France.

Marcel still goes to the Friday night bowling sessions with the Hewson clan.

Marcel says that it is silly but fun.

One Saturday morning Marcel told me in general gossip something important. A couple of the Hewson foster children play with the Willerton Brass Band.

On Thursday night the band room in Willerton caught fire, probably because of an electrical fault. Apparently the band room is a former chicken hut so there is no architectural heritage loss.

However the band has lost all its sheet music, records, chairs, music stands, banners, and some of its instruments.

The band lives hand to mouth financially anyway so it can't recover from this catastrophe.

Marcel repeated what he had been told by the Hewson foster children,

"The band is in shit.

"It needs a fairy godmother straight away or it dies. No-one in Willerton has any money."

I thought about this.

Our Head Office is in Willerton.

No doubt on Monday or Tuesday band members will be going around the few businesses that there are in Willerton asking for support.

What do I think?

Byram's can afford to sponsor a brass band if I wish. Do I wish?

I can justify it as a contribution to the community, or as a marketing ploy.

My parents used to enjoy going to brass band concerts. I was taken along until I was old enough to choose my own recreation.

"Irene, I want your advice."

"Yes, love?"

"Does Byram's want a brass band?"

"Do you need one?"

"No."

I explained that the opportunity has arisen. If I am willing to wave a chequebook I am sure the band can be called the Byram Willerton Brass Band.

I said to Irene that I thought we should.

“Then go for it, dear.”

I telephoned Kevin Hanson. Kevin lives in Willerton.

Kevin seems to know everybody in Willerton. I am sure Kevin will know exactly what the current situation is.

“Kevin. I am very sorry to phone you at the weekend, but you were the only person I could think of.”

“OK?”

“This brass band you have in Willerton. I gather it is in trouble.”

“Yes.”

“I gather they are looking for a fairy godmother.”

“Yes.”

“Who runs the band?”

“George Harker and Aiden Firth.”

“Do you have telephone numbers for them?”

“Yes I do, but they are sat here in my kitchen.”

“Why are they in your kitchen?”

“My eldest son plays the cornet in the band. So I am being roped in to help set up a “Save The Band” Committee.”

“I am probably prepared to be the fairy godmother. Can we all meet at the Willerton Head Office in say forty minutes?”

“Yes.”

“Ask the committee to write out a shopping list. See you in forty minutes.”

As I pulled up they were waiting. The security guard opened the gate for my Bentley and the others walked in behind me.

We went into a meeting room. We do not have a Boardroom because that would be a pointless extravagance. That was one of Mark Johnson’s decisions. Mark is a Yorkshire lad all right!

“So, gentlemen.

“Could you start by explaining the current situation?”

The situation was as I understood it to be.

“Let me start by giving you a cheque.

"I am sure you still have expenses for coaches and room hire and all sorts. This will keep you afloat for a while.

"This is an unconditional gift. Put it away so I do not take it back!"

The men looked at the cheque. They were very happy. Their immediate crisis is ended. The band can continue to operate.

I smiled.

"Look out of the window.

"Look at the warehouse beside the gate."

They looked at a long windowless warehouse that is almost falling down.

"That shed is scheduled for demolition. We have applied for planning permission to take it down. We are not expecting any difficulty."

"I am prepared to use that space to build a band-room for you.

"A modern building.

"We have security here 24/7 anyway. There is secure parking here in the mill yard for about a hundred vehicles.

"Obviously I would stand the electricity and heating costs and the maintenance costs."

The men were very impressed.

"I am not going to do a half baked rescue."

"From what I can gather you were not strong financially before the fire."

The men nodded.

"The new building is going to cost me approaching half a million or so.

Maybe more.

If I am spending that kind of money there is no point in trying to save pennies on the fringes.

"So what is your shopping list?"

They gave me a list. It listed chairs, stands, sheet music, a new banner, and a few instruments. The total was less than twenty thousand pounds.

"Bollocks."

They jumped.

"You need at least twice this."

Their expression was of curiosity.

"You need a computer and a printer, a desk and a filing cabinet. You need insurances.

“You need a lot more sheet music than you have listed.

“I am told that most of your uniforms are frayed.

“At three hundred pounds per uniform and twenty-five bandsmen I make that seven and a half grand just on uniforms.

“There are no running expenses here. No conductor’s honorarium, nothing for postage and telephones.

“There are no competition entry fees. No travel expenses.

“I am not good at music.

“You are not good at money.

“If we could add my money to your music we could have the best of both worlds.”

The men nodded.

“My plan is to equip you properly. And to give you whatever subsidy you need so you can just concentrate on making music instead of trying to raise money.

“Kevin Hanson is going to be our link man.”

Kevin looked surprised.

“I respect Kevin and you respect Kevin. So Kevin is elected.

“Kevin is away a lot during the day but Kevin is based at this building.

“I am sure you want to think about this. I don’t know what other offers you have.”

George Harker spoke.

“Mr Byram.

“We are not going to have a better offer.

“We have to say “Yes” and “Thank you”.”

“I should explain where I am coming from.

“I need a brass band like I need a spare armpit.”

The men looked surprised.

“The basic reason for funding you is that Byram’s should put something back into the community.

“It could have been battered wives.

“It happens to be a brass band.”

The men nodded.

“If I am going to put significant money into you, I might as well get something back.”

The men looked wary.

“I would like you to change your name to the Byram Willerton Brass Band.”

The men thought for a moment, looked at each other, and then nodded.

“I want you to raise your game.”

The men looked surprised.

“I don’t expect you to answer this today. Is it practical to go from where you are now to being one of the leading brass bands in Yorkshire?”

“What would you need?”

The men looked surprised. I suppose if you have struggled for years just to survive, that must atrophy your ambition.

An ungrudging sponsor must be a strange experience.

“OK gents.

“Let me try to explain.

“If I am going to put three quarters of a million into rescuing a struggling brass band, I might as well pay a million and have an excellent brass band.”

The men saw my point. The thought of anyone spending three quarters of a million pounds or a million pounds on their band is still alien to them.

“I am going to claim you for tax as a marketing expense, so I need a band to feel proud of.

“This is your band. It is not my band.

“Until this morning I had no thoughts at all of getting involved in a brass band.

“If I do something I do it properly or not at all. That can be uncomfortable to live with.”

“So, talk with Kevin over the rest of this weekend.

“I will see you Kevin at eight on Monday with Mike from Marketing.”

We all left.

Karen and Irene talk over Skype every Sunday.

I have the impression that Karen and Mark are drifting apart, just because of the physical distance.

The best thing a dad can do in this situation is to shut up. So I am waiting and watching.

Mark is committed to his apprenticeship so Mark is not going to run away.

The lad is less self deprecating than he used to be. He is still only sixteen.

I think a lot of Mark.

I wish we had had a son. It is not fair for me to project that onto Mark.

I am pleased that Mark is earning good money from the catering operation. The improvement in morale and productivity from a good canteen is literally worth millions to me. I must not lose Mark Johnson.

Mark's slogan "restaurant quality food for factory canteen prices" resonates through the workforce.

A lot of the workers think that the restaurant quality food is my idea. I do not disabuse them.

I hope that Mark stays around even if he and Karen do drift apart.

Irene and I discussed whether to bring Karen back sooner.

To my surprise Irene was against it. Irene said that we as parents must not interfere.

For us to try to micromanage Karen's love life must end in tears.

If Karen or Mark should ask for Karen to return early, then we have no objection. On the other hand Karen went to France to improve her French and to cement relations with Marcel's family. From our point of view there is no reason to cut short her journey.

If Mark wishes to take a week's holiday and visit Toulouse he will do.

That is between Karen and Mark. It is not for us to interfere.

My mother's view was interesting.

My mother very much approves of Mark.

She is pleased that I have done so well in distinguishing between Mark as a junior manager and Mark as a future son in law.

I have absolutely no right to become involved in the love life of a junior manager.

If Karen is not happy with the situation Karen will do something about it.

So sit back and wait to see what happens.

I don't like to sit back and do nothing but Irene and my mother understand Karen better than I do. When Irene and my mother say the same thing I normally go along with it.

Then my attention was diverted.

I had explained Plan A to Daniel but Daniel was still confused.

“The simple thing to do is to build a stockpile of metals, wait for a crisis that creates a shortage of metals, and then you sell your stockpiles at an extortionate price.”

“You make an extortionate profit once, and that’s it. Simple.”

“Any fool with spare cash and lots of patience can do that.”

Daniel nodded.

“Plan A is more complex, and potentially much more profitable. I make three killings.

“The Holy Grail of the components business is long-term contracts. They give you steady sales at a reasonable profit. You can plan production weeks ahead.

“There is no managerial difficulty and little other difficulty. Sales costs are close to nothing.

“The reason Byrams is so profitable is that we have nothing but long-term contracts. Set up time is insignificant because of our enormously long runs. We can be light on managers and supervisors because there is not as much actual management and supervision needed.

“Today there are tens of thousands of long term contracts in existence that we cannot win, because they are currently held by other suppliers.”

Daniel nodded.

“When the crisis comes there will be tens of thousands of long-term contracts where the suppliers have no metal and they cannot obtain metal at any price.

“If the customer can’t have more components then the customer can’t make his own products. The customer will soon be in breach of his own contracts to supply goods.

“The customer will lose his reputation and his credibility.

“The customer will soon have nothing to sell, but he will still have debts to service and other expenses. “The customer will very likely go bust.

“The customers soon desperately need components because they have virtually no buffer stocks.

“Most businesses today have less than a fortnight’s supply of buffer stocks.

“Sometimes they hold less than a day’s stocks!

“In a supply crisis the customer would give his eldest daughter and a long-term contract to any supplier who can reliably supply.

“The stockpiles are evidence that we can reliably supply.

“So there will be literally tens of thousands of long-term contracts going begging.

“Instead of being desperate for long-term contracts we will choose which ones we wish to take.

“I make one killing by using the stockpiles to negotiate a raft of long-term contracts with reliable customers. The long-term contracts add significant value to Byrams as a business.

“I make a second killing by using the stockpiles to supply those orders, charging the metal at market prices of course.

“We will supply those contracts from two sources.

“The first source is that we have spare capacity in the Neverthorpe factory.

“The second source is the factories that we will buy very soon.

“Banks are the curse of this country.

“Very quickly in any crisis the banks call in loans, end overdrafts, and squeeze any customers who have financial problems. The banks turn every crisis into a catastrophe.

“The banks panic and they try to pull in money.

“They foreclose on mortgages.

“The companies hit all have to go into liquidation.

“Within a week of the crisis beginning there will be factories and machinery going for a song.

“I have a list about thirty factories that I expect to go bust in the first fortnight. These are all factories that I know to have competent production managers.

“We rehire the production managers.

“They re-open their factories.

“We telephone their previous customers offering new long-term contracts. The customers bite our hands off.

“We supply the metal from our stockpiles.

“The same workers on the same machines supply the same customers.

“Every components factory in England today has spare capacity. We will fill up our Neverthorpe spare capacity and the new factories' spare capacity with long-term contracts.

“I expect to increase the turnover at least tenfold in the few weeks of the crisis. Profit will increase much more than tenfold because we will be working at full capacity.

“The crisis will end one day.

“On that day we will have a business around ten times the size of today’s business. All the work will be on long term contracts and so the factories will be easy to manage.

“I run the business on good profits for about five years. At that point the company has a full book of long-term contracts, good stockpiles to protect the future, and a good profits history.

“I float the company as a public company and I make the third killing.”

Daniel Mason has been a busy young man.

Daniel has put up charts on the wall around his desk.

One chart covers the weekly fluctuations in the market price of the metals we use covering the last year. For each metal Daniel has another chart giving the monthly average prices for the last thirty years.

For each metal we have plate of different thicknesses, pipe of different diameters, and long bars. Broadly speaking these are in line with our normal usage.

Daniel has done a lot of analysis and Daniel has close to perfected the rebalancing required within each metal.

Daniel has been number crunching.

He says that the metal stocks we have probably reflect our company’s usage of raw materials in about 1980. They are seriously out of kilter with the usage of metals we use now.

Daniel said that we can rebalance in two ways. One is to sell some aluminium immediately to buy various thicknesses of steel plate and steel rod. Or we just buy steel until we have rebalanced.

We also need more brass and bronze.

We have a stack of zinc for the foundry. I could run the foundry twenty-four hours a day for a year with the zinc we have. With the zinc is again a year’s supply of steel wire in various thicknesses. These are outside Daniel’s figures because they are earmarked for the foundry.

Daniel said that eighty-four per cent of metals mined are iron, gold, copper, and nickel. We have no gold and no nickel. Is this deliberate?

We use no gold and we use no nickel.

We have a lot of brass and aluminium and bronze and copper. We do use these. What is our strategy?

I told Daniel to hold on to the aluminium.

“Just buy steel and brass and copper and bronze until we are in balance. Gold and nickel do not fit into our strategy so don’t bother with them.”

Daniel has also analysed the metal content of our Chinese imports. I have told Daniel to forget about buying metal related to the Chinese imports for the moment. That will be another project for another day. I need to build stocks of Chinese components before I need to buy metal to manufacture Chinese components.

CHAPTER 4: Mark Johnson

Karen told me over Skype that Marcel’s family have a villa on the Mediterranean coast of France. They are taking Karen and Jeanette, Marcel’s sister.

There is a spare bedroom.

Would I like to come?

I said “Yes” immediately.

There was no problem booking leave for the third week of May. Hooray!

I can easily afford a holiday in France.

Malc Dow came up from London to show everyone the pilot program.

There are restrictions on the hours a child may work. No child saw all the filming.

Of course none of the children has seen the program after editing.

Everyone wanted to see the completed program.

We know that our kids are good, but the program made them look like stars.

Freda’s drawings of the children have been made into three montages. The montages showed first, with “Dance To Your Daddy” as background music. The music faded out quickly.

Kali Daar is always a pleasant cheerful sweet natured child. I have never seen Kali having a paddy.

Kali is a tremendous actress. The opening scene is Kali screaming and shouting and throwing drum sticks, sheet music, a music stand, and a drummer's stool at little Dan Wilbey.

Poor Dan shelters terrified behind the piano.

Kali pulls Dan out from behind the piano and she picks up the drummer stool.

Kali drags both to the drum kit. Kali plonks Dan on the stool.

"Sit!"

Kali picks up the music stand and drum sticks and sheet music.

"Now play!"

Dan begins drumming "Stairway To Heaven", and he is quickly joined by Peter, Gerald, and Colin on guitar. The three guitarists sing.

Dan looks at Kali at intervals during the song and he sees Kali with her hand raised ready to hit him.

About half way through Dan smiles at Kali.

Kali smiles back.

At the end of the piece Kali rushes to Dan and she kisses him.

"I told you you could. You just don't have enough confidence in yourself."

The program moves at an incredibly fast pace. All the characters are introduced. By the end of the program you know this family and you like them.

When it finished we all stood up and we clapped, even the performers.

Malc said that the program has blown away the broadcasting company. It will go on TV straight after the Thursday children's program in which Robert cooks.

Filming is now definite.

The scripts are now being written. The music is part of the scripts. Malc passed out sheet music for each band for about forty pieces that Malc knows will be in the programs somewhere. Malc says that Carlo is still discussing music in minute detail with the script writers.

Malc says that the children will become celebrities.

Anything they say will be passed on and then it will be distorted.

The children must be careful not to say anything.

Telling a joke is likely to cause trouble as it will be believed to be true. The kids are too young to be involved in sex, but if they are tempted they mustn't.

The children should not speak to journalists.

One favourite journalist trick is to say something they know to be untrue. The celebrity puts them straight. This gives the journalist a quote they will use. So don't speak.

Malc said that the children should not worry too much. Tryton is a long way from London and most journalists are too idle to leave London.

There are also rules about unwanted publicity for children.

So there probably won't be any bad journalists.

The children burst out laughing.

"Ask Tohur and Charlotte about journalists!"

Malc and his team are hugely pleased with the kids.

What has really impressed the Dower Productions team is the dedication of these young children. They all knew their lines. Their musicianship and their showmanship are excellent.

The kids are truly professional.

Malc thinks this is a series that could go on for years. If it does, we will all have a lot of fun! The children will play a lot of music.

Malc says that after discussion with Carlo and the script writers Georgina and Fulesa are to be introduced as singers for the rock/pop band.

Malc then said that he needed to whisper secretly with Kali and Sally.

Emma sat with them.

Malc whispered a bit. The two girls giggled a lot.

Then Sally was obviously asked a question. Sally thought for a bit and then she said something. Then both girls giggled again.

Emma was all smiles.

I asked Emma what was the discussion about?

"Malc will tell you when he wants to."

I said to Emma that Sally is my sister.

In the absence of Rebecca I have the responsibility to supervise the family. So Emma told me.

There will be child romances running as themes through the series, culminating in a kiss under the mistletoe during the Christmas Special. For Kali there is only one boy of the right age, Derek Donkin. The question for Sally was which boy would Sally like to kiss under the mistletoe during the Christmas Special? That was what all the giggling was about.

So which boy is it?

After a slight hesitation Emma told me that Gerald Butler is the lucky boy.

Gerald happens to be the second oldest boy among the actors.

Gerald does not know yet.

The script writer Emily is coming to explain all the story lines once Fulesa and Georgina are on board.

Emily needed to know that Kali and Sally are happy with their romantic interests. Emma says that both girls are entirely happy.

I am pleased that Sally has been consulted.

All the boys are nice enough lads. Even Colin Donkin, who is a bit wild by our household's standards, is a nice enough kid.

The next excitement is that Emma at last had the baby.

Kate is a small pink child much like any other baby.

All the Hewsons are just concentrating on the baby.

The rest of us are cooking and generally living.

All the singing and music lessons are happening. The performers are working through the music they will have to perform. Linda and Colin are learning music for their brass band. Colin says that the trombone parts for the brass band are much more challenging than the guitar playing he does for the TV series. So Colin is giving priority to the brass band music for the moment.

Charlotte has finished a hymn. She is happy with it. She has put it to one side, and now she is getting on with the next.

I turned seventeen.

Rebecca had left a birthday present with Charlotte. It was a book on how to cook patisserie.

Don gave me a computer program for learning to drive including learning the Highway Code. I will have driving lessons this summer.

Karen said she has a surprise for me when I arrive.

Tohur has actually lost a judo fight, to a German athlete. Tohur's average is still the highest on the England judo team so Tohur is happy.

Tohur has watched the video of the fight he lost I should think fifteen times.

Tohur says that every time he sees the video he learns something.

I would not say that Tohur is a bad loser.

Tohur is just determined not to lose again if he can possibly help it.

The flight from Manchester to Toulouse was easy enough. Karen was there to meet me.

Karen was wearing a bikini top, short shorts and sandals. I have never seen so much of Karen. Karen is gorgeous almost all over.

Marcel's sister Jeanette is very attractive. She is about George's age, and almost as beautiful.

Jeanette drove us to the villa on the coast.

Then Jeanette drove off.

Karen showed me to a nice bedroom. There was a really nice double bed. The room gives on to a balcony through double doors. The balcony is very big and very private. You could sunbathe nude and no-one would be able to see you.

There are two sun beds.

We stood together on the balcony and we hugged.

We hugged a long time.

"I like this."

"So do I."

"I like being alone with you."

"So do I"

"We are going to be alone all week."

"Good."

Then I said,

"What?"

Then Karen said

"Mark. I have lied to you."

I was surprised.

"Jeanette's parents are not coming."

I was very surprised.

"Jeanette is not coming.

"It is just you and me."

"What?"

"Mark Johnson. I want to be private with you. I want to be alone with you. This is probably the only chance I will have in years so I'm taking it.

"I want to touch you a lot. I want you to touch me a lot.

"I want to kiss you. I want you to stroke my breasts. I want you."

I was thunderstruck.

I thought we were going to have a nice holiday by the sea.

I was expecting a holiday with some "inspecting the summerhouse".

And yes I was looking forward to a week with some inspecting the summerhouse. It is four and a half months that we have been apart.

"Mark, are you going to rape me?"

What a question!

"No. Of course not."

"Am I physically strong enough to rape you?"

"No."

"So we are going to have a week of kisses and cuddles and love and laughter.

"Nobody gets hurt.

We just have lots of love.

This is probably our only holiday together before our honeymoon, and that is a long long way off."

I was pole-axed. I had not expected this at all.

Could I run to the police?

"Officer, this pretty girl wants to kiss me and cuddle me all week!

"Help! Help!"

"Oh you poor boy!

"Are you strong enough to fight her off?"

"Yes."

"So what is the problem?"

I am a Mormon priest. Karen is not a Mormon. What do I do?

I do not want to hurt Karen.

She wants to be touched a lot.

Maybe it is a bit selfish of me, but yes I want to touch Karen a lot, too.

There is going to be no sex. Not as such. We do love each other, as well as lust.

As a Mormon priest my behaviour at all times must be "seemly".

"Are you angry with me?"

I am not sure "angry" is the right word.

I understand where Karen is coming from.

Certainly surprised.

Disappointed?

“Do you want to pull down my shorts and spank me for being naughty?”

“No!”

Karen is laughing at me.

I lifted Karen off her feet and I swung her onto the bed. I laid Karen on the bed on her back. Karen had somehow arranged for her bikini top to fall off while I swung her.

I was transfixed by the sight of Karen’s breasts.

I have not spent a lot of time wondering what Karen’s breasts will look like.

I love Karen. I have not spent time fantasizing about what Karen will look like without her clothes on.

We are three years off getting married. My motivation is love rather than lust.

I know the general design of a female bust. One cannot help seeing breasts and even naked breasts in the newspapers and films and the internet. I have tried not to look.

Living in a house with teenage girls I know the basic design varies from girl to girl, and it changes as girls become older.

I had assumed Karen’s breasts would be smaller than Rebecca’s breasts.

Rebecca has or appears to have appropriate breasts for a woman just turned nineteen.

Linda Donkin is nearly a year younger than me. Linda’s breasts are significant and they are still growing. I do not know how much help Linda’s breasts gain from Linda’s clothing.

It is not polite or appropriate for me to examine Linda Donkin’s breasts. It has never occurred to me to think about Linda Donkin’s breasts.

Charlotte has breasts but I am pretty sure Charlotte does not feel the need to make them look larger than they are. I have never discussed Charlotte’s breasts with Charlotte.

The truth is that I have never seen a young woman’s breasts for real.

Karen’s breasts are about the size I assume Linda’s to be. Or the size I would assume Linda’s breasts to be if I thought about Linda’s breasts, which I don’t.

I can’t help noticing Linda’s bust.

I think Linda thinks her bust is her best feature. I think Linda’s smile is Linda’s best feature.

Karen's breasts follow the standard design. When Karen is on her back gravity does not do a lot because the skin is tight or firm. The skin is tight and the breasts are firm.

Karen's breasts are roughly the size of cooking apples. Not huge Bramleys but reasonable cooking apples.

Karen's nipples are browner than I expected. Not that I have thought about Karen's nipples.

Karen pulled my hands to her breasts and so I touched Karen's nipples. I was not unwilling. I was still reeling in shock.

It might have been polite to remove my hands but Karen was not uncomfortable.

Karen was looking at me and smiling happily.

"They are beautiful!"

Karen is not a porn star. Karen is a normal young woman. Her breasts are nice. I look forward to holding Karen's breasts many times in years to come.

Karen has more growing to do so presumably by the time we marry they will have grown a bit more. They will be even nicer.

I spent a long time just looking at Karen with Karen just smiling up at me lovingly.

"You are a bad bad girl."

Karen smiled wickedly.

"Yes."

"Do you know what I do with bad bad girls?"

"No."

"I don't know either."

Karen laughed.

I climbed onto the bed and we had a long cuddle. We kissed on the lips. Part of me was enjoying the long cuddle.

I was also thinking furiously.

Is my behaviour "seemly"?

We are going to get married. Just years away.

If we were getting married next week this behaviour would still not be seemly.

No doubt people do it, but they shouldn't.

I definitely shouldn't.

If I had known what was going to happen I would not have come.

I thought there would be other people around.

I cannot realistically walk out of the house.

I could walk to the village which is at least seven miles away.

If I could find anyone who speaks English I could get a taxi to the airport and presumably I could find a flight back to England. Walking out would totally destroy my relationship with Karen.

Karen is not wicked.

Karen is a normal healthy young woman. Karen wants a more physical relationship than so far I have been giving her.

If I were not a Mormon we would very likely be doing a lot more physically than we have been.

So is it my fault?

While I was wrestling with these thoughts I got distracted. Karen slipped her hand under my shirt and she began stroking a nipple.

Karen sees me struggling with my conscience and Karen is just laughing.

Karen is not laughing at me.

Karen is laughing because my internal struggle is showing on my face.

If I got all stern and I told Karen that her behaviour is wrong Karen would continue to laugh at me.

If I managed to get through to her then Karen would burst into tears and then I would have to cuddle her. Then the cuddles would lead into naughtiness.

I could sulk. I could whinge.

Karen will just work on me until I come round.

I can shout and roar. That is not what I do.

If Karen can drive me to shout and roar once, she will do it again. I don't want to spend my life shouting at my Karen.

Whatever I do is wrong.

Bishop Collins would tell me I should get up and leave. He would say that Karen is wrong to put me in this position.

Karen may be upset by my leaving. No doubt we will have a row about it. Either we make up or we don't.

It serves me right for having a girlfriend who is not a Mormon.

Mormon youngsters are advised not to form relationships outside our religion.

No Mormon girl would do what Karen is doing.

I do not want to hurt Karen.

What do I do?

If I had to choose between Karen and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, which would I choose?

I have spent all my life as a Mormon. My whole family are Mormons. I have known Karen about eight months.

I love Karen.

I love God.

I actually have to think about the decision.

God or Karen?

I would choose God.

How does that help me?

I have to stick with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints..

The Bishop would say I have to leave. Two attractive young people close to naked and close together for a week is certain to lead to sex. It certainly isn't seemly.

I can't go home today. It is too late to walk seven miles to the village, to try to find a taxi to Toulouse Airport, and to hope to find a flight back to England. It has to be tomorrow morning.

I can survive until the morning.

Karen has stocked the kitchen. I cooked steak, onion rings, chips, and mushrooms. Karen has learned to make salad and vinaigrette dressing while she has been in France, so Karen made the salad.

Karen prepared strawberries and cream.

After the meal we washed up together while entwined beside the sink. Karen had put a top on by now, but no bra.

I decided to avoid telling Karen until morning.

Karen will be upset. She would try to work me round.

Much better to avoid hours of upset.

Much better for me, anyway.

We spent the evening close together, just hugging.

We went to bed eventually.

I half expected a visit so I put on pyjama bottoms.

I was not asleep before Karen came in wearing her nightdress claiming that she felt cold. There was no point in trying to fight it.

“All these months I have dreamed of lying beside your hard fit body. I just want to lie beside you and to touch you sometimes.”

A few times I looked at Karen sleeping beside me. Karen looked very, very happy. I was filled with love.

In the morning Karen opened the front door. There was a shopping bag on the doorstep containing a lettuce, croissants, brioches and a baguette.

After breakfast I sat with Karen.

I told Karen that I have to go.

I explained why.

Karen was in tears.

Karen is so good hearted.

Karen meant no evil. She just wants a relaxed and happy week with me.

It is me who has put a damper on the week. I feel awful.

Karen is in tears.

It is all my fault.

I left Karen crying at the kitchen table.

I feel as though I have betrayed Karen.

I am not going to tow a suitcase behind me seven miles to the village. All I need to do is to take off my flip-flops, put on socks and shoes, pick up my wallet and passport and ticket stub. And go.

I put my wallet and my passport and my ticket stub in my bedside table drawer yesterday.

The drawer is empty.

I looked in my suitcase, in the flap, in the clothes I was wearing yesterday. I looked under the bed. I looked on the balcony. I even looked in my en suite bathroom.

Why would Karen have taken them?

I went down to the kitchen.

“If you must go, then just go.”

“Karen, have you seen my passport and wallet?”

"I don't know if I am your girlfriend or your ex-girlfriend, but I am not your bloody housekeeper or your nursemaid."

Karen is in tears.

"Just go."

"I can't go. My passport and wallet are missing."

"Maybe you left them in Jeanette's car?"

"No. I had them in the bedroom."

"If you are going, then just go."

"If you don't know where your wallet and passport are, you will have to sleep on the beach."

"But just go!"

"Karen, I love you."

"Oh. Now the wonderful Mark Johnson has lost his wallet suddenly he loves me again!"

"Karen, if I agree to stay, will my passport and wallet reappear by Sunday?"

"You can't agree to stay. You are going. Just go!"

Tears, and Karen's entire body shaking.

I went to Karen but she pushed me off.

"I wanted a week of happiness with you and after less than a day you are walking out. Just go!"

I hate to see Karen cry, but I am wondering if this is put on.

"Karen, my love."

Karen looked at me, tears glistening on her face.

"Karen, I can't be in bed with you."

"You know I don't speak French."

Karen nodded.

"I don't know where I am."

"I don't know where Toulouse is from here."

"I have no passport."

"I have no money."

"You win."

Karen came to me and she hugged me. We had a long hug.

"I will stay out of your bed."

"Do I have to hide my breasts?"

I thought about that.

I thought about Karen's breasts.

"Karen, you are a free woman. I have no right to tell you how to dress."

"I thought you liked them!"

Karen is smiling and happy again.

Rebecca says that one of the best relationships is where the woman is as clever as her man and she has the wisdom to hide it. Karen has outsmarted me and there is nothing I can do about it. This will be a story to tell the grandchildren!

I think I will forget to tell Bishop Collins.

I know that Karen will have hidden my stuff cleverly.

Short of violence I am not going to persuade Karen to return my passport and wallet before Sunday.

I have never hit any female. Even when Rebecca attacked me the most I ever did was to block Rebecca's punches.

I will not punch Karen.

I am not going to threaten Karen because Karen knows that I will not actually punch her.

Threatening violence against a woman is unseemly.

Violence against women is definitely unseemly.

My life is not in danger. Nor is my virginity in danger unless I wish it.

There is no justification for violence.

Karen knows that she is perfectly safe with me. Karen can enjoy tormenting me knowing that I won't rape her or hit her.

Think of it as helping Karen to play out a fantasy.

Looking at a nearly naked attractive girl all week is not painful in any way.

If I was not a Mormon Karen would not dare to do this. So it is Karen's compliment to my strength in my religion.

There is nothing that I can do about my situation.

The chalet has no TV or radio.

We just drifted in our bubble.

If we needed anything like another lettuce Karen just telephoned her baker and the goods appeared in the morning with the croissants and the bread.

Karen and I had lots of long chats about lots of subjects.

Karen explained that she does not really wish me to spank her. She only said it to see my reaction.

Once we are married Karen does not mind trying spanking once if I like.

I told Karen that all I will have to do to be motivated to spank her is to think about her tricking me into this holiday.

Karen just giggled happily and she snuggled up to me.

Karen says that after we are married she will enjoy working on me to get me to forgive her for this week of torment.

Karen giggled some more and she snuggled closer.

Karen said that she does not want to have full sex with me yet. Karen wants lots of holding and cuddling and touching.

Karen talked about her issues.

As an heiress Karen is a target for men who need to marry money. One of my attractions is my total lack of interest in Karen's family company.

I was amazed that Karen's expensive school had never covered "pre-nups". At Tryton High School it was covered in "Personal and Social Education" during our final year.

All Karen or Karen's parents have to do is get their lawyer to write a pre-nuptial agreement. If Karen's money is going to be a problem then just park it where whoever Karen marries can't get at it. Problem solved.

If Karen and I can live on what we can earn together then we will be like every other couple. If Karen wishes to live better then that then Karen has the means to live better.

I explained to Karen that we Mormons are supposed to store at least a year's supply of food, water and fuel. Any house we buy needs more storage space than usual.

Karen is very protective of Byram's Bearings, but she does not feel a personal need to be immersed in the business.

Cecil intends to hand over control of the business to Karen one day.

Cecil is still relatively young. Cecil is under forty.

Karen does not wish to spend her life hanging around Byram's waiting for Cecil to retire.

Karen is interested in having a career somewhere else doing something else.

Karen will come back to Byram's when Cecil has decided to retire. Karen will work with Cecil for maybe a couple of years and then Cecil will retire.

We both wish to have children.

Karen noticed my scar from the incident in Florida.

Karen was very excited by the story.

Karen kept touching the scar.

Karen not being a Mormon is a problem for me. I wish our children to be brought up as Mormons. That is significantly easier if both parents are Mormons.

The Church of Christ of Latter Day Saints is a religion where you have to live the religion. If you just pay lip service to it your children will see through you before they are seven years old.

I explained to Karen that we Latter Day Saints are an active Church. Most of the adults are active one way or another.

I am already doing some little tasks for the Church.

After I return from my mission I will be "Called" to undertake roles and positions in the Church.

It is likely that a lot of the time that we would wish to be together I will have to be out doing work for the Church.

Whatever I will be asked to do is The Lord's work so I will do it to the best of my ability.

The better I do these jobs the more the decision makers in the organisation will be moved to "Call" me to more challenging jobs.

If your wife is a Mormon she understands why one has to do it.

Even a good Mormon wife can become unhappy about the time her husband spends on the Lord's work and away from her.

If your wife is not a Mormon she can get very cross about it.

A non-Mormon wife is going to get very cross about tithing because of the effect that tithing has on the family finances.

I fear that even if Karen stays loyal while we are apart she may become angry and upset that when we are supposed to be together I will spend so much time with God and away from Karen.

If my choice is between God and Karen I will choose God although it breaks my heart.

Karen loves me.

Karen has never previously been exposed to the Mormon religion. Obviously I believe in it.

Karen thinks most religions are ridiculous. So far as Karen is concerned the jury is still out on Mormonism.

Yes it would be possible for Karen to adopt the outer form of Mormonism just to make me happy. Karen has too much respect for me to pretend to a religious belief she does not hold.

We chewed that in circles quite a bit, but we got nowhere much with it.

Karen's family thinks well of me. My Mormonism is part of who I am.

Mormonism is part of what I am.

They would prefer that I were not a Mormon but they accept that I am very unlikely to change away from my religion.

Karen's parents think that the two years apart will be a torment for both of us.

They think there is a strong chance that we will break up.

Cecil Byram is very keen that I should stay around Byram's whether I am together with Karen or not.

Cecil thinks I am a lot better as a person and as a manager than I give myself credit for.

Jeanette appeared on the last morning. My passport and wallet and ticket stub miraculously reappeared in the bedside cabinet.

Jeanette took us to lunch with her parents.

I naturally thanked them for lending us the villa.

Over a very nice lunch Pierre told me the story of how Byram's came to be suppliers to his family company. I knew that it had come about because the Six Day War in 1967 had caused disruption to supplies of components, but I let him tell me.

He thanked me for taking Marcel bowling on Fridays. It is good for Marcel to be with young people.

"So papa Byram is going to become even richer!"

Karen and I looked at him.

Why is Cecil going to become richer?

"The poor Chinese!"

Karen explained that we have not seen any news in the last week. What is happening?

Jeanette's parents looked at us as though we had been on a different planet.

A tsunami has hit China. It is the biggest tsunami in recorded history.

Tens of millions of people died in the tsunami, probably hundreds of millions.

Some cities appear to have no survivors.

Some towns and villages no longer physically exist.

Every port in China is destroyed or very badly damaged.

Road bridges and railway lines have been washed away. There is virtually no transport within sixty miles of the coast.

Many coal mines are flooded with sea water.

Electricity distribution is wiped out over a large area.

All the drinking water near the coast is polluted.

Every advanced country in the world is flying supplies and search teams to China.

Given the size of China it is like a number of fleas trying to rescue an elephant.

Commodity prices are going through the roof.

Cecil Byram is sitting on huge stockpiles of metals so Cecil will become even richer.

Cecil has told Jeanette's parents that there is no need for Karen to return to England. Cecil told Jeanette's parents that on Monday I will be pulled into Group Headquarters.

The tsunami hit on Wednesday and today is Sunday. Cecil decided not to spoil my and Karen's holiday.

I flew to England that Sunday afternoon on the flight I was due to take anyway.

CHAPTER 5: Emma Hewson

Little Kate is a sweet baby.

Max and Alice and Damien spend a lot of time just looking at Kate. Max holds Kate.

Don is walking around with a huge smile on his face.

I am very happy.

Arthur was prepared for another baby coming so Arthur is not upset.

The children are being really helpful and considerate. We have no problems except for poor Charlotte.

Charlotte has carried a torch for John Tarron since the Mormons broke up their innocent first love. John is seventeen now, and so John is allowed to be interested in girls.

John has been seen kissing a girl. Some unthinking person told Charlotte.

Charlotte is devastated, betrayed, hurt, and everything else.

These experiences are part of growing up.

The girl concerned is a Mormon, but that is no consolation to Charlotte.

I know that time heals all, but there is no point saying that to Charlotte.

Charlotte will wallow in her grief for a while and then she will get on with life.

Stoke Mandeville Hospital is very happy with Robert's physical improvement.

The Consultant has given a list of exercises to Robert's physiotherapist. The Consultant wishes to see Robert again in three months instead of the six months we were expecting.

The house is awash with music. Almost all the children are playing, singing, or learning an instrument. All the actors are practicing their music.

Kali Daar comes on Saturday with Joy to play on our piano. Peter Wilkins and Gerald Butler tend to come during the week.

Eric is almost living with us now. Eric's mother is very happy to see Eric socialising. Eric is now much less introverted than he was.

Freda made a sketch of Carlo, and Derek is now working on a face mask of Carlo.

Derek is rehearsing drumming and singing for the TV series, playing piano for Linda, and visiting his mother twice a week. Derek has an hour of Islamic classes twice a week, and his kitchen obligations.

Derek is still making time to carve wood and to play golf.

I am beginning to notice that Derek plans his time well. Derek tries to knock off his homework as soon as he gets home so that he will have the evening and weekends free.

Colin and Linda had just got involved with the Willerton Brass Band when the band-room caught fire. They were hugely happy when Byrams stepped up to support the brass band.

For quite a while they thought Mark was a hero.

Then they learned that it was Marcel who had told Cecil that the band needed help.

Mark knew nothing about Byram's supporting the band until the decisions were already made.

The Choir School had a meeting with Helen Wilkins and Angela Wilkins and Don because of concerns over Peter.

The tutor for Latin and French has been helpful.

The choir school is worried that Peter is just stretched too thin. Peter has ordinary homework, his tutor, dancing, a weekly choir rehearsal, Sunday mornings and some Saturday mornings singing at the Cathedral, and lots of time practicing for the TV series.

Something has to give.

Don brokered a deal whereby Peter resigns from being a choral scholar and Peter becomes a fee paying schoolboy. This frees up Peter's weekends and his Wednesday evenings.

David Wilkins is paying Peter's fees.

David is still earning phenomenal money.

At the theatre club David goes to a girl told David that she is gluten intolerant.

David had never thought about people with diet issues.

David is writing "Dave The Chef's Gluten Intolerant Cookbook". Then David is going to write a cookbook for people with diabetes.

Then David will probably write a cookbook for people who wish to lose weight.

David says there are several of those books on the market already.

David is also working on his calendar, his Christmas goods, and his next set of cookery programs.

Tohur Miah and Robert Graham are working on their Christmas products and their next cookery programs.

Tohur sometimes goes into a trance. Suddenly Tohur says out loud "tahini" or "yoghurt". Tohur rushes upstairs to his computer and we don't see him for hours.

In contrast Robert thinks aloud all the time. I prefer Tohur's trances to Robert's prattle.

Mark is fully occupied with his job.

Mark has barely spoken about his holiday in France because he is currently working fourteen hour days at the company headquarters. Mark says he enjoyed just lazing around in the sun with Karen.

George is also working these fourteen hour days. She is staying with us again because she is too tired to commute to and from her mother's house on the other side of Leeds.

I am not sure what the situation is between George and Ali Miah.

Ali is in his end of year exams at the moment so they are I think barely communicating. No doubt all will resolve in a few weeks when Ali returns from Cambridge.

Ali will barely have a summer holiday.

Immediately after his exams Ali is having simulator training on RAF Apache helicopters. Then Ali has simulator training with the airline. Then Ali will be on long haul flights to the Far East and Australia.

Ali has about three weeks break and then lectures begin for Ali's second year. Ali says that on the long-haul flights there are compulsory layovers when he is not allowed to fly. Ali will use the time to read the textbooks for his second year studies.

Am I going to go back to work? I don't know.

I see how hard my Head Teacher works. I do not wish to become a Head Teacher. Not because I am afraid of hard work but because so much of what the poor woman does is barely concerned with Education at all.

Mrs Rollins and I do a huge amount of work to facilitate our teacher colleagues so they can just teach. It is no fun for us.

So why am I a Deputy Head?

I could in theory go back to being an ordinary teacher.

Knowing what I now know, perhaps I should have stayed as an ordinary teacher.

The trouble is, once you have been a Deputy Head you tend to get dragged into issues and problems that are above your pay grade.

You also see your bosses making mistakes. Do you bite your tongue? Do you get involved? Whatever you choose is wrong.

I would not mind working at the Cathedral School. To teach well motivated bright children in small classes would be heaven. I have never thought of teaching outside the State sector before.

If the TV series is successful there may be an argument for setting up a small stage school. It is an interesting thought. How that would work with the foster children I don't know.

The rest of the music has arrived. There is some really good music. Presumably Carlo chose what the music would be. If the scripts are as good as the first script then the series has to be a hit.

Andrew Johnson asked if he could have bagpipe lessons. So Andrew is having bagpipe lessons as well as guitar lessons and singing lessons. Andrew is a sweet boy.

The new advertisements for Dennis and Abdullah and Amy are out.

Amy is very fit. Amy is becoming very attractive. Abdullah and Dennis are very good looking. The advertisements are even a hit on the internet.

Apparently Americans are viewing the advertisements as entertainment. The ad where Amy does one handed press-ups is apparently seen as a feminist triumph.

I don't see feminism as putting down men. Raising up women is good and I see the ad in that spirit.

Of course, I know that it was Abdullah and Dennis who taught Amy how to do the one-handed press-ups.

Don is well. He is happy with our life.

Don is happy for the children that so many of them are having success. It is not the money that pleases Don, it is that the children are having success.

Don and I never planned all this.

It has not happened by accident.

Don has supported and prepared and loved these children. The children have made their opportunities. The children help each other.

Don is hugely proud of the co-operative nature of the household. Don does not realise that this is largely down to Don.

CHAPTER 6: Cecil Byram

I was in my office one Wednesday afternoon when Daniel came in.

Have I heard about the tsunami in China? I hadn't.

We put the computer onto the various news channels. It is a total and dreadful disaster.

The water rushed up all the rivers and spilled out the sides.

Hong Kong has just gone. The island caught the tsunami full on and there are believed to be no survivors. The water washed over the New Territories. A few hundred people escaped up the mountains. They appear to be the only survivors.

Shanghai now has no buildings, only stumps of buildings. It is virtually certain that everybody I met in Shanghai is dead.

There is a port in the North of China that is not too badly damaged. Repairing that port will be a priority.

Daniel said that commodity prices are already rising.

We decided to freeze all new orders. I rang Garth and I told him about the disaster in China.

I told Garth that all our established customers are going to draw down their orders as commodity prices rise.

On the other hand I am stopping the component sales marketing effort so that the former production workers may be recalled to production.

Garth's new production workers are at the factory and are already productive.

Garth needs to work out how best to use the extra staff. Do we move to seven day working or long hours or what?

I decided that it is time Garth learned about Plan A.

Garth and Barney Stoker his deputy manager will come to see me at the office after work today. I had Daniel phone Kevin Hanson for Kevin to get back to Willerton for the briefing.

We took down the internet sales site. Carol put up a sign on the web site saying that sales are on hold until there is more clarity about commodity prices and raw material prices.

I rang my industrial research company and I asked them to do a quick re-check on the cohort of potential managers. I expect to be hiring some of the production managers over the next month.

Then I sat.

We have enough Chinese goods on land and at sea to meet all our legal commitments.

We have no long-term Chinese contracts as such. I had not wished to make myself vulnerable by trusting foreign component makers.

We have Memorandums of Understanding but they contain an “Act of God” clause.

Our standard contract for the components we make also has a clause that covers the tsunami so we are not in any kind of trouble.

On our long-term contracts we are able to vary our prices if prevailing commodity prices or wage costs increase. So if say steel doubles in price we may increase our component sale prices significantly.

Whether we are purchasing metals at current prices or we are using metal from our stockpiles is irrelevant to the price we charge.

I gave Kevin instructions to make an immediate stock-take of all our components on customers’ premises, and then to serve notice of a price increase.

Given that every components factory in Europe has significant spare capacity, why is there a problem just because China can’t produce components?

The problem is that to make components one needs metal to make them out of. The largest metal producer in the world is “temporarily” unable to produce metal or to ship metal.

There are ships full of metal in the Pacific Ocean headed towards China, but with the best will in the world those ships are weeks away from Britain. They may well not turn around because may be nobody alive to tell them to turn around.

Everyone will wish to buy metals but no-one will wish to sell.

There are virtually no buffer stocks of components or of metal anywhere in Europe.

Within days there will be a distinct shortage of metals in Europe.

For a limited period the company that has metals stockpiles is king.

If China is out of action as a metal producer for six months or for a year then there will have to be other sources of supply. But where? It can take months to bring a mothballed mine or foundry or smelter into production.

It will be months before there is enough metal in the world.

The other problem is that China produced iron in quantity from mines in China. Those mines cannot be replaced easily. So there is a world shortage of iron and a consequent world shortage of steel.

Iron and steel prices will be high for a long time.

Byram's literally cannot buy metals at the moment because there are none to be had except at extortionate prices.

A month from now metal prices will be even more extortionate.

If we are to keep the men employed we have to use the stockpiles.

If we are going to implement Plan A we have to use the stockpiles.

Metaphorically we will turn our metal stockpiles into gold.

I had intended to build a significant Chinese stockpile.

About a month ago Byrams issued new capital to fund a huge Chinese stockpile. We issued shares at par.

The shares issued are worth quite a lot more than par value because the metals stockpile and the real profit are much greater than they appear on paper.

When Karen was six I set up a trust fund for her. Karen does not know the trust fund exists.

Karen's trust fund borrowed money from the other family trust funds and bought the shares I issued. So I have transferred value to Karen without attracting tax.

On paper the price was fair.

I still control over fifty-one per cent of the share capital.

Byrams has some stockpile goods at sea because they were shipped from China before the tsunami hit. Daniel has checked and the ships carrying our goods are still afloat.

After the tsunami our share value is increased enormously just because of the stockpiles. When metal prices come down again our share value will reduce but by then most of our stockpiles will have been used or sold and we will have oceans of cash.

Our share value will increase again because of Plan A.

The business has cash on hand to build the Chinese stockpiles. Obviously China is not going to be producing and exporting goods for quite a while.

There is enough cash already in the company bank accounts to buy and run all the targeted factories and machines that will come on the market in the next month.

I can pay a bigger wage bill without difficulty.

By the end of the next month I will have used some commodities at high prices so I will have even more cash if I need it.

It takes five weeks for goods to come from China by sea.

It will be at least six weeks before China is able to export anything.

I had always planned for a three month crisis.

This looks like a crisis that must last a minimum of six months. So I need to think very carefully about how to manage during this crisis.

Garth Stead and Barney Stoker and David Taylor (my Finance Manager) and Mike Appleyard and Carol Pierce and Kevin Hanson and Daniel Mason and Georgina Aaron all gathered around at five o'clock. Rose Howarth our Human Resources manager was there too.

I told them all to telephone home to say they would be very late. I am going to take them all to a working dinner shortly.

I have booked a private room in a restaurant for seven o'clock.

I started the meeting by asking them all if they could keep a secret?

They all said that they could.

"He who would a secret keep should keep it secret that he a secret hath."

They all nodded.

Then,

"I apologise for keeping you all in the dark.

"If you have a strategy, there is an argument for making sure that everyone understands what the strategy is.

"If your strategy is secret then you need to keep it very secret that there is a secret strategy."

They nodded.

"My family has had three strategies that we have operated on for more than fifty years.

"The first strategy is well known. We only take long-term contracts. Long-term contracts make the sheer process of managing so much easier than either short-term contracts or a mixture of long-term and short-term contracts."

They all nodded.

"The second policy has been to avoid paying tax. It started in the 1950s when tax rates on high incomes were eighty per cent or more. Dividend income paid

an additional fifteen per cent. Some years the combined tax rates were above one hundred per cent.

“So we had tremendous incentive to avoid tax where we could.”

“My grandfather and then my father set up overseas trusts and transferred Byrams shares to avoid tax.”

Everyone nodded.

“You probably know that I waive some of my dividends. I take no salary as a Director, and I take out of the company only a generous factory manager’s wage.”

Most people knew that.

“We were given a house when we married, so I have never had a mortgage.

“I have always been able to save from my income. I now have pretty good personal investments.

“Any more money that I might take out of the company would be taxed at the maximum rate of tax.

“I do not need more income, so why take income that I don’t need just to have the government tax it?”

They nodded.

“The third strategy grew out of the second strategy. We needed to avoid having profit at the end of the year because our profits would be taxed even if we did not distribute them. So we sank the money into these stockpiles.

Daniel has completed his stock-take on the stock-piles. We have at least six years supply of iron, steel, brass, bronze, copper, and aluminium.”

People were surprised that we have that much!

“On top of that we have enough zinc and steel wire to run the foundry twenty-four hours a day for a full year. That is in a different stockpile.

“We also have fifteen lorry tanker loads of diesel oil. We have those in case there is a fuel supply problem.

“I have been buying machine tools at liquidation sales for about fifteen years. I only bought them if they were cheap.

They were all fettled after I bought them and then they were stored in oil and grease and plastic. I have a couple of warehouses full of them.

Either I can install them in an empty factory or I can sell them for scrap if prices are high.

“You will remember that we have been avoiding tax for years.

“The family, not the company, has cash offshore that we can lend to the company or invest in the company if we wish.

“We have just invested a lot of money into the company. It was intended to set up a stockpile of Chinese components, but it can be used for other purposes.”

Most of the people there had no knowledge whatever of Plan A. I explained the strategy.

I explained the preparation that has already been done.

They were shocked at the vision.

They were impressed by my family’s tenacity in building the stockpiles.

“Garth.

“Within three weeks we will own between three and seven more factories. They will each have a competent experienced production manager who has hand-picked his production team.

“All the factories will have spare machines.

“There are willing hands available if they need more staff.

“I will release the stored machinery if you need it.

“Here is a list of the machine tools that we have in store.

“I need you to move to be Group Production Controller.

“You will allocate contract work to the factories. You will work with the production managers in each factory. You will chair the group joint meetings with the union or unions. The aim is to have every factory at full production on long term contracts.”

Garth raised his eyebrows and nodded.

“Rose. You are now HR Group Manager. We just replicate our existing contracts and agreements and procedures.”

Rose nodded.

“The local managers will take the best person out of their previous HR team to be your local representative. They will be your team.

“There are two thousand “Byrams” uniforms in Bay 17 in the stores.

“And some “Byrams Bearings” plastic signs.

“David.

“The factories are not going to have an independent financial operation beyond their petty cash tin. So look at your software and make sure that it can handle twelve profit centres and potentially over a thousand employees.”

“It can, Mr Byram.

“I thought you were crazy when you insisted on it, but now I see your thinking.

“I will need to employ a few more experienced accounting and payroll staff. “

“I thought so. So be it.

“Get started tomorrow.

“Catering will be outside contractors.

“Mike. We are probably the only people in the country with significant stocks of metals.

“Our problem is not obtaining long-term contracts. It is choosing which ones to take.

“Think on the selection process.

“By Thursday of next week we will have a mill yard crowded with potential customers who are all desperate for components.

“How do we select our customers?

“I am open to your thoughts. So far, I think the most important question is whether we actually want a long term relationship with this customer. What is their history on paying suppliers? Do they mess suppliers about?”

Mike nodded.

“Do they have good relations with their unions?”

“Why do their relations with their trade unions matter?”

“We do not want to be involved in sympathy strikes, boycotts, or anything else like that.

“So avoid customers where those problems are possible.

“I am not anti-union. The men have the right to put their point of view. The men have the right to defend themselves.

“Every manager makes mistakes.

“I know I make mistakes.

“The men have the right to say “Hey that is not a good idea.”

“They need trade unions to do that.

“Yes there are idiot shop stewards and idiot trade union leaders. There are also idiot employers and idiot managers.

"You need to work with Garth to keep orders in line with production capacity.

"Carol. We have closed the internet operation for the next few weeks while things settle down. So you help Mike.

"Kevin. You and Georgina are going to help me on the purchasing side. As soon as a target factory is for sale you two will walk around it.

"You check that the building seems to be in reasonable condition.

"You note what machinery etcetera is there and whether it seems to be in working order.

"You also note stocks of manufactured components and stocks of raw materials. You look at security.

"You look at road access.

"You look at how many people could work there if we had enough orders.

"You look for reasons why we should or should not buy this property.

"I will not have time to visit the factories.

"I will be relying entirely on your judgement."

Kevin and Georgina were visibly concerned about their new responsibility.

"When Mark Johnson gets back on Monday Mark is going to be my PA and link person with the new production managers. Mark will be monitoring the daily changes at our target factories as they crumble one by one.

"Then Mark will telephone the recently sacked production managers out of the blue and invite them to job interviews with Garth and me."

"Any questions?"

Garth asked,

"What can go wrong?"

Typical Garth!

"When I was thinking and planning, I had in my head that whatever crisis happened is unlikely to last more than three months. I did not imagine the scale of this crisis.

"The most serious mistake we can make is to accept orders for more than we are able to produce.

"The limiting factors there are the capacity of the factories to fulfil the orders, and the amounts in the stockpiles.

"If you think that six years is seventy-two months, then we have in theory seventy-two months of supply.

“It is not quite even. We have one hundred and twenty months of aluminium and only seventy-six months of steel.

“Most of our stock is steel.

“So really the outside of our envelope is seventy-six months. If we buy more factories and increase production to tenfold, then our seventy-six months becomes seven point six months.

“We run out of steel in seven point six months and then we are in trouble.

“I know that the Americans will increase their steel production but they will sell to other Americans.

“It takes a cargo ship five weeks to get here from China. Looking at the scale of the disaster I don't see a regular supply from China being restored within a seven week time frame, to arrive here within three months.

“If we increase production to fivefold we run out of steel in just over thirteen months.

“If we increase to threefold then we have more than twenty-one months. I am pretty confident that the world will have recovered enough by then that we will have supplies of steel available again.

“So I think we are looking at threefold or possibly fourfold. No more.

“I hate to see these opportunities running away but it can't be helped. There is no point in buying factories that you cannot run.

“On the positive side increasing threefold is less managerially challenging than increasing tenfold.

“The other thing that can go wrong is that the government decides to confiscate all the metal stocks in the UK and allocate them according to government priorities. We will be given compensation for the stockpile but there will be no compensation for the lost opportunity of Plan A.

“There is nothing I can do about that.

“I do not mind if at the end of the crisis Byrams is left with stockpiles. By then the stockpiles will have cost me nothing because I will have sold or used some stock at a high price to wipe out our debt.

“More important, stockpiles are evidence that whatever happens, Byrams can supply.

“Our existing long-term customers will wish to increase their purchases.

“We are prepared to increase our supplies to our existing long-term customers by one hundred per cent provided they will commit to further long-term contracts.

“We will supply those contracts out of our existing spare capacity and from the new factories that will be operative within the next three weeks.

“Let’s go to dinner.”

Over dinner Garth said that he had never before seen a manager commit to increase production threefold in a month and then express exasperation at his own lack of ambition!

By great good fortune the first components for the Chinese stockpile are standard sizes of nuts and bolts. They will arrive here in four weeks time.

As I don’t need them for any contractual commitments I can sell them as soon as they land, at a tremendous profit. Or hold onto them for a month and then sell them at an even more tremendous profit.

CHAPTER 7: Rebecca Johnson

I knew I would miss my family. What is interesting is that I mainly miss Sally, Andrew and Michael.

I love and I respect Mark, but Mark does not need me. Mark is getting on with his life. Everything is going right for him.

Charlotte is a fine young woman. She is already a credit to our family. She is already thinking about her missionary service, which is more than three years off. Charlotte is pretty, and she is on her way to becoming beautiful.

Charlotte is very level headed.

Charlotte is still interested in John Tarron. Charlotte is fifteen, and she is obeying the Mormon rules. In a bit less than a year Charlotte will be allowed to form a relationship with John. Charlotte will be alright.

I so love the younger ones. Sally is feisty and intelligent and pretty and fun.

Andrew is already serious and earnest and loving.

Michael is just so much fun. I miss the cuddles and the kisses. And the silly arguments about whether there are more “a”s in “banana” or “a”s in fruit salad.

The answer is that if there are bananas in the fruit salad then the fruit salad has more “a”s than a banana on its own. I don’t understand that either.

Michael has endless fun with it.

I miss the physical contact with the little children so much.

My partner Hannah is from Staines. I had never heard of Staines before.

Hannah says that Staines is West and slightly South of London, just outside the M25. Staines is close to Heathrow Airport. By train Staines is only twenty-five minutes from Waterloo Station in London. Staines is fairly prosperous.

I am happy with Hannah as a partner. Hannah does not snore. Hannah does not prattle. I think some people could be uncomfortable with Hannah's constant enthusiasm but I like it.

Hannah likes the fact that I am an excellent cook. I like it that Hannah washes up. We get on.

A Mormon missionary team does not expect to knock on somebody's door, be invited in for tea, and walk out having instantly made a convert. It does not work like that.

We are only in a ward for six months. After five months we have only a month left.

We are unlikely to be anywhere long enough to locate a potential convert, court them, see them convert, and continue in contact.

Our role is to go door to door finding people who might convert.

People do not wear little labels saying "potential convert". It would be a mistake to think in stereotypes. People are all different.

Even when people appear hostile it is often less a sign of hostility to us but an indication of their significant current unhappiness.

Really our job when canvassing is to identify people who are potential converts. Then we discuss what to do with our supervisor.

Usually we spend some time building relationships with the person or couple or family. We introduce someone from the local ward who will befriend them. Then the local person works with the person or household for as long as is right.

The Mormons do not work on target numbers. We have a continuous recruitment campaign.

If it takes years of contact before a person or family decide to commit, so be it. The local Mormon ward does that work.

Our active adult members are busy people. We usually have families, parents, and other family members who need our time. Our ward has a full calendar of

religious and social events. These all need organising, and of course we usually attend ourselves.

Most of us of working age have jobs.

Our available time is limited.

If we think the person or household is moving towards our Church then we have the opportunity to save souls. We do not begrudge the time.

If we think we are wasting our time then we withdraw, trying to leave the door open so that the people in their own time may step forward.

If a missionary team visits a thousand houses we may not find a single potential convert. But the more houses we visit the more people we will meet.

The more people we meet the more likelihood we have of finding a potential convert.

Our missionary supervisors want us to spend our days actually visiting houses. There are all kinds of excuses for doing something other than knocking on doors.

Our missionary supervisors understand our human weaknesses. They were young missionaries once themselves. So they help us to keep on task. We are all volunteers of course so our supervisors use psychology to keep us motivated.

Once one team finds a potential convert the other teams feel under pressure to emulate them.

When we have our group meetings the teams who have found a potential convert are so warm and loving and supportive to the rest of us that I want to spit. But maybe tomorrow our team will find someone.

I like the Scottish people. The people in the Scottish mining villages are friendly and welcoming to strangers. They do not get many strangers.

Our team does not average even one cup of tea a week from the people we call on.

Our supervisor says that Hannah and I are so obviously intelligent that people feel intimidated by us. Hannah and I must be split up.

We are so close to the end of our placement that we will not be split up now.

For the next session we will both be paired with people who appear less bright and who appear less intimidating. That is mortifying!

The fact is that Hannah and I are not being successful. Hannah and I discuss it endlessly and then we end up crying.

We also pray.

Hannah said one night that we should stop praying out of our hurt and distress. We should be praying for the people whom we should be finding and the souls we ought to be helping to save. So we prayed like that.

We both felt that Hannah had moved us in the right direction. It was the first night in weeks that we did not cry.

In the morning our Mission Supervisor told us that our problem is solved.

Hannah and I are being moved from the pit villages of Scotland to Edinburgh.

We will canvass in an area mainly inhabited by students, university staff, teachers and social workers. Hannah and I will not be seen as unusually intelligent there.

It's looking better!

CHAPTER 8: Mark Johnson

In Greek mythology the Gods on Mount Olympus look down at the people and they observe our struggles with amusement.

If any Gods were watching me and Karen last week they were probably splitting their sides with laughter. Karen had quite a few good laughs I know.

I won't pretend that I never smiled.

I have always hoped to marry an intelligent woman. Karen outsmarted me, which shows that Karen is good wife material. Life with Karen will never be dull.

I am a serious young man. Karen is a serious young woman. It is just that Karen has a different agenda.

On one level what Karen did to me was outrageous. I understand why Karen did it.

I can see the funny side.

I am not going to get my own back on Karen. Any relationship where people need to get even with each other will end in tears.

I do not need to assert my masculinity by hurting my wife. That is to misunderstand what a man is.

Yes, Karen lied to me. Lots of wives sometimes lie to their husbands. Provided that Karen does not make a habit of lying to me I will be happy.

In an open and happy marriage the wife rarely has to lie. So I must try to keep our marriage open and happy.

In the great scheme of things, Mark Johnson being forced to watch a very pretty girl prancing around in a bikini bottom was not exactly a hardship. Kissing and cuddling Karen was very enjoyable.

I accept not “seemly”, but no-one was watching. I am only a weak mortal. I don’t feel as bad about it as I should.

Having the long free flowing talks with Karen was good for both of us. I have had time to lay out the problems that we will have to face if we stay together. Here on Mount Olympus at the Group Headquarters at Willerton I have thirty companies to watch. According to Cecil all of them are virtually certain to go down the pan in the next month.

If you think of all the people who sacrificed to build those companies, there will be so many broken hearts and so many broken lives.

Each company employs between a hundred people and four hundred people.

They will all lose their jobs this month.

The human cost is enormous.

I know that quite a few people will lose their homes and their savings after they lose their jobs. All this because of a tsunami on the other side of the world!

I have a map of Great Britain on the wall. Cecil is not interested in investing in Eire or in Northern Ireland. I don’t know why.

I have not asked Cecil.

At the moment the map has thirty blue pins in it. I have yellow pins ready to signify that the company is in trouble, green pins to show it is in liquidation, white pins to show that we have bought the premises and machinery, and black pins to show that we decided not to buy it.

Part of me feels like a ghoul.

On the positive side, I know that I am doing good. I am going to rescue nearly a thousand people by helping Cecil to buy their dead factories and to give the people jobs.

Each morning I look at each company’s file at Companies House to see if anything happened yesterday.

Cecil says that he expects the companies to start collapsing about a week after the tsunami. Cecil expects all of them to go within the month.

I have a bunch of blank progress charts. They are not labelled with company names yet.

We will wait until the company is in liquidation.

We will request permission to view the premises and machinery. Kevin and George will go to see the site. If they report back positively we will consider buying it.

Cecil's preference is to have a few large factories instead of a collection of small factories. All thirty companies employ over a hundred people. Some employ more than three hundred people, so we would prefer those premises.

Cecil says that this crisis is going to last much longer than three months.

We do not have to rush.

Two months after the factory has closed it can probably be bought even more cheaply than in the week after closure.

Many of the factories that close will be closed for many years. It is unlikely that any of the factories that we select will be bought from under us.

Cecil's strategy is first to wait for a few weeks. Cecil actually went off to China for ten days while waiting for the situation in England to ripen.

Liquidators have a duty to do their best for the creditors. Most creditors would rather have some money this year than wait maybe a decade to receive any money.

The property is usually the only significant asset of the company.

After a month the liquidator and the creditors will have realised that they have no chance of selling the property quickly. It is very likely that George and Kevin will be the only people who have even inspected the property.

Cecil intends to make insultingly low offers on the factories he wants. Cecil explains to the liquidator that this is the best offer the liquidator is likely to receive in the next year or three.

Cecil has thirty factories in mind but he only needs between three and five. So Cecil's insultingly low offer will be "take it or leave it" because once he gets moving Cecil will want to get on.

If the machinery is still in the factory that is fine. If the machinery has been sold then Cecil will reduce his offer significantly or Cecil may withdraw totally.

Cecil has quietly assembled a huge stock of machine tools. If Cecil needs them during Plan A he has them. And if Cecil does not need the machine tools then Cecil will sell them for scrap while metal prices are sky high.

Before Cecil went to China Cecil and Garth met with the union.

I was there.

Cecil explained that there simply is no metal available to buy at any price.

The men nodded.

Cecil said that a number of our competitors have already run out of metal. They are laying off their workers.

Many companies are going bust.

The union men know this.

The union guys know that Cecil has stockpiles, but they had no idea how much metal is in the stockpiles.

Cecil said,

“I have to tell you that Byram’s stockpiles are limited.”

The men were concerned.

“We only have enough steel for six...”

You could see the men thinking “weeks”.

“...years.”

The men laughed with relief.

Cecil smiled.

“We all know this supply crisis is going to last six months or maybe even eighteen months.”

The men nodded.

“At the moment, there are thousands of long-term contracts where the component maker cannot obtain metal. So he has to let down his customers.

“His men are losing their jobs.”

The men nodded.

“Factories are going bust every day.”

The men nodded.

“Good factories. Good workers. Good managers.

“They will all on the scrap-heap for years.”

The men were watching Cecil intently.

“I knew there would be a supplies crisis one day. War, plague, strikes. I did not think of a tsunami but I knew there would be a supplies crisis one day.

“I knew a crisis was coming. I did not know when. But I knew a crisis would come one day.

“So I have done some planning.

“I intend to grow Byram’s fourfold over the next three months.”

The men were very interested.

“With our stockpiles we will have no trouble negotiating as many long-term contracts as we need to keep our factories busy.”

The men nodded.

“I have identified about thirty factories that I expect to go bust this month.”

The men looked at Cecil intently.

“There are a lot more factories than these thirty that will go bust this month. But these thirty factories have good reputations, good workforces, and good managers.

“I do not intend to buy the companies. I intend to buy only the factories and the machinery.

“I will hire the previous production manager, and he will hire reliable production workers.

“The people all know each other, and they are all used to working together.

“We will have the premises, the workers, and the managers. We will have long-term contracts. We already have the metal.

“The new factories will be Byrams. Our contracts and agreements will be applied to the new factories. They will work the way we work. They will be us.”

The men nodded.

“Garth is going to be group production manager. Garth will run all the production, with production managers at each factory.

“When Garth and I go to speak to each new workforce I will ask for one of you to come with me.

“You will reassure the men that Byram’s are not anti-union. We are fair employers.”

The men nodded.

“If you wish to set up a union branch while you are there Garth and I have no objection.

“One thing the new people will have to understand.

“This is not their old factory reborn.

“This is a Byram’s factory.”

The men nodded.

“To avoid confusion, I am not going to buy thirty factories. I am going to buy some factories from among those thirty.

“I have not started the works on Ming City because we are still waiting for planning permission.

“I was going to hire a manager for Ming City but that is on hold for the moment.

“We still have eighty containers of components on their way here from China.

The current China depot will be empty inside two months because we will be able to sell off any spare components as they arrive.

“I will open Ming City eventually.

“I do not know how long it will take for the Chinese to get on their feet. A year or so at least, I suspect.”

Cecil is not short of cash at the moment. Cecil is expecting to make an enormous profit this year.

The factory costs the same to run as it always did, but we are at full production already. With the Saturday working we are at about one hundred and ten per cent of possible production.

I asked Cecil why he does not set on a night shift.

“I don’t think that working permanent nights is healthy. A system where everyone works some night shifts is pretty unpleasant. If we were desperate I could do it. I really don’t want to.”

Cecil is funding the Byram Willerton Brass Band. It is going to cost Cecil a lot of money, but Cecil is not bothered.

CHAPTER 9: Kevin Hanson

I have worked at Byram’s for eight and a half years. Over the last year or so I have spoken with Cecil Byram quite a bit.

Cecil is an odd bloke.

If Cecil trusts you, he trusts you.

I was very surprised when Cecil telephoned me at home on a Saturday. Within two hours of that telephone call I had become the band’s link man at Byram’s.

I report to Mike Appleyard the Sales Manager but I usually report to Mike and Cecil together.

Cecil had no idea what he was asking for, to take the Willerton Brass Band towards becoming one of the best brass bands in Yorkshire.

If you take the thirty best brass bands in the world, six are from Yorkshire. It is not easy to muscle in. If you have a lot of money then in theory you can muscle in.

I am not going to tell Cecil but the quickest and the cheapest option is to find a band that is already at the top and then wave your chequebook at it.

It is like a lightning strike that our little village brass band has found a sponsor with deep pockets.

We all know what needs doing if only we had the brass.

Cecil has the brass.

My Chinese job has nearly disappeared because soon there will be no more containers from China. I will be running round looking at factories with Georgina, but that job will soon end.

Cecil has told me that he is going to second me to the band as full time administrator.

Cecil thinks the administrative abilities of the band need to be beefed up. That is a polite way of saying what Cecil really thinks about the organisation of the band.

One of the accounts staff gives two hours a week to help the band Treasurer to keep his books straight.

I will be Clerk of Works when the new band building is built. I have to make sure that everything works as it should.

Cecil expects results.

Cecil does not shout at you. Cecil has trusted you to do a job, so you do it.

Unless a decision is really important, Cecil does not expect to be consulted.

Mark Johnson helped me with the planning process because I have never had to write a plan in my life.

Mark has been reading Management Planning books, so Mark knows what a plan should look like.

The way we plan is that I talk and Mark draws up the plan. We work at the detailed plan for hours after work finishes. We will not give Cecil a half-baked proposal.

In the same way as soccer has a Premier League and Divisions, brass bands have a Championship Section and a First Section, Second Section, through to Fourth Section. Willerton are in the bottom half of the Third Section so we have a long way to go.

Unlike soccer you do not go up or down a division in a year. The places are worked out each year on a three year floating average. Your position does not depend just on how you do but also on how everyone else is doing. Nobody can jump a Section each year.

Rising is slow and difficult. Falling is a lot easier.

At the lower levels of the brass band world everyone or almost everyone is unpaid.

There is a Committee elected by the band members. The Committee members usually have functional responsibilities like treasurer or competition entries or transport or keeping track of who has borrowed the band's instruments.

The Director of Music traditionally is not on the committee. Often the Director is not strictly speaking a member of the band.

This goes back to the days when many band players could not read or write.

The Director of Music was educated, and he was not working class like us.

The Director is the person who decides what music is played, and what instruments people should play. The Director might demote a person from first cornet to ninth cornet, or even to another instrument altogether.

Musical strategy is in the hands of the Director of Music although a wise Director discusses and agrees objectives and strategy with the committee.

The nuclear option is for the committee to dismiss the Director of Music. Usually it is put out that the Director resigned, but everyone in the brass band world knows what really happened.

On the other hand, if a band committee keeps firing its Directors of Music, people draw the logical conclusion that it was not the Directors of Music who have been the problem.

Our Director of Music has made it clear that he is very happy to stand aside now that we have the money to hire somebody really good. We do not pay him much because we could not afford much.

For the money Cecil is prepared to spend we can employ a very good Director. As your band rises, some players are recognised as more essential than others. It is because they make more contribution in some way. They may need payments to keep them with the band.

If your band plays in a lot of competitions people can become tired. They may need money to keep them with the band.

Cecil has agreed in principle to fund a Music Academy. We will provide very cheap musical tuition to children and teenagers. This will give us a pool of young players. We can have a children's band and a Youth Band. Some music academies encourage children to form small groups to play jazz or classical music. Their thinking is that children should have a wide range of experiences to make them better musicians.

It may take six years or longer before the benefits of the Music Academy really show. Then you find that you have a pool of experienced and competent musicians who are worthy of a place in the band. The band or the Director of Music can pick and choose.

We may even set up a "Willerton B" adult band if we have that much strength in depth.

It has happened with other bands that the "B" band begins beating the "A" band in competitions.

If we cannot provide enough opportunities to youngsters they may drift off to other bands, or be poached by other bands. They are still part of the Willerton family, and they are still in brass bands.

Good musicians are attracted by other good musicians.

In time you have a band composed of really excellent musicians, with lots of very good musicians vying for any opportunity to play with the band.

Cecil's building is going to cost him more than half a million pounds because there will also be a suite of individual tuition and rehearsal rooms. With all this danger of children possibly being molested all the rooms have to have clear door panels to reduce privacy. There will also be security cameras monitored by Cecil's security company, and recordings.

Children generally speaking have no money.

Young people often have no money.

Lots of adults are financially squeezed these days.

The band will have to lend instruments to a lot of players, even to those in the main adult band.

Each band that we have will need two uniforms. One is a light uniform for marching. It has quite a lot of wear because of rain and dust and general dirt in the atmosphere. The other is a heavy uniform to wear on a stage.

Every brass band struggles financially.

The generous sponsorship by Byrams already means the Willerton band no longer has to hold raffles and draws. There is now no financial struggle at all. If I approve a proposed expenditure Mike transfers the money to the Band's bank account the same day.

Mark and I must have spent forty or fifty hours on writing the detailed plan.

I ran the plan past the Committee. Mark had prepared a PowerPoint® presentation.

Some of the Committee were in tears. After so many years of the band living hand to mouth the Willerton Band is set to soar. The Committee approved the plan.

Then I gave Cecil and Mike the plan.

The next day I had an email from Cecil.

"Byram Willerton Brass Band plan approved. Proceed. Report monthly."

David Taylor the Finance Manager came up with a wheeze.

Value Added Tax (VAT) is charged on band instruments. The band is not registered for VAT.

So Byrams, which is registered for VAT, will buy the instruments. Byrams can claim the VAT back.

Byrams will simply lend the entire collection of instruments to the band. Byrams will buy more instruments as we need them.

The same process will apply to anything else we buy that carries VAT.

David says that any machinery Byram's buy is written off for tax purposes after five years. So after five years Byrams will simply give us the equipment they previously loaned us.

I have advertised for a full time Director of Music. The salary is so good that it will attract good applicants even though we are only a Section 3 band. The Director of Music will also be Head of the Music Academy. The advertisement said that the Byram Willerton Brass Band has “adequate and secure funding”.

The funding is “adequate” all right!

Our band has never had a web site before. A teenage lad called Sahid Daar set it up with me one Sunday. The web site looks really good. Sahid is available 24/7 if I need him. Sahid’s fee is paid by Byrams.

I put the full plan including the budget up on the web site for applicants to view. Applicants can see what the project is before they decide whether to apply.

I was also thinking that a lot of the local bands are financially shaky. We might have some of their players tempted to move to us.

CHAPTER 10: Ali Miah

The HGV (Heavy Goods Vehicle) driving course was terrific. The teachers were tremendously good.

I can drive a car and I can fly a plane. I am studying to be an engineer. I passed the driving course easily and quickly.

They put me through the next level of HGV, so I can drive HGV Class 1 and Class 2.

Reversing a laden tank transporter down a narrow alleyway at speed is the most exciting thing I can ever recall doing. It wasn’t part of the HGV test but it was part of the Army training.

I did so well so quickly that they let me qualify with forklift trucks as well.

The Wing Commander was very pleased with me when I returned.

I am still aiming to be in the top ten per cent of Engineering undergraduates in my year.

I don’t just have to pass my University exams. I have to excel.

So instead of going home for the last week of the Easter holidays I buried myself in my room at Cambridge.

I have barely emerged from my room since I returned. I eat, and then I go back to my room again.

The exams were almost enjoyable. I could answer every question well enough to pass. I have no concerns about whether I will proceed to the second year.

My concern is whether I will score in the top ten per cent of my year.

I came out of my last examination to see an RAF mechanic in uniform stood outside the examination hall. I did not know his name but I recognised his face.

He recognised me and he came over to me.

He saluted, even though I was not in uniform.

He gave me a sealed envelope and a mobile telephone. He gave me a piece of paper with a telephone number written on it.

"The Wing Commander wishes you to telephone him, sir.

"Immediately, sir."

When a Wing Commander wishes a lowly cadet to telephone him "immediately", the lowly cadet makes the telephone call.

I must be in trouble but how can I be in trouble?

"Congratulations, Miah."

"Sir?"

You know that as a student cadet it is theoretically possible for you to be called to the colours?"

"Yes, sir?"

"You are the first student cadet since 1939 to be called to the colours."

"What, sir?"

"You do know that there has been a tsunami in China?"

"Yes, sir."

"We have been flying search dogs and engineers and earth moving equipment and supplies to China since the tsunami.

"We are desperate for Hercules pilots.

"We have raided the airlines for their pilots. Now we need you.

"The envelope is your notice to report to the Hercules squadron at Brize Norton by nine tonight.

"I wanted to speak to you. Do you realise how important this is?"

"One of our cadets is actually useful!"

"There is a lesson for me in this. I am going to encourage more cadets into logistics planes.

"Your Apache helicopter course is postponed.

"We have already told the airline that you will not be able to fly with them this summer.

“Exigencies of the service.

“They understand. They say that you will be an even better pilot for having hundreds of flying hours that the airline doesn’t have to pay for.”

I went back to King’s College in a daze.

I had lunch. I packed. I put the rest of my belongings into store

I phoned George to tell her that I am flying to and from China until October. I gave George my love.

Then I went to the railway station to begin my next adventure.

When I arrived at the Brize Norton base I was still in my normal student clothing of jeans, T shirt and sweater. I intended to find my accommodation and then to change into uniform.

I had to report by nine so I still had four hours in hand.

As I reported myself at the main gate I was told to report to the Administration Block immediately.

As I approached the Administration Block towing my suitcase a Squadron Leader rushed out to greet me.

Squadron Leaders do not rush to greet lowly cadets.

The Squadron Leader looked at my log book. He saw that I had indeed qualified on the Hercules.

“Have you done in-flight refuelling?”

“Yes, sir.

“Eight times on simulator, and once for real.”

“When did you last sleep?”

“Last night, sir.”

“Are you fit to fly?”

“Yes, sir?”

“Do you see the Hercules outside Hangar Seven?”

“Yes, sir.”

“We are desperately short of air crew. That plane has been waiting for three hours for a second pilot. You are it.

“This is not the way we normally do things. We are under huge pressure.

“I am so pleased to see you Miah I cannot say.

“I am just sorry I am throwing you in at the deep end.

“It can’t be helped.

“Get going. The plane is waiting for you.”

As I climbed on board with my suitcase the First Pilot greeted me.

There are not huge numbers of RAF Hercules pilots of Bengali ethnicity. I am pretty sure that I am the only one.

“Are you the famous Miah?”

“My name is Miah. I don’t think I am famous.”

“You stood up to a Squadron Leader while you were still only a cadet.”

“I still am a cadet, sir.”

I was not in uniform yet.

“Have you been called to the colours?”

“Yes, sir.”

You are the Cadet Miah who aborted a take-off because he thought his crate was dicky?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Then you were bored with watching the Wing Commander shouting at the mechanics so you asked for another plane to play with?”

“Yes, sir.”

“You are the famous Miah.

“Good.

“You have the reputation of being a competent pilot.”

That pleased me.

It had never occurred to me that real RAF pilots might talk about a lowly cadet like me. I must have impressed my trainers more than I had realised.

“I am dog tired.

“I have not had a day off since the tsunami. After you take off you fly to Beijing.

“The course and clearances and so forth are on the clip board.

“Wake me ten minutes from the first in-flight refuelling. I will do it because at that point I will be fresher than you.

“I so need the sleep.”

Somebody had done good staff work. All I needed was on the clip board.

We did our pre-flight checks and I reported to the control tower that we were ready to fly.

Clearance was immediate.

I have flown laden Hercules planes before.

This plane was heavier than any Hercules I have known. But I took off without much difficulty.

“What is our cargo?”

“Look on the clip board”

It was earth moving machinery and diesel fuel and spare parts.

As we crossed the channel I saw that my First Pilot was already asleep. His name tag said his surname was Thomas. He was wearing the uniform of a pilot officer.

I spoke to air control officers in Belgium, Germany, Poland, Ukraine and Russia. I spoke to several in Russia. It seemed that every time we changed a time zone in Russia we changed air control officers.

English is the international language of air control so there was no communication difficulty.

There was a lot of “You are late!”

I replied,

“Sorry! We had a shortage of pilots.

“Now that I am here everything will be fine.”

I am so modest!

We refuelled once over Russia and again over Eastern Kyrgyzstan.

I assume the tanker craft were flying from Turkey but they could have flown from anywhere.

I really enjoyed that flight. So did Pilot Officer Thomas.

Pilot Officer Thomas must have needed that sleep. When he first woke he said, “Where are we?”

“Approaching the first refuelling point, sir.”

“Have I slept for nine hours?”

“Thank Christ for you, Miah.

“I have had a good sleep and I am almost human again.

“OK. We will refuel, and then you need to have some sleep.

“I will wake you as we approach the second refuelling.”

By my body clock it was half past two in the morning. I had had an exciting day.

I do not find flying tiring.

I often study in the small hours of the morning, but I had no experience of night flying. I had only piloted abroad once.

I was really pumped up by flying a laden Hercules at night over foreign countries.

I am on active service with the Royal Air Force!

I had about five hours sleep. I woke naturally. I changed into uniform.

Pilot Officer Thomas was very happy to let me fly as much as I wished. I was at the controls for the second refuelling.

At Beijing Airport Pilot Officer Thomas made a good landing and we taxied to the cargo depot.

There was a small base for RAF staff beside the cargo area.

The sergeant chef was very apologetic that he had no halal meat.

“You have potatoes, mushrooms, peppers, and eggs?”

“Yes, sir.”

“A four egg omelette with mushrooms and peppers, and a portion of chips.

“Salt, pepper, but no other flavourings.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Bread and butter?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Tea?”

“Yes, sir.”

“I am with you on and off for the next few months. If you send the order now you will have halal meat in stock for when I return.

“Let me cook it.”

The sergeant chef was surprised.

“Can you cook, sir?”

“I have cooked in English hotels and in Asian restaurants.

“Do you know the TV chef Tohur Miah?”

“Yes, sir.

“He is very good.”

“Tohur Miah is my brother. We learned in the same kitchens.”

His eyebrows shot up.

I know that this information will go around the RAF chefs like wildfire. An officer whose brother is a TV chef will never be served burnt toast or poorly cooked vegetables.

We had a night of sleep while our plane was unloaded.

Then we flew back to Brize Norton.

Pilot Officer Thomas must have been very tired because he slept most of the way back to England.

After that he was fine. He told me that I could call him "David".

Then David had four days off.

I was paired with Harry Dingle. We shared the flying. We were paired for about three weeks. I am by now "experienced".

When David came off leave he had to mother a pilot who has just qualified on the Hercules.

I am paired with various pilots as they come back from leave.

The pace has reduced by now because the emergency is over.

The airline pilots have been released back to the airline.

I was offered release.

I said that at this point I have missed flying for the airline this summer, so I have no pressing reason why I should be released.

I am very happy to build up my Hercules flying hours, repeatedly perform in-flight refuelling, and land at a wide range of Chinese airports. So the squadron will let me stay on until the end of September.

There was an administrative hiccup when we landed at one airport in China. For some crazy reason there were six forklift trucks lined up to unload the plane, but there were no forklift drivers on hand.

I unloaded the plane myself.

My First Pilot Gerald was impressed.

I was dog tired by the time I finished.

We flew straight back to England. For a change it was me who slept most of the way.

I had wanted to end my first year as an RAF cadet in the top three of my cohort.

I now have more flying hours than all three cohorts of cadets put together.

I am the first cadet since 1939 to be recalled to the colours.

I am the only one among us who has been "useful".

I am confident that I must be in the top three of my cohort. I would be very surprised if I am not number one.

I had aimed to be in the top ten per cent of Engineering students in my cohort at Cambridge. I came fifth in the exams, so I am in the top three per cent.

I have heard nothing from George in the last few months so I suspect our relationship is over. I will catch up with George and find out if we still have a relationship.

CHAPTER 11 : Mark Johnson

Kevin and the Band Committee have come up with a very ambitious revival plan. I helped with drafting it onto paper but I cannot say that I contributed anything to the planning.

As Cecil had predicted the thirty companies we were watching all collapsed in the first three weeks of the crisis. All but one died within sixteen days of the tsunami.

George and Kevin were driving all over the country looking at properties.

We came down to a shortlist of eight factories that are all in physical good condition and are large enough for our purposes.

There is one place at Cleckheaton that incorporates a long disused foundry that used to make nuts and bolts and threaded rod. Cecil wanted that because, as Cecil says, one never knows when one might want a spare foundry.

There was no competition to buy the foundry because it is very old and nobody has any metal stocks to run through a foundry.

Five weeks after the crisis we began the purchase process.

I first had to telephone the liquidators. They always wanted to meet Cecil on-site.

Cecil toured each factory. Then Cecil made his insultingly low “take it or leave it” offers that were good for seventy-two hours. Cecil told each liquidator that he has the cash for his offer.

Cecil had a shortlist of eight factories but he only wished to buy four. It was up to the liquidator whether to accept.

Cecil lost one factory but he bought three of the top four. Then Cecil bought the fifth on his list.

About two weeks later I had a telephone call from the liquidator of the factory we had missed out on.

“Sorry”, I said.

“We have all the factories we need now.”

I enjoyed telephoning the production managers.

They were all at home on a Tuesday morning.

Without exception they were all four free to come to Willerton for a job interview on Friday morning.

They all emailed me their curriculum vitas.

I don't know Latin. Should that be "vitaes"?

On Friday I welcomed the managers and I settled them with coffees and pastries. Everyone was wearing big name badges.

Garth introduced himself. The first PowerPoint® shot was an organisation chart of Byrams. There was Cecil at the top, with a photo, as Managing Director.

There was Garth, with photo, as Group Production Manager. There was David Taylor the Group Financial Officer and Mike Appleyard as Group Sales Manager.

There was a silly little dotted line leading from Cecil to my photo.

"Junior manager, and probable future son-in-law."

Just so they knew how I fit in.

There were five Production Managers reporting to Garth. There was one photo of Barney Stoker, and four silhouettes.

Garth said,

"There are four Production Manager slots to fill. There are four currently unemployed experienced Production Managers in the room."

"You will all be interviewed today.

"There is a job lined up for each of you in your old factory.

"None of you are in competition with the others for a job.

"You are all future colleagues, if you accept the job offers."

The candidates suddenly all looked very cheerful.

Daniel Mason introduced himself and he showed photographs of the metal stockpiles.

To try to put some scale on the photos my brother Andrew is in many of the pictures wearing a piper's kilt and cap and playing his bagpipes.

Each series of photos starts with viewing the edge of a tall pile of plates of metal, with a fully extended forklift truck beside it to give a scale for the height of the pile.

Then the camera moves back to show Andrew stood on the top of the pile of metal plates.

The next photo shows Andrew in the same position but now you can see the stacks of metal running away from Andrew in all directions.

There are also huge stockpiles of metal pipes and of metal ingots. There are literally thousands of tons of metal.

The candidates were very impressed.

Daniel was like a banker displaying his hoards of gold.

Then Daniel put up a frame that summarised our stocks of metal. There was a silence while the men digested the information.

The men sat there after they had digested the information.

With companies going bust all over the country for want of metal Byrams has riches indeed.

Cecil took over.

“Each of you will be interviewed.

“That will happen later today.

“It is easier to explain the complete plan first.”

So Cecil did.

The men were interested in Plan A.

The men were happy that they are just to run manufacturing plants without having to think about sales, finance, HR, transport, security, catering, or supplies and stores.

They love the idea of working with very long production runs.

They love it that at any one moment they will know exactly what production Garth will want from them on each day of the next ten working days.

They will be able to hand-pick their workforce from their former workforce.

Cecil gave them the Byrams line on trade unions. Cecil's line is non-negotiable.

They are happy enough with it.

They are all pleased to accept the jobs offered.

With the current collapse of industry there are no production manager jobs being advertised anywhere.

They were already making notes on which of their former workers to employ.

Each of them was given a laptop computer to take away. All the documentation and systems they need are pre-installed.

On Monday we will buy all four factories with their machinery.

Some of the two thousand “Byram’s” overalls stored in Bay 17 will be delivered to the Production Managers at their works on Tuesday. So will the plastic “Byram’s Bearings” signs that have sat in Bay 17 for years. There will also be a week’s supply of metals.

On Wednesday the first workers will report for work at each site.

Garth and the trade union chief shop steward and a young woman from HR will tour the factories on Wednesday and again on the following Monday.

That Saturday night after dinner I had a conversation with Cecil.

“Cecil, you have much more aluminium than you need.”

“Yes.”

“The price of aluminium is sky high.”

“Yes.”

“Why don’t you auction, say half a ton?”

“Then say to whoever wins the auction, “How much more aluminium would you like at that price?”

“After him, go to the next highest bidder and ask how much he wants at the high price?”

“If you have any aluminium left over, have another auction two weeks later.”

“Keep as much aluminium as we need and sell the rest.”

“That’s brilliant, Mark.

“Put it out to all the news media and see if we can have free publicity for the auction.

“One advertisement in the Daily Telegraph.”

“Do you want the auction on-line or here at Willerton?”

“Here. We will have the aluminium on pallets for the bidders to see.”

“We don’t want them to see the aluminium stockpiles because that might reduce the price.”

I had guessed that I would be given the job of organising the auction.

“Kevin has a problem with the brass band. He is afraid you will say “No” so he does not want to ask you.”

“Go on.”

“With top of the range brass band instruments they tend to be made to order.

“There is usually a bit of a waiting list.”

“So?”

“So the company that Kevin wants to use has no brass. It buys brass tubing in relatively small quantities. Now it can't buy brass tubing at all, because nobody who has brass tubing or brass will part with it.”

“How much do they want?”

“They need about five hundred pounds of brass pipe to make the instruments Kevin wishes to order, and another five hundred for orders they took before the tsunami.”

“No problem. I will release that.”

“Kevin says the company owner told him that the company is being crucified by their bankers. The bank is calling in their overdraft. The company is about to go bust.

“So Kevin asks if you wish to buy one of the best manufacturers of brass band instruments in the world?

“You can probably buy it for a song.”

“What do you think?”

“At the top end of the market there is always enough business to keep going. It is a good business.

“The only problem with it is that their bankers are idiots. The company are out of brass to make instruments, and out of brass to pay rent and wages.”

“Go and see the company owner with Kevin and George.

“Do due diligence.

“He is going bust. He is not in a strong position.

“On the other hand he was running a sweet business. Let him have ten per cent of the shares and a contract where he earns a small wage as manager plus twenty per cent of the profits.

“Mark, Byrams are not going to buy this manufacturer. One of our family trusts abroad will buy it.

“See if you and Kevin can visit the manufacturer immediately.”

The manufacturer was very willing to meet with us, so George drove Kevin and me over to the brass band instrument factory on Monday morning.

Without stocks of brass the business will shortly be dead. With the bank pulling the plug like it has the business is already walking dead.

The workmen are already laid off.

There is no equity in the business.

The premises are rented and the manufacturer had to sign personal guarantees for the lease. There are twelve years to run on the lease.

The manufacturer had to sign personal guarantees for the company overdraft, secured on his home.

So the poor guy is going to lose both his livelihood and his home. He will be homeless and bankrupt.

The only assets the company has are its reputation, its skilled work force, and a few machine tools.

I showed the man Daniel's photos of our brass stocks.

The man kept turning the photos over to see if "fake" was printed on the back.

When the manufacturer told me how much money he needs to get out of trouble

I nearly burst out laughing.

I knew I could agree that figure without telephoning Cecil.

If you were fifty years old, about to lose your livelihood and your home, how long would you hesitate if offered a halfway decent rescue package?

I took the guy's bank details and I telephoned Cecil.

Cecil laughed at the figure, and he agreed the deal.

I spoke to the man.

"OK. The money will be in your bank account this afternoon. Phone your bank now and tell them it is coming.

"Tell your workers.

"The brass piping will be available to collect from noon tomorrow.

"Or we can arrange delivery.

"Cecil, our boss, has told me that Kevin here and Byram's Finance Officer David Taylor are going on your board as Cecil's representatives.

"We are not changing your name. We do not wish to run the business.

"Just carry on the way you were."

"The boss has thousands of tonnes of brass tubing in his stockpile, so you may accept as many orders as you can process.

"But the Byram Willerton Brass Band is next in the queue."

"Any brass that you buy will be sold to you at current prices, so you will need to raise your prices."

The guy was so grateful!

His first phone call was to his wife.

I asked Cecil later why the rescue terms had been so generous. The guy would have accepted nothing.

“He would have accepted nothing.

“But two or three years from now he would begin to think he had been robbed.

“He would raise some capital and he would set up across the road, taking his best workers with him.

“This way he basically stays as his own boss. With his shareholdings and his wage and his profit share he will already be financially comfortable.

“So he will not bother to set up again.

“To earn a good living he needs to make decent profits.

“The family trust is on eighty per cent of the decent profits, so our interests are aligned.

“When you think how little money we have put in, our return on investment is going to be very good.”

The aluminium auction was amazing. We gained publicity for the auction as well as advertising it.

I had hired a professional auctioneer.

The auctioneer was on a fee for the Tuesday afternoon rather than on a percentage of the price. That was one of my better decisions.

The mill yard at Willerton had more Bentleys and Jaguars and Porsches than I have ever seen together in my life. There were a few Ferraris and a couple of Rolls Royces.

The high end Rovers looked like poor relations.

Every participant had to complete a contact details sheet to buy an auction paddle. The auctioneer supplied the paddles.

The auctioneer announced that the highest bidder would have the first opportunity to buy more aluminium at the final prices. Then other bidders would have the opportunity to purchase at the high prices until we had sold all we intend to sell today.

Only bidders would have any opportunity to purchase. Low bidders might find we had run out of stock before they had an opportunity to purchase.

The auctioneer started the auction at an exceedingly high price. The half ton of aluminium sheets went for a shockingly high price.

The half ton of aluminium ingots went for a very high price.

The aluminium pipes I thought at one point would cause a punch-up. They went for even more ridiculous prices.

“The terms are that you order from Mr Johnson today. You make payment by two pm tomorrow afternoon.”

“The goods will be available for collection from Byram’s depot in Tyswin on Thursday morning from ten in the morning.”

The high bidder was very happy to buy thirty tons of aluminium piping at the excruciatingly high price.

The guy behind him wanted twenty tons of piping. He was astonished when Daniel and I just nodded.

“How much aluminium piping do you have?”

“Enough for you”, said Daniel.

We sold all our “surplus” stocks of aluminium that day. We were left with only seventy three months of supply, in line with our other stocks.

Byrams made almost enough from the aluminium sales to repay all the debt to the family trusts abroad.

With our recent usage of metal at current high prices all the loans are now repaid in full.

The huge stockpiles are “free”.

Tyswin is the smaller of the aluminium stockpiles. We cleared the Tyswin depot completely. Cecil does not know what he will do with Tyswin. It is just a large flat piece of ground with a high stone wall enclosing it. Cecil has now reduced the security to a twice nightly drive-by. We don’t want the stone wall to be stolen!

Garth is very happy with the new set-up.

Mike gives Garth breakdowns of the orders and draw-downs daily.

Garth allocates production across the factories in discussion with the resident production managers.

Garth and Daniel arrange for the delivery of metals as they are needed.

HR and Finance are working smoothly. The new Production Managers have brought back people who used to do this work. The people now answer to Rose and to David.

Security and catering at the new sites is outsourced to conventional contractors.

Carol has reopened the Internet sales site, selling what we used to sell.

Carol charges ridiculously high prices.

As ours is the only site in the United Kingdom that has stock to sell Carol is doing very nicely. Prices for components on the Internet sales are ten times what they were two months ago.

Even at these prices we are selling eight times by volume, so together eighty times by turnover.

Sahid is still on his miniscule percentage of sales.

Sahid has a realistic chance of becoming a millionaire before Christmas. Cecil Byram of course is doing even better.

The Internet sales are much more profitable than any of the long-term contracts. The Internet production and packing is all done at our original factory in Neverthorpe.

Garth has actually diverted work away from Neverthorpe to make sure that the Internet operation can continue to function well.

The Chinese stocks are being ferried to Neverthorpe to supply Internet orders. Fortunately the stocks of nuts and bolts Cecil had bought to begin his China stockpile have now arrived.

No-one else in Europe has nuts and bolts for sale.

The foundries in Europe that can make nuts and bolts have no metal.

Carol is charging fifteen times the normal price for nuts and bolts and they are still selling very fast.

The next time we set up the Neverthorpe foundry we will just keep it running because at the moment nuts and bolts and threaded rod are very profitable. We will use up the Chinese stock first of course.

Carol is also compiling a list of the big buyers.

With Cecil's consent Mike Appleyard is telephoning the big buyers after we have vetted them as customers we would wish to have.

Mike explains how Byram's customers who have signed long-term contracts are given even better volume discounts. Are they interested in signing long-term contracts with us?

They certainly are interested!

Cecil is keeping an eye on China.

Cecil says that a few Chinese exports will start in another two months time, but it will be a full year before Chinese production becomes significant.

Containers have stopped arriving from China.

The Clickworth Chinese depot will be closed in about a week. Again, it is a large flat piece of ground with a high wall around it.

Cecil flew to China after the tsunami to indicate a willingness to invest in China.

One of the Shanghai manufacturers Cecil met on his first trip is still alive.

His factory is gone.

His workers are dead.

He has no money to set up again.

Cecil apparently said,

“What do you need?”

“I can invest money.

“I can give you long-term orders.

“I can train workers in my factory in England. Or I can send you some workers to act as trainers and foremen.”

China is so desperate for inward investment that the normal rules about

Chinese participation in inward investment have been waived.

Cecil reckons that it is in his long-term interest to lend money to his Shanghai friend so his friend may buy shares in the new business.

The loans to Byrams from the family funds have been repaid so the family funds have plenty of cash.

This factory in China is going to make nuts and bolts. It will not be “Byrams” because it has no connections with Byrams other than common ownership.

As soon as it is up and running Cecil will give it long-term contracts to supply nuts and bolts to Byrams.

Using this promise of immediate foreign investment and immediate foreign sales the Shanghai partner has negotiated all the permissions and permits he needs to begin building his factory.

Cecil brought Mr Wong to England to show him the working conditions in our factory.

Mr Wong is going to build a “Western” factory because that is what Cecil wants.

The workers will still be paid at Chinese wage rates but their working conditions will be better than factory working conditions usually are in China.

The school term ended, so the children began filming.

More importantly, Karen returned and Marcel left.

Karen and I inspected the summerhouse thoroughly and then we resumed our normal life together.

Karen is now coming to some Mormon social events with me.

A house next door to the Daars' house came up for sale. Sahid had enough money saved to buy the house without needing to borrow money.

Sahid is too young to legally own a property. The Trustees are Shahida and Amina who are both now eighteen years old.

Shahida and Amina are both now formally out of care.

The Daars are discussing among themselves whether the younger children should stay in care or whether Shahida and Amina should take responsibility for their siblings.

They appreciate that Arthur and Joy provide adult stability and adult protection and guidance. If the children come out of care the Daars will lose Arthur and Joy.

Karen has decided to study Accountancy and Marketing as a joint honours degree. Karen's A levels will be Maths, Sociology, Psychology, and French. Karen can study these at Meldon Sixth Form College.

I am back to working as an apprentice. I am working on maintaining our fleet of forklift trucks.

Cecil has a number of petrol tankers full of diesel fuel that have not moved in twenty years. Cecil intends to sell the diesel to a haulage company and then to sell the tankers for scrap while metal prices are high. So I will be working on making the tankers roadworthy. This will involve freeing off brakes, checking and replacing tyres, freeing off valves and taps, checking the lights and electrics, and probably a few other things.

After that I will be involved in reinstating the foundry at Cleckheaton.

Barney Stoker is in charge of bringing the Cleckheaton foundry into operation again. If we decide to run the foundry then Barney will stay in charge. If we decide not to run it then Barney will mothball it again. We will know however that everything works.

George is being made manager under Garth at Neverthorpe on a temporary basis, because her sales and product development skills are not currently needed.

The job may become permanent. George is a permanent employee but Cecil uses her to plug gaps. This is good experience for George.

Cecil had not decided what to do with his two warehouses of machine tools. Garth took a few machine tools that he needed into the Neverthorpe factory to expand production capability. That made it possible for Garth to eliminate Saturday working.

Mr Wong says that there is a desperate shortage of machine tools in China. Instead of trying to sell the machine tools to manufacturers who like Mr Wong have no money Mr Wong proposes investing in the new factories using the machine tools as Cecil's capital input.

I and Karen are going to go camping with the kids after they have been filming. I missed last year's camp. With the extra kids who are coming there will be about forty children and teenagers at the camp.

Andrew and Michael will sleep in my tent.

Charlotte and Sally will sleep in Karen's tent.

I will go to Tunisia without Karen because that holiday was booked before I got together with Karen.

I am having extra leave because I worked during the last Christmas holidays and I will be working over the next Christmas holidays.

Ali has been shanghaied to help the RAF to fly supplies to China. Ali told Tohur that he will earn hundreds of flying hours. Ali may possibly earn thousands of flying hours.

Ali does not know what he will be paid for all this flying.

Ali would fly for free, so really Ali does not care what he earns from the flying.

The TV chefs were filming while the children were filming for the TV series. The TV chefs will film again when they return from Tunisia.

Robert Graham is now very strong. Robert still cannot move his legs, but Robert's legs are strong from all the exercises that Robert has been doing.

We have discovered that the gym is very close to soundproof. It is the ideal place for Andrew to practice playing his bagpipes.

Shakoora and Amina Daar have completed their courses. They both earned Distinctions in Fashion Design.

Uncle Jalil is still not fit enough to return home, so the family had to make some decisions about what to do.

Amina is not going to University. Amina is the principal carer.

“Little” Ahmed is now seven years old. The children can look after themselves now. The younger children are still technically in care, but they will be discharged from care soon after Uncle Jalil or Daddy Jalil returns home.

Shakoora has an unpaid placement at a fashion house in Paris to begin in September. Shakoora is having a crash course in French at the moment, paid for by the clothing collective.

Abdullah and Sahid have bought a house in a nearby street. It is intended to be a family home for Abdullah when he marries, sharing with Sahid when Sahid marries.

For the moment it is rented out and it is generating an income.

The house Sahid first bought now has passages knocked through to the Daar family home. The Daars’ original front sitting room is now a bedroom and sitting room for Jalil Daar for when he returns. They have given Jalil Daar an en-suite bathroom.

The two back rooms have been knocked through to make a kitchen and dining area. Mr Daar can live on one floor for now.

The other front room is a ladies and general living room.

The two downstairs kitchens have become a sewing factory.

For the last few years the Chinese have been providing most of the wedding dresses and prom dresses bought in England. Virtually no girl or woman is a perfect size twelve or fourteen or whatever, so an English seamstress always alters the dress to fit the individual client.

With the collapse of China there is going to be a desperate shortage of base dresses to alter. So the Daars have four young women from the local Somali community just churning out these base dresses.

The front cellars are storage for the textile factory.

The workers come in through one of the downstairs back doors, so they never see, let alone meet, any of the Daar males.

The young women appreciate the opportunity to work only five minutes’ walk from home in a respectable, Somali speaking, Muslim, and secure environment.

There has been a general reshuffle upstairs.

Sahid and Jalil still share a bedroom, but all the geeky equipment has been moved to an adjoining bedroom to be “the studio”.

Sahid is looking at more houses to buy, but he is also thinking of joining an investment club with David Wilkins, Charlotte Johnson, Robert Graham and Tohur Miah.

For religious reasons the Muslims and the Mormons are not keen on the arbitrage business that Don's son-in-law runs. They think that it is speculation rather than investment. Gambling is forbidden in both religions.

The idea of the investment club is that the youngsters should form a joint fund and then they will invest it together. They are holding fire for the moment because Dennis is dithering about whether to join and Sahid is waiting for another payment from Byram's.

Sahid is afraid that Cecil will suddenly say that Sahid is earning too much money and then reduce or end Sahid's payments.

Sahid's interview with his careers teacher was constructive. The teacher said that a degree in Media Technology is right for Sahid, preferably at Salford, Manchester, or Queen's University, Belfast. Sahid should study Electronics, Physics, Maths and Information Technology at A Level.

Sahid's practical portfolio will make Sahid an attractive applicant.

Sahid is thinking all this over.

Sahid is in the same year as Charlotte. His GCSE exams are over a year away. Arthur and Joy Brown have moved back to their own home. They are visiting their grandchildren a lot more.

They have told Doncaster Council that they want a holiday from fostering.

They will tell Doncaster Council when they are available to foster again.

The Browns are on good terms with the Daars. The Daars hope that Uncle Jalil will be home by Christmas.

Don sat me down. As I know, Don is a trustee for Sally.

Charlotte is old enough to know her own mind, so Don allows Charlotte to tithe.

Don is very twitchy about allowing Sally to tithe. Sally is very young. Sally is only nine.

Today Sally is a firm Mormon.

People do fall away from the faith.

What happens if Sally turns round when she is Charlotte's age or my age and Sally says that Don should never have tithed for Sally?

Don is happy to set up a "Sally B" fund where he transfers ten per cent as though Sally is tithing. Then when Sally is mature enough Sally may authorise the payment of the accumulated "Sally B" fund to the Mormons.

Bob has stopped visiting, so Don has no Mormon adult to consult.

Would I please speak to the Bishop and see if the Bishop has any other possible compromise to suggest?

I told Don that tithing is voluntary.

If Don is saying that Sally is too young to agree to tithe then I can see his point.

I don't agree, but I see his point.

I will discuss with the Bishop and see what he suggests.

Bishop Collins has ended his term as Bishop. He is visiting family in Australia.

I will have to see Bishop Singleton. Bishop Singleton is the Elder Ted Singleton who trained me in the preparation to becoming a priest. I have no idea what Bishop Singleton will say.

CHAPTER 12 : Don Hewson

Straight after the filming, in agreement with Malc Dow, I had the boys shorn for the summer. Their hair will grow back to the right length for the filming of the Christmas Special in late October.

I said to the boys that if we did not shear them now then their hair will be far too long in October.

They were not all happy, but they went with my decision. I think they look better with short hair, but then I always did.

We had about three days at home, and then the children went camping. With all the musical instruments that went I was glad that the children have the campsite to themselves. Much the same gang went as went last year, plus more Johnsons and more Wilbeys. Andrew took his bagpipes.

Tohur and David and Robert and Mark are camping, so I have no fears that the children will starve to death.

Ruth Lightfoot is there again.

Helen is there, and so are the two older Daar girls. The event is well supervised.

I make a supplies run every two days. I am not encouraged to linger there.

The kids are having a great time.

George Aaron moved out a while ago so we just have Alice, Damien, Arthur, Kate, and Jenny Graham. The house seems so quiet!

We visited Emma's parents for the first time ever. Alice and Damien explored the house thoroughly. I think it is the first time that either of them has seen the inside of any house other than our house and the Wilkins' house.

Arthur and Joy said that the Daars are such good children that fostering them had been easy work.

Sahid had opened a bank account while he was with us.

Sahid saw no need to tell the social workers about his earnings and the social workers had never asked. Arthur and Joy told the family social worker Veronica that the sewing co-operative and Abdullah and Sahid are all earning "good money".

"Enough to pay for a holiday?"

"Enough to buy a house!"

Veronica was impressed. Veronica felt that she had to raise this at the next case conference.

At a case conference Arthur and Joy outlined the approximate earnings of the children. They included Kali because by this point Kali's payment for the pilot program had been paid to the trust fund I set up.

All of the children concerned are doing well at school, so no-one could say that all this activity is hurting their studies.

The children are saving their earnings rather than frittering them.

For Sahid, Abdullah, and the co-operative Doncaster Council no longer pays board. The case conference decided that there is cause for admiration but no cause for concern.

All this was before Sahid's payments from Byrams became large.

Houses in central Doncaster's ethnic minority areas are not very expensive.

Sahid's monthly payments now are large enough that if he wished Sahid could purchase a house a month.

The lad is stashing some money for his tax bill when it arrives.

Veronica said that the case conference has made a decision on the principle of whether to intervene, and it decided not to intervene. Unless there is evidence that Sahid is going off the rails there is no reason to intervene.

There were the usual excitements of about forty children and teenagers camping.

George Butler fell into the same bed of nettles again this year. George was happy to help to gather the materials for nettle soup!

Michael Johnson, Colin Donkin, and Fosia Daar at different times all fell off the rope and fell into the pond they were swinging over.

The man who runs the campsite said that the children play music and dance until ten at night, and then they go to bed. He and his wife sit out listening to the singing.

I have a very musical bunch of children. Even the bagpipes player is good.

Do I really have three television chefs cooking for the children? I told him that at least ten of the children are excellent chefs, but only three of them have chosen to go on television as chefs.

He made no difficulty about me booking the campsite again next year.

The documentary program tracking Robert came to film him camping. They only stayed a few hours.

They filmed several children throwing Robert into the pond from the jetty and Robert swimming to the jetty and climbing out. According to Helen the children have been practicing this scene for a few days.

Robert loves the activity. Several other children are frequently thrown, all of them volunteers. Great fun for kids if they enjoy it!

When the children came back, we had a few days to turn around before my household had to pack for Tunisia.

One morning there was a Special Delivery envelope for Max. I allowed Max to open it.

It is invitations to two premieres of the film that Max appears in. Max and Dan play the principal actor as a child during flashbacks. The first Premiere is in New York in late January and the second in London on Valentine's Day.

The principal actor is Dee Lishus, currently the most famous male actor in the world.

One of the fan magazines had paid a reputable polling agency to conduct a serious survey in the USA. Extrapolating from the polling results thirty million American women would abandon their husbands to shack up with Dee. This

includes four million women who had described themselves as “happily married”.

Dee is in his middle thirties, and Dee has been a heart throb since he was eighteen. Dee has enough Oscars and other awards to justify two shelves above his fireplace as well as using the mantelpiece.

None of Dee’s films have done badly. They are usually the second highest earning film of the year they come out.

So far, though, Dee has not appeared in the iconic film of the decade.

Dee is still ambitious.

Dee is currently single, his childhood sweetheart having divorced him recently.

The invitation is for “Max Hewson and partner”.

Without needing to be prompted, Max asked,

“Mum, would you come to these Premieres with me, please?”

“You will meet Dee Lishus.”

“Of course, darling”, said Emma with a huge happy smile.

“Anything for you, darling.”

Emma hugged and kissed Max more demonstratively than I have ever seen her being with Max before.

“What will I wear?”

“We will be on the red carpet with all the media present! We will be photographed with Dee Lishus!”

Emma rang her mother. Emma is going over to Doncaster tomorrow morning to meet with Joy and the Daars.

Then Emma rang Karen Wilbey. Karen does not have £25,000 for a dress to wear. Karen does not have £25 to spend except by raiding Dan’s earnings which I currently hold as a trustee. I don’t think Karen would and I don’t think I would let her.

Emma and I have that kind of money, but we have more sense.

Karen Wilbey is going with Emma tomorrow to see the Daars.

The day after, we fly to Tunisia.

Emma said that Max will need a suit. So will Dan. The suits should be identical.

Emma will speak to the Daars.

Helen Wilkins has split up from the uninteresting boyfriend she brought to dinner. We are all sure that Helen has done the right thing. None of us can even remember his name.

David's book on gluten intolerant cooking is in the supermarket already, and on sale internationally. It has been reviewed by three gluten intolerant association web sites in different countries and all three gave the book rave reviews.

David's annual "Dave The Chef" cookbook is just the recipes he has cooked in the last year plus a DVD of David cooking the dishes taken from his TV program. It was not a lot of work for David and Sahid to put that together.

This year's calendar is just photos of David cooking and holding various cooked dishes.

David says that Tohur is such a hunk it is not worth competing with Tohur on the male body stakes.

Robert's cookbook is just his dishes over the last year with DVD on how to cook them.

Robert's calendar is photos of Robert in the gym. Robert is very fit, so why not show off his six-pack?

The disparity in age between Tohur and Robert, and the different audiences they attract mean that they are almost not in competition with each other.

The "Terrible Tykes" Christmas material is not out yet. It won't be long before their CD and their calendar are out.

Amy and Abdullah and Dennis and Diana have put out a DVD containing all their advertisements and illustrating all the ballroom dancing dances that they do. For the dancing part Mrs Freeman does the commentary and sometimes she slows down the action so viewers can see exactly what the dancers are doing.

Mr Hudson has waived his financial interest, and so has the sanitary towel company.

The DVD is selling well in the UK and in North America. It has been dubbed into German and it is on sale in German supermarkets.

Emma came back from the Daars very happy and slightly worried.

The Daars say that all fashion houses are in fierce competition for the customers' money.

The Daars cannot afford the literally tens of millions of pounds of advertising they would need to make any impression in the fashion world.

For an opportunity to have one of their dresses in the same photo as Dee Lishus on the red carpet at a Film Premiere the Daars would happily pay £10,000.

The Daars are hugely excited to have the opportunity to have two dresses on show at each Premiere. Not only are the Daars not going to charge for the dresses, the Daars will pay for shoes, handbags and accessories.

The Daars took very careful measurements of Emma and Karen. The Daars took photos of both Emma and Karen in their underwear.

Looking at themselves in the mirror Emma and Karen have decided to exercise in our gym. The tums and general excess flesh need to be reduced. The muscle tone needs to be improved.

The Daars will use the photos and their computer design packages to show what the dresses will look like.

The Daars said that dressing a beautiful young woman in her early twenties is not a great challenge for a dress maker. If in doubt, show flesh.

Women in their thirties who have had children can be glamorous. There are millions of women in their thirties who wish to look glamorous and who have the money to buy glamorous dresses. If the Daars can make a mother of five and a mother of four look glamorous then they will attract a huge amount of business at £20,000 or £25,000 a time.

I am not stupid enough to say to Emma that after four children she has let herself go a little. Compared with most women of Emma's age Emma is still pretty good.

I told Emma that I think Emma is beautiful.

I don't think Emma needs to change, but if Emma wishes to improve on her present good looks I will be very happy to help her with any exercises she likes.

My offer to help Karen is less generous but I will help Karen to become fitter.

If Emma is going to be seen by millions of women alongside Dee Lishus it is hardly surprising that Emma wishes to look her best. Emma has five months to sharpen up, so there is more than enough time.

The Daars will use our fortnight in Tunisia to draw sketches and designs of the total look they are striving for. Then Emma and Karen will have input, make design and fabric choices, and so forth.

CHAPTER 13: Malc Dow

Sometimes in this world things just go right.

The concept of our children's TV series was outside the usual run of TV series.

There is a strong story line running through the series.

Emily really understands these children.

Emily has even absorbed the Yorkshire accent and Yorkshire speech structure that the children use. Emily writes lines that are utterly natural for the children to speak.

Emily is not using the Yorkshire dialect that the children sometimes use because ours is a national program.

Carlo Stewart as music director is just perfect. Carlo is on the same wavelength as the children.

On the first day of filming at Easter, when the piano turned out not to have been tuned recently, Kali Daar gave Carlo such a look of disappointment that Carlo was cut to the quick.

The normal relationship is that the Music Director supervises the performances of the children. One does not expect a child to judge the performance of the Music Director and to find him wanting!

Carlo is a tough bunny but Carlo had no defence against the look that Kali gave him.

Carlo will make sure that he never earns such a look again.

Finding child musicians who are happy to perform on television is not that difficult. Finding child actors is fairly easy.

The Hewson household generates very competent musicians with terrific personalities. They are all good kids, and they all get on.

The children have such a good work ethic that all of our technical team are impressed.

The children always know their parts. The children know and have rehearsed their music. None of the guitarists ever needs to borrow a plectrum. The drummers always have their sticks.

The children turn up ready to roll. They never need to interrupt filming to use the toilet.

The children show impatience whenever there is delay caused by us adults.

We are supposedly the professionals so we do feel embarrassed when there is an unnecessary delay. We feel that we have failed the children.

The pilot program we produced at Easter was an utter knockout.

Mr Vincent and the other executives were stunned.

The concept, the performances, the music, the pace, and the story line were all terrific. The children are all attractive. They all have strong personalities. There are both genders and several ethnicities, which wins brownie points for diversity and for inclusion.

As the credits rolled up Mr Vincent said,

“I thought so!”

“What”

“Wilkins! Hewson! Even a Daar!”

“Are all of these children connected to Mr Hewson of Tryton?”

“Yes.”

Mr Vincent laughed.

“I produce Robert Graham and I used to produce David Wilkins. Sahid Daar is their set designer, illustrator, and general technical expert.

“Let me guess.

“The kids are perfect from a Director’s point of view?”

“Yes.”

“They are mature far beyond their years, and they are always perfectly prepared when they arrive for filming?”

“Yes.”

“You are in for an exciting time.

“We have to take this series.

“We will show it on Thursday evenings straight after the magazine program where Robert Graham cooks.

“Is there going to be a Christmas Special?”

“We have one planned. Special guests will be Robert Graham who plays the accordion and violin incredibly well, and sings, and Charlotte Johnson.”

“How did you manage to book Charlotte Johnson?”

“Charlotte Johnson is Sally Johnson’s sister.”

“Of course.

“I know that Charlotte Johnson is an orphan in care. She lives in the same house as Tohur Miah. It sort of makes sense that she should live with the Hewsons.”

“Well, have thirteen programs in the can for the first of September, and we are away.”

“I want a hundred minute Christmas Special. Can you do that?”

“Easily. We could do longer if you wish.”

“I will bear that in mind, but work to one hundred minutes for now. With advertisements and linkages that will fill two hours.”

Carlo and Emily work very hard on the scripts and the music to make sure they enhance each other.

All of the team adults can smell industry awards coming for this series.

The strong scripts and the strong music are the backbone of the series. Add the musical performances and showmanship and the acting and we have a world beater.

Carlo is going up to Yorkshire every weekend in May and in June to polish the musical performances.

Carlo says that when he arrives the children are already good enough to film or to record. All that Carlo can do is to tweak and polish already excellent musical performances to make them slightly better.

Compared with some of the jobs Carlo has had to do, these Yorkshire weekends are Paradise for him.

Carlo has to work around the difficulties that Sally Johnson will not work on Sundays for religious reasons, and that Max Hewson and Gerald Butler sing at the Meldon Cathedral every Sunday morning and some Saturday mornings.

Those three are all fine with Saturday afternoons so Carlo schedules the other children around them.

Kali Daar prefers to come on only one day of the weekend, but she will come on both days if needed.

The Manchester studio is being very co-operative. They stand to earn a lot of money from repeat bookings from us. It adds to their prestige as a studio to have a famous series made there.

When a team knows that we are onto a winner there is such a feeling of goodwill that it is almost humbling.

People work incredible hours so as not to let the rest of the team down. People think outside the box.

Freda Graham's sketches of the children and the theme music "Dance To Your Daddy" open each show. There is not time to show ten solo performances each episode, much as we might like to. In a fifty minute episode we usually have eight musical performances including two solos.

The adult actors are really just foils to bounce incidents off.

The children are the stars.

It is not that the children are scene stealers. This is children's TV and the audience want to see children rather than to see adults.

When it came to the filming of thirteen episodes back to back the children were great. There truly are ten stars now.

Any one of the four girl actors could carry a series on her own. As a foursome they are incredibly strong.

I could rave about each boy. There is not a weak performer amongst the children.

Dan Wilbey has such a wonderful terrified look that we have to ration ourselves as to how often we use it.

The adult actors are good, and they are good with the children.

One cannot film a fifty minute TV drama episode in two hours.

When the children who play most of the characters are so competent it puts the rest of us on our mettle.

We used to rehearse and then film.

Now we film the rehearsal as well, because usually the children are perfect first time.

I find it humbling that one filmed rehearsal and two run-throughs is more than enough material for an episode. Filming adults is often not as easy.

We can film the children's part of an episode in two and a half hours. Any adult only filming needed we then do in the afternoon.

There are restrictions on working hours for children so we only film one episode a day.

Our techies just love these children because the children are so professional. Editing is a dream because each child stands exactly where they should every time.

We gave the children weekends and Wednesdays off so as not to tire them.

CHAPTER 14: Tohur Miah

When we got back from the camp we had only a few days before we went to Tunisia.

Sahid telephoned me to tell me that the police have raided his house in Doncaster looking for drugs.

Apparently Sahid's bank manager was unhappy about a fifteen year old black lad suddenly having so much money. Sahid is black and Sahid lives in the inner city so Sahid must be earning all this money from drugs.

Under the rules about money laundering the bank manager was required to report his suspicions to the police.

The police raid found no drugs at all in the house except the usual drugs anyone has in their medicine drawer. The police caused quite a lot of damage to find nothing.

Sahid has photographed all the damage and Sahid is claiming compensation from the police. Sahid is furious.

Uncle Jalil and Amina were at home during the raid.

Uncle Jalil is back in hospital now he is so upset at the raid and at the damage caused by the police.

Jalil is also upset at the damage to the family's reputation.

The last time people in uniform visited Uncle Jalil's house they massacred some of his family.

Jalil understands that the British police are not like that but emotionally Uncle Jalil is badly affected by this raid.

Jalil had thought that he was safe in Britain.

Sahid has put up a board outside his house showing photos of the damage the police caused. Sahid also sent photos to the newspapers.

Cecil Byram confirmed that the contract Amina showed to the police is genuine.

Cecil is aware that Sahid is in line to earn a million pounds or so from Byram's this year.

Cecil said that when the deal was originally made Sahid was in line to earn between £250 and £2,500. Sahid is doing very well from the increase in turnover, but it is money that Sahid is entitled to under the terms of his contract. Cecil says that had Cecil been able to foretell the future Cecil might well have negotiated a different contract.

Byram's Internet sales have increased more than eighty-fold by value since the tsunami, so Byram's have no complaints about paying Sahid what he is due. Next year Sahid's income will drop as component prices fall.

Cecil could terminate the contract, but Sahid is doing all that he contracted to do. There is no honest reason to terminate the contract.

Sahid has now switched banks.

The entire Daar family has switched banks!

The new bank has been assured by the police that they are fully satisfied that Sahid's income is totally honest.

The police have supplied a letter of apology to Sahid and to Uncle Jalil. The police have agreed to pay compensation.

Apparently the police have no legal obligation to pay compensation after a raid but as a matter of good community relations they often do pay compensation when a raid turns out to be a mistake.

A Community Inspector has been to the house to apologise for the raid.

The police were acting on what appeared to be good information. The fact is that most of the people who become significantly wealthy in a matter of months are drug dealers.

The police accept that the Daars have absolutely no involvement in drugs or any other kind of crime.

The computers seized have already been returned.

Sahid's board is up outside the house until the police actually pay. The apology letters have been added to the board.

Uncle Jalil is home from the hospital but he is still psychologically affected by the raid.

The Community Inspector has given his mobile telephone number to the Daar family.

Should any issues arise with the police would the Daars telephone the Inspector immediately please?

The Community Inspector will gee up the agreed compensation payment through the police systems.

By this time of course my household were in Tunisia. It was just a nice holiday. We swam and we loafed and we played table tennis and pool. Nothing exciting happened.

The poolside workers were appalled to see me lift a disabled child out of his wheelchair and throw him into the water. After a while they got used to Mark and me doing this.

Quite often the children were queuing up to be thrown into the water.

With Jenny Graham and Alice and Damien Hewson we did not throw them into the water but instead Mark or I would jump in with the child in our arms.

When we boarded the plane to fly back to England the cute stewardess from last year recognised our household. She asked after Ali.

I explained that Ali has been called up by the Royal Air Force to fly Hercules freight planes to China.

I introduced her to Mark and I explained that Mark is a qualified pilot should she suddenly need one.

She laughed. She said that it is very unlikely that Mark will be needed. The systems have been changed so what happened last year can't happen again.

Mark and Robert visited the cockpit but they were not called upon to help.

Robert would like to loop the loop in an A320, or to do a barrel roll.

The First Pilot explained that he is not allowed to try that while carrying passengers.

We arrived home all in one piece. The Browns came over with their two foster children. They seem nice enough children.

The children were in a bit of awe about Robert Graham and me because we are TV personalities. They got over it after a while.

Heinz had been staying with the Browns. Heinz was delighted to see everyone again.

Derek is back to spending time away from the house on golf and woodcarving.

Don is not happy for Colin to spend all of a sunny day indoors playing computer games so Colin goes to Eric's house to play computer games indoors for all of the day.

Mark had to go back to work. Mark is working on fettling some old petrol tankers that have not moved in twenty years or so. He enjoys the work.

George popped in for a cup of tea. She has been receiving postcards from China. Ali has been writing them in Chinese!

They are all quotations from ancient Chinese philosophers about love. Ali does not speak or write Chinese, so obviously Ali is just copying them from somewhere.

George has them translated at a Chinese restaurant in Leeds when she eats there.

George is now managing the Neverthorpe factory under Garth. George says that everybody at Byrams is happy.

The people at the new factories are very pleased to be in work in secure jobs. Dennis is having his early flying lessons. Dennis is really happy with the experience of flying. Dennis is going to study Science and Maths A levels with a view to studying Engineering at University.

Assuming Andria's A levels go all right Andria will study Nursing at Meldon University. Andria will have work experience mainly at Meldon Hospital.

Helen is fine. One of Helen's early boyfriends, Martin Jenkins, is back in her life. There is virtually no news from Rebecca. She sends the Johnsons a short letter every month saying that she is alive and well.

Charlotte is writing hymns and songs.

Linda has formed a relationship with a cornet player in the Willerton brass band. He is in my school year so he has just sat his GCSEs. He is going to study Information Technology at College.

Robert Graham and David Wilkins and I are planning our programs through to Easter.

David says that my TV program has as many viewers as his program has, so I am going to do well in my cookbook and calendar sales.

Robert has held the audience that David attracted to the children's magazine program so Robert will do well, too.

Our job in these planning sessions is to make sure that each of our performances is top notch. Robert and I are in full agreement with David.

We three spent three days planning. We joked and we argued about every ingredient in every dish that we three are to cook over the next six months. We know on exactly which day each recipe will be broadcast.

Robert is going to spend a day with David at the Wilkins house working with materials Robert cannot use in our house, like bacon and pork and lard and sherry and brandy and wine.

I think that planning over six months is much better than planning over three months. There is more of a sense of completeness.

Then each of us had to plan our shooting schedule. My schedule is a bit more complex than the other two because I use marinades a lot more. I will marinate meat overnight, or for several hours. I also have to build in safety nets in case timings go wrong.

Robert and David are shooting first because they start school in early September. I do not start college until late September. Sahid and I will shoot over weekends in September and October until we are done. Any catching up, and the programs for after Christmas, will be shot over half term.

I have judo some weekends. I have to fit my filming around my judo obligations. Andria has earned good A levels so she will enter University.

Shakoora and Amina Daar came first and second on their course. Their results were very close. They could go to university.

The GCSE results are out. Dennis has As and Bs. I have an A* in Food Technology, the rest being Bs and Cs. Nigel has As and Bs. Mina Daar has A*s, As and Bs. In terms of results, it is Mina, Dennis, Nigel, and me. We all have what we need, so we are all happy.

The Daar family was already respected in the Doncaster Somali community because of Abdullah's appearances in the advertisements and because the Daars are now local employers and landlords.

After the police raid the Somali community now knows that Sahid is a millionaire from his own efforts. Their respect for the Daar family has risen to new heights. Sahid has explained to enquirers that he is not able to invest in other businesses until he is eighteen. At that point Sahid may be willing to invest in businesses, but Sahid will require a share of the equity. Sahid will not just lend money to people.

Sahid's future investment policy is very Islamic. Participation in a business is religiously much better than lending money to it.

Emma Hewson and Karen Wilbey came back from the Daars really excited. The Daar team has generated designs for gowns that have Emma and Karen looking incredibly good.

With all their computer kit the Daars have generated Photoshop® photos that show the gowns from different angles. The silks are of different colours. The Daars have even photo-shopped hairstyles. There are eight designs, but only two Premieres for each woman.

Karen and Emma have been given two weeks to decide what designs they wish, or to discuss amendments. The Daars have about sixty swatches of silk to choose from.

Emma and Karen are exercising in the Hewson gym almost every day, with Don as PT instructor. Both women are visibly losing weight.

When they have finished either Andrew goes in to practice his bagpipes or Robert goes in with someone to help him exercise.

When the first TV program was broadcast our children became instant celebrities. They have been told not to become big-headed.

Colin is now at the High School with Derek.

Kali is a star in Doncaster. Kali has lifted the Daar family even further in their community.

Peter, Gerald, and Max are at the Cathedral Choir School. They have been roasted by Don so they do not become cocky.

Sally is fine. Little Dan is fine.

Georgina Donkin and my sister Fulesa do not appear until the second program.

Fulesa is the sweet kid she always is.

I have told Fulesa to recognise that Allah has a purpose for her. What that purpose is neither of us know.

Fulesa must remain worthy of being Allah's servant. Fulesa must remain generous and kind and lovely.

Poor Damien Hewson is in trouble again.

Damien punched a child called Tommy Harris last term, because Tommy had hit little Angela Wilkins. This week Tommy Harris and Tommy's big brother Jamie cornered Damien in the playground and tried to beat him up.

Whoops!

Andrew Johnson had to step in to lift Damien into the air to stop Damien doing any more damage to Jamie Harris.

The school did not punish Damien because there were plenty of witnesses to the attack on Damien. Jamie Harris is seven, so Jamie should not be attacking a much younger child.

Don punished Damien.

Damien has two weeks of early bedtimes and no TV.

Damien is normally a placid child. It takes a lot to make Damien explode. When Damien does explode he does not seem to know when to stop.

Don said that as a child Don had a similar personality.

Don and Emma whisked Damien in to see a child psychologist to see if there was anything they could usefully do with Damien.

The surprising answer was to enrol Damien into martial arts of some sort, to learn how to channel and to control his fury.

It tends to be me who takes Damien.

The judo school is happy to see me again. Now that I am in the national judo squad I have stopped going to the local dojo.

Andrew Johnson has had a "kindly" word with Jamie Harris.

Andrew has explained to Jamie that if Jamie goes anywhere near Damien again Andrew will hurt Jamie severely.

In Damien's extended family Damien has more than a dozen big brothers, so Jamie and Tommy would do well not to come into conflict with Damien.

My catering course is close to a waste of time.

I am "learning" alongside people who need to be taught how to make a white sauce!

I am looking on the Internet to see if there is somewhere else I can learn. Don will release money if I need it for a cordon bleu course or something like that.

There is a Cordon Bleu teaching centre in London. They have a Grand Diploma which I cannot take because one of the modules is about using and keeping and serving wine. I can do every module as a separate course.

Their web site says that I should have a High School leaving certificate, but I do not need cooking experience.

I will ask Mr Driburg to telephone for me because Mr Driburg is a professional negotiator.

I have more than enough money to pay for the course and living expenses in London.

I have a grade B at A level and an A* in Food Technology at GCSE, and lots of practical experience so maybe they will let me in. I have to prepare a really detailed CV setting out everything I have cooked. This will be ammunition for Mr Driburg.

CHAPTER 15: Malc Dow

When the first program was screened in September we knew it would be a smash hit.

We arranged for a Press Conference in London because show business journalists do not like to stray outside London.

The children have never seen a complete program. Even the pilot program I showed them has been altered.

We took Gerald Butler's "Can't Take My Eyes Off of You" out and we put in Derek Donkin's "The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face".

At the end of the viewing the journalists stood up and applauded.

Show Business journalists are a pretty hardened bunch. Even if you pour booze down them in quantity they will not usually stand up and applaud. We have a hit!

Just as I was basking in the applause and waiting for it to subside an astonishing thing happened.

Sally Johnson stood up and she marched past me towards the journalists. I have never seen an angry expression on Sally's face before.

Fulesa and Peter came with her. The cameras were following them.

Sally pointed at a woman journalist.

"You are a liar!" Sally shouted.

"You told lies about my sister Charlotte!

"You said Charlotte had sex with Fulesa's brother when that was not true.

"You had to apologise in person in the High Court because you are such a liar.

“Before that you were looking for dirt on Peter’s brother “Dave The Chef”. There isn’t any dirt on David because he is a really nice boy. We got a court order against you for that.

“You looked for dirt on Dave The Chef.

“Then you published lies about Charlotte Johnson and Tohur Miah.

“Now you are here to tell lies about us!

“Get out!

“Crawl back into your gutter and wait until it is time to fry in Hell.

“Get out!”

One had the sense that “gutter” and “fry in Hell” are reserved for that journalist. This is not Sally’s normal vocabulary.

“Sorry Mr Dow but none of us are going to say anything while that woman is in the room!”

All three children marched back to their seats and all the children turned their chairs so their backs were to the journalists.

I looked at the journalist.

“Well, Jes, what would you like to say?”

“It is true that I had to apologise in the High Court. I blame the newspaper and the sub-editor for part of the confusion. But I did apologise.

“I am not here to tell lies about these children. This is just a normal assignment for a show business journalist. I had no idea I would meet more family members here.

“I am not going to tell lies about these children. It was a terrific performance and a very good program.”

“Sally?”

“If Jes Holt was coming here to tell lies about us she would lie about that, too.

“I don’t know why Jes Holt hates our family. We did nothing to her.

“Jes Holt tells lies and she looks for dirt on us.

“I thought journalists are supposed to report on events, not to make up lies about orphan children.

“Did any of you journalists become journalists just to tell lies about people?”

The journalists did not reply.

“None of us will speak while she is in the room.”

There were two lines of ramrod backs facing the journalists.

I had not expected this problem.

I tried to continue the press conference but the children remained silent.

After a few minutes I said to Jes,

“I am sorry, Jes, but the children will not speak while you are in the room. I will have to ask you to leave.”

Jes stood up. Addressing the serried ranks of backs she said,

“You are a talented and interesting group of children.

“I wanted to publish a nice story about David and Dennis Wilkins.

“The story about Charlotte was a bad mistake made worse by confusion between the newspaper and me.

“I really am not here to tell lies about any of you.”

The avenging angel stood up again. She pointed at Jes.

“You were asking schoolgirls if David Wilkins used drugs or had sex. Is that what you call a nice story?

“When Tohur heard he had been selected to fight judo for England he hugged all the three girls that were with him. You know that because you took the photo. You were there.

“There was no story to sell to the Sunday Scandal so you told lies.

“Now you come here today and you say that you are not intending to tell lies?

“You are telling lies today. You are a liar.

“You are such a liar!”

Sally turned around and she sat down.

The cameras were still on Jes Holt. Jes had no choice but to leave.

I said to the journalists that the issues between the children and Jes had been fully ventilated. I would be grateful if the journalists would just ask questions about the program.

I think the journalists decided not to tie themselves into Jes’s problems. As I had asked, they concentrated on the TV series.

The children were full of praise for Carlo and Emily. They said that they love the music and they love the scripts.

Dan Wilbey said that when Kali pretends to be angry with him Kali is such a good actress that Dan is genuinely frightened.

“Kali is acting and I really am afraid of her.

“My scared expression is not acting, it is real!”

“You and Max are obviously brothers but you have different surnames?”

“Yes. We have the same father. Max’s birth mother died.”

There was an “Aah” in the room.

I changed the subject quickly. I realised that Max’s birth mother dying was a good point to end on. It did not actually explain how two children with the same father have different surnames.

“This has been a wonderful series to film.

“Terrific scripts. Terrific music. Terrific musical performances.

“And terrific actors!”

The journalists applauded.

Kali led the children out.

We adults mingled for a while.

It would have been a great event anyway.

Sally and Jes’s altercation spiced it further.

The row with Jes Holt was on every news program. Sally the avenging angel was wonderful TV.

Mr Driburg the children’s agent had come to London for the launch, and he ended up on the BBC current affairs program that night.

The presenter thought that barring journalists from press conferences was a slippery slope.

“Surely Michael you must be pleased that somebody still believes that journalists should not tell lies?

“Even if it is only a child?”

Mr Driburg and Carlo and I had a long drinking session at my house after the current affairs show.

A wave of publicity that money could not buy ensures that our viewing figures must rise in future weeks.

Next week’s program has Sally Johnson singing “White Cliffs of Dover” and Colin Donkin singing “This Land Is Your Land”. Both are knock-out performances.

I told Mr Driburg about Mr Vincent’s comments.

“He said we are in for an exciting time. It has been pretty exciting so far!”

One side effect of the supermarket deal with Mr Vincent's TV company is that no other supermarkets may advertise for an hour after the magazine program containing Robert Graham.

If we can produce spin-off goods in time for Christmas the supermarket will be interested. We have already agreed on a band CD. A book of sheet music based on the series, with an accompanying DVD?

What else?

We can knock out a calendar just using stills from all our footage.

Our team is writing the script now for the Christmas Special to be filmed during the October half term. That will almost all be music that the children have played before.

We will monitor the downloads from YouTube to see which pieces of music are the most popular.

I did not think that the publicity could get any better than what Sally Johnson had achieved.

A family in Kent saw Max Hewson singing "Greensleeves" in the first broadcast. They have now announced that Max Hewson saved their child's life by giving a series of bone marrow transplants about eighteen months ago.

The national TV news programs showed excerpts of beautiful Max Hewson singing "Greensleeves" and a very emotional woman in Kent saying that Max has saved her son's life.

Mr Driburg has arranged for Max and the child to meet in London for a photo-shoot and a conversation.

We had more publicity of course when the woman hugged and kissed Max in front of the cameras.

Every producer wants to have publicity when he launches a new TV series.

For a new children's TV series to make the national TV news three times in a week with positive stories is astonishing.

We have been very lucky that there is no news at the moment. Parliament is not sitting and there is nothing new going on in the world.

The following week saw fifty thousand children change channels to watch "Terrible Tykes".

That statistic was worthy of releasing to the media.

It brings ITV even closer to equality with the BBC in the late afternoon.

After the second program the Conservative Member of Parliament for Dover said he thought Sally Johnson's rendition of "White Cliffs of Dover" was the best performance of the song that he has ever seen. This sparked off some discussion in the media.

A breakfast TV program showed the famous Dame Vera Lynn version and then Sally Johnson's version.

Sally Johnson had stated at the press conference that she and Charlotte Johnson are sisters. After "White Cliffs of Dover" there was media discussion as to which Johnson sister is the better singer.

This publicity is wonderful but all of it is totally out of my control. I have not originated any of these stories. Nor has Mr Driburg.

I wake up every morning wondering if there is some bad publicity to come!

Mr Vincent telephoned me. He congratulated me on attracting fifty thousand additional viewers after only one program.

"Do you know, it looks to someone outside London that all these stories have got into the media without you having placed them.

"You are a master of publicity."

Then Mr Vincent burst out laughing.

"I told you that you would have an exciting time!"

CHAPTER 16: Don Hewson

The children's TV program is a success.

I enjoyed seeing Sally Johnson flaying Jes Holt. Sally's expression was so like Rebecca at times that I just had to smile.

Emma and Karen Wilbey are working very hard on becoming slimmer. They were neither of them even remotely approaching fat, but like most adults they were carrying a little spare weight. We all hate stomach crunches, but they are a very effective way of reducing tums.

I have been helping Emma with special exercises at night, which we both enjoy.

Derek Donkin is a lovely looking lad. Girls follow Derek home after school because he is so nice.

Derek is a celebrity now because of the television series.

I have worked with all of the children to present themselves outside the house as just ordinary children who have been fortunate.

I have told them that really each of them is special and talented.

If they go around at school with arrogance and being bigheaded it will cause trouble.

I have also reminded them that all this celebrity will end one day. Most of them will not make a career in acting. So they have to work hard at school to gain qualifications to help their real lives.

The Food Technology teacher Miss Watkins asked Robert Graham if he wished the same deal as David Wilkins had negotiated, of not going to the Food Technology practical classes?"

"No, Miss.

"It will be good for me to see what problems ordinary children have in the practical classes. It will help me when I am thinking about how to teach practical skills in my program."

"So you are not coming to the practical classes for what I can teach you? You are coming just to observe the other children?"

"That's right, Miss.

"And also to see how you teach cooking skills.

"Tohur and Dennis say that you are a very good teacher."

Miss Watkins laughed.

"Will you be observing my teaching techniques?"

"You are a professional teacher, Miss.

"I hope to learn something from you about how to teach."

Miss Watkins laughed again.

"If there is anything I could present better, please tell me after the lesson."

Later that day Miss Watkins asked Derek Donkin if he is a Hewson child?

"No, miss. I am a Donkin child. I live with the Hewsons."

"Has Mr Hewson taught you to cook?"

"Yes, Miss."

"Are you a good cook?"

"Yes, miss."

"Are you as good a cook as Robert Graham?"

"I am not as good as Robert at everything. I bake, but Robert is a better baker than me.

"Robert is more adventurous than me.

“I don’t try to invent dishes.

“I just follow recipes. I do not try to tweak them.

“But I could cook three courses for twenty people solo if I needed to.”

“What do you enjoy cooking?”

“Casseroles, Miss.

“Roasts.

“Tohur Miah’s Lebanese aromatic lamb is one of my favourites.

“For Eid I will be roasting joints of goat kid and lamb and serving them with coloured couscous. I will also be cooking balaklava.

“Would you like to come? It’s this Saturday. You would be really welcome to come at two in the afternoon. Bring a partner or a friend.”

“I did not know one could buy coloured couscous.”

“You can buy coloured couscous but we don’t bother.”

“I sauté onions and garlic and turmeric. When the onion is soft I add cous-cous and stir. The couscous turns golden. Then I add boiling water. When the couscous is cooked I add warmed green peas, grated carrot, sweet corn, roasted red peppers cut small, and cubes of raw squeezed courgette. It looks really pretty.”

“Tohur and my brother Colin will be cooking, too.”

“Freda Graham is doing the salads and Charlotte Johnson is doing the desserts.”

“Well I would love to come, but I will be away this weekend.

“Thank you for the invitation.

“I would love to come next Eid. Give me a few weeks’ warning.”

Derek is skipping the practical classes because he would like time in the library to do his homework. Derek is a busy lad!

Derek took Miss Watkins some balaklava after the weekend for Miss Watkins to taste.

All the children in the TV program receive thousands of fan letters, almost all of which are dealt with by the TV production company. Georgina Donkin has had an interesting letter, but no-one has told her about it.

The letter was recognised as a hot potato. So it was forwarded to Mr Driburg.

Tom Driburg telephoned me and Tom emailed me a copy.

I rang Elizabeth, who is social worker for the Donkin children. I sent a copy of the letter to Elizabeth.

The letter certainly is a hot potato!

We know very little about Deborah Donkin except that she is originally from London. This letter claimed to be from Deborah Donkin's mother. It enclosed a photo of Deborah at Georgina's age.

Georgina does look exactly like the photo of her mother at that age. It has to be the same family.

The letter said that this lady and her late husband had been very stupid.

Their young teenage daughter Deborah had become pregnant. They had pressured Deborah to have an abortion, to the point where Deborah had run away.

They recognised that they had been incredibly stupid.

About nine years ago an enquiry agent had located Deborah in Huddersfield. Deborah had made it clear that she did not wish to have a reconciliation with her parents.

Deborah had told the enquiry agent that so far as Deborah is concerned her parents had wanted to murder Deborah's unborn child.

So far as Deborah is concerned her parents betrayed Deborah in her hour of need. Deborah never wishes to see her parents again.

Deborah at the time said that she had a lovely girl child and two lovely boy children.

Deborah's parents had respected Deborah's wishes. They did not feel that they had any moral right to argue with Deborah.

Deborah's father has died recently.

Deborah's mother had written to Deborah to tell Deborah of her father's death, but the letter had been returned "Gone Away".

Georgina's mother had been watching television with some of her other grandchildren when she saw Georgina.

Georgina has to be a daughter of Deborah.

Georgina is too young to be the child whom the grandparents had wished to have aborted.

So this letter is to say to Georgina that grandmother would like to meet Deborah and the children. Granny wishes to apologise to the child whom she had wanted to be aborted.

If Deborah still will not meet with her, grandmother would at least like to meet the grandchildren.

Grandmother will travel to Yorkshire or wherever Georgina is.

Alternatively Georgina is welcome to visit her grandmother in London.

Or they can meet wherever convenient.

But Georgina's grandmother really wishes to meet her grandchildren.

Grandmother has seen that in the TV program there are two very good looking and talented boys Derek Donkin and Colin Donkin. If they are Georgina's brothers then grandmother really wishes to know them as well.

Elizabeth said to me that she wanted to think about this letter.

Handled right, it could be a breakthrough for the entire family. Handled wrong it could put Deborah back in the mental hospital.

Elizabeth is going to think on this problem, and then she will get back to me.

Linda Donkin and Charlotte Johnson are now in their final GCSE year. So are Amy Waters and Diana Green and Sahid Daar. David Wilkins is also in his GCSE year. Grace Adams, too.

I don't think any of this cohort need tutors.

Sahid Daar is still pretty cross with the police in Doncaster about the police raid.

Uncle Jalil has ordered Sahid to shut his mouth and not to do anything stupid like hacking into the police computer system.

Sahid had to take his board down.

Sahid is still seething.

Jalil's attitude is that it was an understandable mistake by the police that is best forgotten. Sahid's attitude is likely to cause more trouble with the police.

I think that Jalil is right.

Sahid has now bought a factory unit about five minutes away from the Daar family house. The sewing co-operative have transferred their operations there.

There are eight young women there doing nothing but making wedding gowns for sale to bridal shops.

Amina is in charge because Shakoora is currently in Paris doing an internship at a Paris fashion house.

Jabril apparently is doing much of the support for his father Jalil to free up Mina and Amina in the evenings and weekends. Abdullah is leading the cooking and the supplies side.

Dennis Wilkins has passed his flying test.

Dennis is happy at College. Dennis needs to score well in his AS exams to be an attractive candidate for University.

We agreed to start tutor support for Dennis after half term whether Dennis thinks he needs support or not.

As I said to Dennis, if we wait until Dennis recognises there is a problem then the poor tutor will be on a rescue job rather than on an enhancement task.

Tohur is unhappy with his catering course. It is just too simplistic for him.

If Mr Driburg can gain entry for Tohur at the London Cordon Bleu Centre that would be good. The alternative road is for Tohur to gain practical experience in restaurants.

Tohur wants to expand his skill set rapidly. A good course such as Cordon Bleu is what Tohur needs now.

Tohur's CV runs to six sides because Tohur has listed virtually everything he has ever cooked. Tohur has collected testimonials from the General Manager and Head Chef at the Tryton Hotel and also from the owners of the Asian restaurants where Tohur has worked. This has all gone off to Mr Driburg.

Tohur wanted to leave his course.

I told Tohur that hopefully in a few weeks the situation will resolve. Until then, Tohur should attend the course. Tohur has agreed, reluctantly.

Elizabeth has returned from London. She went to visit granny Donkin.

Elizabeth says that granny Donkin is fine. It had been her late husband who had been the leader in demanding that Deborah should have an abortion.

To granny's eternal regret granny had supported her husband.

Deborah and granny had not had a terribly good relationship.

Looking back over this distance in time, granny recognises that granny had not been prepared to let Deborah grow up.

Granny recognises that Deborah's current mental health issues in part relate to Deborah's childhood.

Granny would like to have a good relationship with Deborah and the grandchildren.

Granny does not wish to make things any worse.

Deborah has a sister Beverley and a brother Edward. There are five nephews and nieces. Deborah had always been close to her sister Beverley. One possible approach might be for Beverley to come up to Yorkshire, perhaps with her two children. Deborah might be willing to meet Beverley.

Elizabeth has been given a few photos of Beverley and Edward, their spouses, and children. And granny.

Elizabeth is going to discuss this information with Deborah's psychologist. I ought to know the difference between psychologist and psychiatrist but I don't. Whatever he is, he is on holiday this week but Elizabeth has an appointment to see him on Tuesday of next week.

The Donkins know nothing about the letter at the moment.

There is very little news from Rebecca.

Rebecca said in her monthly letter to the Johnsons that she is now stationed in Edinburgh. She says she is enjoying Edinburgh more than she enjoyed the Scottish pit villages where she had been stationed previously.

The way I read Rebecca's letter, I think that Rebecca is still not happy.

There is nothing I can do at this distance. Interfering with a Mormon missionary's service will lead to even more tears and upset than not interfering. Mark is helping to bring a long disused foundry back into working order. Mark is really enjoying his apprenticeship.

Mark and Karen seem to be closer than previously. Perhaps Karen has grown up because she and Mark seem to have no rows now.

Charlotte has begun her marketing program for her new CD. She has had interviews in the religious press.

When Charlotte goes to the USA she will be too young to travel alone. Ruth Lightfoot will go with her.

Sally Johnson is fine and feisty.

Andrew is good enough on the bagpipes that I now allow Andrew to practice in the house. Andrew says that he prefers to practice in the gym.

Mike Johnson is fine.

Freda Graham has a boyfriend. His name is Jacob Grundy. I think Jacob is a little old for Freda.

Jacob says that he is very much aware of the age difference.

Jacob says that he is intending to wait for Freda to grow up. He seems to be a straight lad. He is studying for A levels now.

There is nothing wrong with Jacob. Freda is happy with him.

Linda and her cornet player have broken up. She is now close to a flugelhorn player. Linda is happy.

I am not totally sure what a flugelhorn is but I have no real need to know.

Charlotte wrote a song about her broken relationship with John Tarran. It is really a song by any girl who has been betrayed by a lad.

Mr Driburg is aware that such a song would be bad for Charlotte's saintly reputation. Mr Driburg has put "Emma Hewson" as the song-smith and he has placed the song with a well known female singer. The song is going to come out as a pop song any week now.

Damien is enjoying his judo. Andrew and Michael Johnson and Simeon Graham have now all taken up judo. Moklisur Miah has joined in.

Sally Johnson was already doing judo. She is getting quite good now. Janine comes over for judo.

We have a judo mat in the garage and Tohur Miah is living in our house. Tohur runs judo training sessions in the garage after school.

Alice has no interest in judo. Alice is trying to become a better pianist.

Stoke Mandeville hospital is really pleased with Robert. The Consultant has issued a new set of exercises for Robert.

The Consultant says that he expects Robert will suffer from painful twinges below the waist over the next six months. If he does, that is confirmation that Robert is on the road to recovery. If we keep a record of dates and where the twinges are in Robert's body that will help the hospital.

Deborah Donkin has agreed to meet her sister Beverley.

Beverley and her children will come to our house on Saturday morning.

Beverley will go to Deborah's flat, leaving the children with us.

If the meeting goes well then on Sunday both families will have Sunday lunch with us before the London family return home.

This Saturday is Eid. So the Donkin cousins will have great food, much of it cooked by Derek and Colin.

Rebecca's bedroom is empty, and we have spare child beds, so Beverley's family will stay with us on Saturday night.

Sahid Daar is a mischievous stinker.

Sahid discovered that persons unknown had placed a program on his computer that allowed remote access.

The obvious suspects were the police, because they are the only outsiders known to have had access to Sahid's computer. Sahid could not think of anyone else who could have any interest in Sahid.

Sahid told a Doncaster Somali friend that Sahid was going to send a silly email that the friend should just ignore and not reply to.

The email warned the friend to stay in his house on Friday night. In particular the lad was to stay away from the Somali community mosque at 2am on Saturday Eid morning because of "the delivery" that would take place.

At 2am on Saturday morning a white Transit van pulled up outside the mosque. Sahid was there to meet it. Suddenly the van was surrounded by shouting police.

Amina had driven the van to the mosque. When the van back door was opened the police discovered only a cardboard box.

When opened, the box was almost empty. All the box held was a plastic pig that squeaked when one squeezed it.

The Inspector asked Sahid what he thought he was doing.

"I wanted to find out who was spying on me. Now I know."

"Do you know that there is an offence of "wasting police time?"

"Would you like to show me the warrant for bugging my computer?"

Sahid was arrested on suspicion of wasting police time. When interviewed under caution Sahid asked to see the warrant for bugging his computer. Every time Sahid was asked a question he responded by asking to see the warrant for bugging his computer.

The Daars contacted the Community Inspector to tell him that Sahid had been arrested.

Eventually the police officer interviewing Sahid gave up in disgust.

Sahid was given police bail and he was released.

On the Saturday morning the Community Inspector visited the Daars. He was too early for Eid food.

Sahid asked the Community Inspector,

"Is there a warrant for bugging my computer?"

The Community Inspector was silent.

“Did you personally know that my computer is being bugged?”

“No.”

“Do you know why my computer is being bugged?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“I can’t tell you.”

“Is there a warrant?”

“Yes.”

“Can I see it?”

“Not yet.”

“What do I have to do to see the warrant?”

“Wait.”

“How long.”

“I don’t know.”

Sahid thought.

After a while Sahid said,

“I think you are an honest man.

“I was very angry when the police raided this house. You smashed the house up and you found nothing at all. You really upset Uncle Jalil. So I was really angry.

“When I had the apology letter I was pleased that the police accepted that I am innocent of everything.

“I was still cross about our home being invaded.

“So then when I found the police were bugging me secretly I was angry again.

“Now I am really curious.

“What is going on?”

“Sahid. Let me turn this round.

“You are an intelligent young man.

“Can you suggest why we might be doing this?”

Sahid thought for quite a while.

“You bugged me after the raid. So I was not really in the clear.

“I know I am innocent of anything. Obviously you don’t.

“It is the money that was the trigger. That suggests drugs.

“I am a Muslim so maybe you suspect terrorism. Maybe money laundering?”

“Keep going.”

“I accept your word that there is a warrant.

“Presumably the wording of the warrant would give me information you don’t want me to have.”

The Community Inspector nodded.

“This can’t just be about me, or you could just show me the warrant.

“It has to be part of a larger police operation.

“You know something is going on.

“You thought I was part of it.

“If I am part of it then obviously now I know I am being watched I will not do anything criminal.

“If I am not part of it, which I am not, you need to find who is actually doing whatever you thought I was doing.

“So this operation is about some criminal conspiracy of some kind.

“Whatever is being investigated is still going on.

“If I am part of the conspiracy you obviously won’t tell me. If I am not part of the conspiracy I have no need to know.

“You do not wish to tell anyone anything until the police operation is concluded.

“You don’t know when that will be because the criminal conspiracy is still ongoing.”

“Sahid, you are spot on.”

“I am pissed off with the police and how you have treated my family.

“I am not anti-police in principle.

“So what do you want from me?”

“Sahid. What we want is for you and your family just to remain silent.”

“It may be three months. It might be six months. But the operation will end.

Then I will be able to tell you what has been going on.”

Sahid nodded.

“Sahid. I appreciate your attitude. Not everyone would be as reasonable as you.

“Sahid. I would like to run a different problem past you.”

Sahid looked at the Community Inspector questioningly.

“In a democracy, every person has a right to live their life without police interference and without police monitoring of their activities and communications.”

“Yes.”

“There are people who wish to damage our democracy by killing people, exploding bombs, and damaging the very fabric of life.

“Those people would like the police to be repressive and intrusive because if we were that would create more recruits for the terrorists.”

“Yes.”

“We in the police have to obtain information about these terrorists, preferably before they kill people.”

“Yes.”

“We have to gather that information delicately and subtly, without damaging the democracy we are here to protect.”

“Yes.”

“One way to do this is to very delicately monitor the most likely terrorist recruits. If they are behaving like normal young people then we just let them get on with lives. If they suddenly start behaving abnormally then that is cause for concern and for deeper monitoring.”

“I understand.

“I don’t like it, but I understand your thinking.”

“If I were an Islamic terrorist organiser, I would look for a young man who is a good Muslim, settled in his community, intelligent, and ideally good at information technology and electronics and physics and chemistry.

“I would not want a mummy’s boy but a young man with some spark in him.

“We know that there are Islamic terrorist organisers actively recruiting in the North of England.

“Looking around your local Somali community, you will agree Sahid that you fit the profile of the ideal recruit better than almost anyone else.”

Sahid considered for a bit. Then he nodded.

“When we went through your household computers we found absolutely nothing to suggest that anyone in this house is remotely interested in terrorism or extremism.

“You and your entire family are totally clean.”

Sahid nodded.

“But in three months time or a year’s time or three years time attempts will very likely be made to recruit you or to recruit other family members.

“You are an important family in your community and it is natural that your family would be recruitment targets.

“The purpose of the adjustments to your computer was to allow us to remotely interrogate your computer as to what web sites you and your family are visiting.

“Watching the odd beheading or the odd visit to a terrorist supporting web site is normal adolescent behaviour.

“If we find someone in your house is spending a lot of time on these sites then that is an alarm bell for us.

“My first question is, can you think of a less intrusive way for us to monitor people whom the terrorists are likely to try to recruit?”

Sahid thought for a bit.

“I am unhappy that you are monitoring me and my family like we are potential criminals.

“Are all Muslims being monitored?”

“Sahid. Everyone is being monitored. Some people are monitored more than others.

“Taking a quick peep at your Internet usage once every three months just confirms that you and your family are clean. We could not think of a way to be less intrusive.

“Which goes back to my first question. Can you think of a less intrusive way to monitor people whom the terrorists are likely to wish to recruit?”

“Presumably you monitor the terrorist web sites, but that does not catch the people who use Internet cafes or the computers at school or college to visit those web sites.”

“That is a problem.”

“What is your second question?”

“Imagine that one of your family were to be killed by a terrorist bomb. Then you learn that someone had information that could have prevented the bombing. They kept quiet about that information because they are a good Muslim.

“Is that person a good Muslim?”

Sahid considered.

“I would say a misguided person. Possibly a good Muslim, but definitely a misguided person.”

“If you were in that person’s shoes what would you do? Would you have told the police the information before the bombing?”

Sahid thought for a bit.

“I would tell the police but I would try to do it anonymously.”

“Why?”

“I do not trust the police to keep me anonymous.”

“I am not attempting to recruit you as an informer. This is for two reasons.

“One is that you are not moving in terrorist supporting circles, so you know nothing useful.

“The other is that I think you would refuse.”

Sahid nodded.

“We police have a difficult job.

“At the moment Sahid you can just get on with life as a teenager.

“Sahid, because you are an outstanding young man you are a recruitment target for the terrorists.

“And therefore you are also a person of potential interest for us.

“I hope you get through life without ever meeting a terrorist or a terrorist supporter.

“I think you will meet them. I just pray you have the wisdom to make the right decisions when you do.”

Sahid told me all this.

I rang the solicitors who had acted for Charlotte and Tohur in their libel action.

They suggested three solicitors in London who were good at civil liberties actions against the police. I rang one.

I did not give any names or locations.

“Mr Hewson. The police are not perfect.

“What I will say is that the police are not miracle workers. They do make mistakes. The police are not just messing about.

“There is something going on. The police are trying to stop it.

“Yes my firm can make some money by raising a stink.

“Your young man may or may not receive compensation.

“I suggest everyone just sits quiet until there is much more information.

“When you know more, please do tell me.”

The Eid cooking team did a wonderful job. At two, along with the Eid guests, the new Donkins arrived. The Donkin cousins (actually surnamed Herbert) were star struck by their famous TV personality cousins, but that wore off after a while. The Donkins and the Herberts spent a lot of time just looking at each other and talking. The older child, a girl, was fascinated by Derek. The lad was more interested in Colin and Georgina.

CHAPTER 17: Ali Miah

The four months I spent flying to and from China were the four hardest months that I have ever spent in my life.

The time zones were a total killer.

Eventually I decided I had to live on English time and just try to ignore the Chinese end.

In truth all I did in China was to land, eat, sleep, get up, eat, and fly away.

When I had a rare day off in England I tended to spend much of it in bed, trying to repair my body clock. Or exercising in the gym or jogging, to try to get my body back in kilter.

The flight was about twenty-five hours or so, depending which airport we were flying to. With our sleep period we would be there and back in about sixty hours.

Then we had to do it again!

It eased off after a while, but for about eight weeks I was clocking up over 90 flying hours a week.

I am young and fit.

I really felt sorry for the older pilots, some of whom were not up to this level of activity.

The older pilots were happy to let me do most of the flying.

This experience has made me as a pilot.

I so enjoyed the in-flight refuelling.

First, I enjoyed the meeting and identifying each other miles from anywhere.

Then I enjoyed the manoeuvring to place my stick in the tanker's funnel.

Disengagement was very straightforward.

I am going to ask if I may learn to fly the tankers next.

I had Heffers bookshop send me a book of romantic Chinese poetry. The book has the Chinese calligraphy on one side and the English translation on the other.

I bought some Chinese postcards in China. I did not have time in China to write the postcards. I wrote them with calligraphy pens in England and then I posted them to George from China.

The Royal Air Force and the Hercules squadron are very happy with me. I put my shoulder to the wheel when I was needed.

Back at Cambridge the Squadron Leader and the Base Commander are very happy with me. They enjoyed reading my pilot log book.

They said that all the cadets are going to be encouraged to consider flying the Hercules. They will put me forward to qualify on the tankers.

When I told the student liaison worker at the airline that I have now over a thousand hours on the Hercules she was very congratulatory.

“And you will have the Dragon medal, too!”

I had no idea what she was talking about.

Apparently the Chinese government are issuing a campaign medal for all foreign Services personnel and civilians who played an active role after the tsunami. I will be awarded the Dragon Medal.

I told Tohur but I did not tell anyone else.

I would have told George, but George has delicately told me that I am no longer in a relationship with her.

George has found someone else.

There is a new intake of young ladies coming up to Cambridge University this year. I will meet some of them.

I am not too bothered about having a girlfriend at the moment.

I did not have any time to study over the summer and I have to get on top of the academic work for the second year. I have to qualify on the 737 family of Boeings for the airline and hopefully on the tankers for the Royal Air Force.

The Squadron have told me that until my tanker training posting comes through I will continue to qualify on helicopters.

I had only been back in College a couple of days when some students called me over to their table.

They are the Committee organising the end of academic year May Ball, which will take place in June. I had not stood for election because I had no wish to get involved.

These guys know that I cook in my kitchenette on Sundays. They have no chef input for the May Ball. They wished to co-opt me onto the Committee because I know something about catering. I said that I am honoured, but that I do not have the time.

They asked if I have time to give advice?

I said that I do.

“Fine” they said.

They showed me the menus for the last few years. Would I be able to prepare a menu for the May Ball? I would have significant numbers of unpaid and paid student volunteers.

I studied the menus. I thought them a bit unimaginative. I said I would see what I could do.

Is there a budget?

They showed me the budgets for the previous years. I said I would get back to them.

Do I know any celebrities?

“I might do. Why?”

They explained that they need to book two pop groups for the May Ball, and really they want some big names as well.

“What kind of big names?”

“A famous singer or musician for the interval. A comedian.

“A famous chef preparing the breakfasts.

“Anything like that.

“Just to jazz up the offering.”

“The only famous singer I know is Charlotte Johnson.

“You know those advertisements for sanitary towels? I know those people. They could demonstrate ballroom dancing.

“For breakfasts maybe David Wilkins or Tohur Miah.

“I know the children from “Terrible Tykes” but they are too young for a night-time event.

“The only thing is, they are friends, but if you want them you will have to pay.

“They all have the same agent. I will give you his details.”

I gave a talk to the Chinese Society about the airlift to China.

Elise is a girl of Chinese ethnicity from Malaysia. We have become friendly.

Elise is helping me with the Chinese poetry book.

I am learning a bit of Chinese.

There are dozens of Chinese dialects. Elise told me that I need to learn the Putonghua dialect of Mandarin. That is the official national language of China.

Any important person in China speaks Putonghua.

I had another invitation to speak in a Cambridge Union Society debate. I turned it down.

It is unusual for a student to be invited to speak in a Cambridge Union debate.

It is very unusual for a Cambridge undergraduate student to refuse an invitation to speak in a debate.

There are usually two dozen clever folk who are desperate for such a chance.

I had such a wonderful time the first time that I think a second speech would be an anti-climax.

I still go to the debates, but I leave after the main speakers have spoken.

The Islamic Society asked me to speak on the role of the Muslim in the Armed Forces. That was quite good.

I had the usual twerps who said that religiously I should not be involved in a military service that represses Muslims. I asked them to name a Muslim country where the Army or Police would never fire on civilian Muslims.

Silence.

Then I asked them the last time the British Army had fired on British civilians.

Silence again!

After quite a wait I had to tell them it was Bloody Sunday all those years ago.

My major reason for being at Cambridge University is to obtain a good degree.

Based on my first year results I could earn a First Class Honours Degree but I have to do the academic work.

If I average a high First at the end of the second year then I am well set for a First in my final year. If I do not score well in my second year then I will struggle in the third year. So I have to work hard this year.

I never set out to do this, but I have become almost a leader for the foreign Engineering students. I am open and friendly. I am happy to work through a lecture with the foreign students.

Our lecturers are very bright but they are not always desperately good at teaching. Some of the students are not perfect in English.

I commonly sit with maybe twenty fellow students and essentially I deliver the lecture again. I had prepared for the lecture beforehand. I understood the lecture when it was given. Then I deliver the lecture as it should have been given.

Prof caught me in a corridor and he took me to his room.

Prof asked me why I seemed to be so often teaching the foreign students.

I told Prof what I was doing and why.

Prof gave me one of those funny looks he sometimes gives.

“Carry on.”

Soon after that conversation I noticed that two of our lecturers are suddenly taking much more care about the lectures they give. Their lectures are better structured and their lectures are easier to understand.

I suspect that Prof has been applying his boot to their fundamentals.

I am now flying the Boeing planes, working through the airline's fleet. The more than a thousand flying hours on the Hercules are helping me with the big Boeings.

I am qualifying on each Boeing model fairly quickly.

The request to qualify on tankers has been refused because I am not going to stay on in the Royal Air Force. The Wing Commander is fighting my corner for me, so I just have to wait. I am on helicopter training, which I also wished to do. Elise has realised that I am unlikely to marry her, so Elise has taken her bat and ball home. I liked Elise but I was not in love with her.

I am now using the language lab at the University to try to improve my Chinese.

I have to pay a little bit, but I do not mind.

Tohur has been accepted for a series of catering courses in London. I have gone round North London with Tohur looking for somewhere decent for Tohur to live.

House prices in London are ridiculously high. So are rents.

Tohur has put out a plea on his web site.

Tohur is still in care, so really Tohur's social worker should find accommodation for Tohur in London.

Tohur has asked if any of the Muslim children in care in North London can suggest a foster carer who has a spare bedroom, or make any other suggestions for accommodation. This has generated some replies so we are going to London again next Saturday to look at accommodation.

Tohur has left his college course.

Tohur is giving Don support while Ruth Lightfoot is in the USA with Charlotte Johnson.

Charlotte's song "Good Riddance Rat" is a major hit in the UK, the USA, and all over Europe. The woman who sings it is a tremendous singer and she is very attractive. The combination of a great song and a great singer is irresistible. Almost every woman in the world has had at least one bad experience with a man at some point in their lives.

It seems that millions of women who never purchase music are buying this song.

Mr Driburg put "Emma Hewson" as the pseudonym for the true song-smith. "Emma Hewson" has requests for songs from at least twenty leading female singers.

Charlotte herself has extended her tour in the United States because so many radio and TV stations want to interview her about her double CD of religious songs. Its sales are fantastic, and there are still another two months until Christmas.

Charlotte will be back for part of the October half term because Charlotte is booked to film the Christmas Special for the "Terrible Tykes".

Abdullah Daar telephoned me.

In our religion one is supposed to give a percentage of one's capital to charity each year. This is called the zakat. I do it. Tohur does it. Abdullah and the co-operative and Sahid do it.

It is not seemly to make a public demonstration of the zakat because it is a private religious obligation.

One does the zakat because it is one's religious duty. One's prayers to Allah will not be of any value if one is not paying one's zakat.

At the moment I have everything from Allah that I could wish.

Allahu Akbar!

The usual whisperers in any community started to chunter that the Daars do not make their full zakat.

The Daars identified the chief whisperers in their Somali community.

The Daars invited the whisperers to come to visit the Daar house all at the same time.

Abdullah presided, although Uncle Jalil was in the room.

Abdullah opened the meeting with a prayer that the community should live together in love and harmony.

Abdullah said that the Daars had heard that there were mutterings in the community that the Daar family does not make their full zakat. Abdullah said that the Daars do not know exactly who is saying these lies.

All the people in the room are influential people in the community and the Daar family would like their help to challenge and to stamp out these lies.

Then Abdullah quoted from the Holy Quran [Quran 24:15]

“When you received it with your tongues and said with your mouths that of which you had no knowledge and thought it was insignificant while it was, in the sight of Allah, tremendous”.

Just to rub it in Abdullah first read it from the original Quranic Arabic and then Abdullah repeated it in Somali.

In one sense this was a courtesy to those who have not had Abdullah’s opportunity to learn about Islam, or whose Quranic Arabic was a bit rusty.

It was also close to an insult to suggest that some of those present might be ignorant of the fine detail of Islam.

The deputy treasurer of the Mosque stood. He is the zakat collector for the community.

He said that he had sat with the Daar family.

He has worked out with the Daars their zakat and other contributions over the last few years.

The Daars have actually paid more to Islamic charities than they are required to do.

Abdullah asked if anyone present wished to ask the zakat collector any questions or to make any statement.

There was silence.

Abdullah then asked every person present to do their best to stamp out these foul lies.

The whisperers left.

Each one of them knew that he had been implicitly rebuked by one of the most respected families in their community.

The Daars then made sure that everyone in their community knew what had been said at the meeting.

I thought this was a high risk strategy, to take on the whisperers directly.

Abdullah said that it served notice on the whisperers that the Daar family are not to be whispered about.

It was necessary because these guys are almost all retired or unemployed.

They do nothing all day except chunter and whisper. If the Daars did nothing it would be open season for the chunterers.

All these guys will be much slower to repeat anything negative about the Daar family if it may come back to bite them.

I see the strategy. I don't know if it is wise. Time will tell.

CHAPTER 18: Cecil Byram

I do not know what happened with Mark and Karen over that week in France.

They are very comfortable in each other's company, and they are physically closer to each other.

Karen tells Irene that they still have not had sex.

I reckon they must have come pretty close.

I would not mind if they did have sex, but I would be disappointed in Mark.

Mr Wong's daughter Wen Dei is coming over to stay with us. She has some English. Mr Wong and I think that if our families are going to be linked financially for a few decades it would be a good idea for our families to get to know each other. Mr Wong has no money so I am paying the girl's fares and expenses and pocket money.

Once China is sorted out a bit better Irene and Karen and I will visit China as tourists.

The Shanghai factory site has the ground cleared and a perimeter fence built.

All the places in China that could have supplied a foundry are themselves wrecked by the tsunami. The foundry we need is currently being prefabricated in the USA and then it will be shipped to China.

As a side deal, the warehouses of machine tools I have spare are being shipped to China. China is desperate for machine tools as the Chinese begin their economic recovery. Mr Wong intends to invest in a number of enterprises using the machine tools as our contribution.

Karen is at college studying for AS levels and then for A levels.

Mark is still working in Barney's foundry at Cleckheaton.

It seems that the foundry was not mothballed as it should have been. They just stopped using it about forty years ago.

Still, it is all good experience for Mark.

At the end of the exercise I will have a working foundry that has cost me close to nothing.

Daniel organised a metals auction for me similar to the aluminium sale we had in July. We sold off what had originally been a months supply of five metals (stainless steel, copper, brass, bronze and aluminium) for the Neverthorpe factory.

We did it in what for us is the normal way, of selling half a ton and then offering more metal at the highest bid's price.

By now everyone is beyond desperate for metal. There will be some metal arriving in Britain eventually, but not for a few months yet.

I had thought the aluminium price in July was high. This time all the prices were beyond all reason.

I could have sold much more at these prices, but I must keep my factories operating.

Byram's is free of debt.

I am sitting on a cash mountain in England and another cash mountain offshore.

I still have enough metal in stock for all my factories to operate for another seventeen months. It will not be a full year before metal supplies resume.

I do not think I can avoid a massive tax "hit" this year.

If you stockpile six million pounds worth of metal every year for more than thirty years you have two hundred million pounds worth of metal. If metal prices have

suddenly risen twelve-fold, that becomes twenty-four hundred million pounds, or two point four billion pounds.

Even after the tax hit I will be worth nearly a billion pounds.

Karen will personally be worth more than three hundred million pounds, all of it offshore.

Given that this all comes from income we avoided paying tax on in the first place, I cannot complain at a tax hit now.

Karen still does not know that she has any personal wealth.

On top of that cash we will still have the Byrams manufacturing business, now greatly increased in value.

David Taylor has spread Byrams' money around twenty banks to reduce the damage to us should a bank go bust.

I need advice about what to do with this money.

The banks are all desperate to give me advice.

I think bankers are generally crooks and are often incompetent, so I do not want their advice.

The trip to Doncaster Races was great fun.

I said "Sod it" and all of the workers from all of the factories went, with guests. More than two thousand people!

I had hired a huge hospitality tent and outside caterers. Paying for their own drinks at Racecourse prices slowed down the drinking significantly so no-one got too drunk.

My mother and Irene came, too. My mother had a great time talking with the long-serving staff and the retired staff about the old days.

We went to the Hewsons for one of their parties.

I respect Don Hewson. He is a very sharp cookie.

Don Hewson has put me on to a Mr Porteous who gives financial advice to seriously wealthy people.

Mr Porteous has come top of all the investment performance tables this year because he kept telling people not to invest in China. Now, after the tsunami, all the investment trusts that invested in China have seen their factories washed away.

Mr Porteous will see me in London next week. It says something that I have to go to him.

Our Internet sales are enormously profitable.

Young Sahid will earn well over a million pounds this year.

We agreed a contract. I cannot see any honest way to break it.

Lucky boy! Without the boy there would be no Internet operation, so even luckier me!

“The labourer is worthy of his hire.”

Mark was chatting one Saturday.

“Cecil, I have had an idea.”

This was at home. At work I am “Mr Byram”.

“Go on.”

“You have three empty storage units.”

“Yes.”

“Each empty unit is surrounded by a high stone wall.”

“Yes.”

“When you start building stockpiles again the obvious location is Ming City because you have two square miles of level space there.”

“You would only have to pay for one set of security operatives instead of the eight you had at one point.

“So you do not need these stockpile sites again.”

I thought about that.

“Not really.”

“Could you obtain planning permission to build supported old people’s housing there?”

“What do you mean by “supported”?”

“You would have a gatekeeper controlling entrance to the estate to keep jobs and thieves out. You would have a home help service and a daily visiting service. You would have a little shop on the site or do a deal with a local shop for deliveries.

“You would have a community centre for the old people to use. They can run their own bingo sessions and anything else they want.

“You would have grounds maintenance. You would maybe have little interview rooms for doctors and chiropodists and so forth. Or run a mini-bus service to the GP surgery.

“If you painted the stone walls you could give the illusion that the old people have views over open country.

“If everybody there rents then even old poor people could live in pleasant purpose built accommodation.

“It’s up to you whether you build a nursing home as well.”

“That is a very interesting idea, Mark.”

“So then I thought about who could build these houses.

“Did you know that roughly one prisoner in ten is ex-services?”

“No.”

“Well they are.

“Once they leave prison nobody wants to give them a chance, so a lot of them spend their lives unemployed or back in prison.

“You want to build a brick wall at Ming City twelve foot high and six miles long. That would be a great training opportunity for bricklayers before they go off to build your old people’s bungalows.

“Building walls at Ming City is a great hospital job for spare workers.”

“Working on the plumbing and the electrics for the bungalows would be good training.

“Putting up internal walls and painting them creates jobs. So does making and putting in doors and windows, and laying pavements and roads.

“Someone can paint the inside of the external walls.

“You are giving these guys a chance to work. You are giving them the opportunity to earn good references.

“They will learn skills. They will build decent records for themselves.

“The trick is in selecting the right people. You want people who want to make something of themselves.

“You could turn dozens of lives round.

“And still you make a profit.”

There was a silence.

Irene said,

“That is a really interesting idea, Cecil.

“You remember what your great-grandfather said.

“Lions.”

This is a reference to the General Strike in 1926. Byrams was unionised, and the men came out on strike in 1926. They had no quarrel with Byrams, but they came out on strike.

When the Engineering Union withdrew from the General Strike the men came back to work.

Some employers tried to break the union. We didn't.

Great-grandfather gathered the men in the factory yard.

"Many of you served in the Great War.

"Most of you have fathers or sons or brothers or uncles who served in the Great War.

"We all lost people in the Great War."

Silence.

"We were all on the same side then."

Silence.

"I was too old to serve. My son was too young.

"General Ludendorff said that you were "Lions led by donkeys".

"It seems that nothing much has changed.

"Your quarrel was not with me. I am not sure who your quarrel was with.

"There will be no retribution from me.

"I am not going to try to break the union.

"You need a union to stand up for yourselves and to negotiate with me.

"Some of you must be very short of money."

General assent.

"When the works closes, so on your own time, queue at the Pay Office. The Pay Office will lend you a week's pay, to be deducted from your wages over the next ten weeks.

"Now, back to work my Lions!"

We have had good relations with the union ever since. I don't say there have never been differences with the union, but with goodwill on both sides we have generally worked our way through them. There are people working for us who are fourth generation and even fifth generation Byrams workers. Karen is fifth generation Byrams.

I bought the stockpile sites a long time ago, at a time when disused mills and factories were very cheap.

If I turn them into housing I don't see how I can lose.

If building my Ming City wall can be a training exercise I will have the Great Wall of Ming built for only the cost of the materials.

Would the materials be a tax deductible expense too? I will have my accountant check that out.

"Is this your next job, Mark?"

"No, Cecil. I will be away on my missionary service before this project gets off the ground.

"You want Sergeant Hanson and Fusilier Styles."

"Who?"

"Kevin Hanson and Karl Styles."

"Oh."

"If you rope in the Royal British Legion as advisers, or NACRO, that would be a good idea."

"NACRO?"

"National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders."

"And me", said Irene.

"This is a really good project.

"I want to be involved in this."

I was pleased. Irene needs something to get her out of the house.

"How long would it take you to knock out a really detailed plan, Mark?"

"I have the project on a memory stick.

"If you lend me your computer and printer, Cecil, about six minutes."

Mark has actually costed my six mile brick wall.

Double thickness of brick, four metres high, roughly six million bricks. At two metres high, only three million bricks.

Buying in bulk I should be able to buy bricks at twenty-five pence each or less. If I say thirty pence per brick to include sand and cement and water, then the materials for a two metre wall will cost me £900,000 – more than I paid for the site.

I have made literally a fortune from my stockpiles.

The former stockpile sites are worth much more today than I paid for them.

Investing to build one large stockpile site at Ming City is a good idea.

If the bricks are for an improvement to the property, a capital improvement, then I cannot claim the capital expense as an expense against income. But if the bricks are for training workers how to lay bricks then arguably they are a legitimate business expense that I can set against taxable income. Given that I am taxed at forty per cent on my income, this is not to be sneezed at.

Mark is a clever lad. He has a list of people who should be considered as advisors for the project.

Sergeant Arthur Brown (Retired) is a retired transport manager, previously a lorry driver. Before that he trained soldiers and before that he was a combat soldier. I don't know him.

Sergeant Don Hewson M.M. (Retired). Accountant and actuary. Now Mark's foster carer.

Awarded the Military Medal while in the Pay Corps? There must be a heck of a story there.

Sergeant Kevin Hanson (Retired) – Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers.

Fusilier Karl Styles (Retired) – former combat soldier.

Dave Taylor my Finance Manager and Rose Howarth my HR Manager.

George Aaron? The suggestion is that George should be the full time manager for the entire project.

Mark says that the project needs a full time manager.

-Dealing with Barnsley Council over Ming City.

-Dealing with Meldon Council over initially three retirement developments and hopefully more projects as stockpiles are emptied.

-Liaising with local communities.

-Negotiating with the Army

-Negotiating with the prisons

-Negotiating with the Benefits Agency.

-Finding a technical college willing to produce the instructors.

-Negotiating with the Construction Union so that our trainees may join.

-Setting up a building company, a training company, and a company to manage the retirement sites.

-Exploring what grants, European Union monies, and other monies we can draw in.

-Press and PR.

-With Dave and Rose, setting up systems.

Mark's argument is that I should have a manager I know running the show rather than hire a stranger. This is just standard business advice and it is my normal practice.

Barney is close to completing his foundry, and then Barney could be used. But Barney is a production manager. Barney would find the negotiating and soothing and smoothing involved a trial. Whereas George has a proven track record in sales and negotiating and could do the job well. So Barney either runs the foundry or he returns to be deputy manager at Neverthorpe.

Mark's calculations on the retirement homes once an estate is up and running were an eye opener.

Any of my stockpiles could take eight blocks of twelve retirement homes, producing ninety six homes. Assuming that at any one time some are voids for various reasons, then calculate on ninety in constant occupation. Charging only sixty pounds rent per property generates £5,400 income each week. Four security staff at say £800 a week each costs £3,200 a week. Maintenance, grounds maintenance and grounds cleaning is to be done by a central team probably costing £200 a week. The gross profit is £2,000 a week.

All the other services are charged for as services additional to the basic rent. They pay their own way and they ought to generate profit.

All the bungalows are small, so we are looking at less than £10,000 per unit.

The initial capital cost of £960,000 spread over say fifteen years requires a return of £64,000 a year or £1,230 a week. Net profit is therefore a bit less than £1,000 a week, rising to £2,000 a week when the capital cost is repaid.

The capital asset will be appreciating because over the long term property usually does appreciate.

All but one of the sites are large enough for sixteen blocks of retirement homes instead of eight blocks. For the 96 extra properties there would be virtually no additional running costs. Net profit rises to £5,000 a week.

One of the sites is on a bus route to Meldon University so that site could be for students.

"How long have you been thinking about this, Mark?"

"About three weeks, Cecil,

"I did not want to come to you with a half-baked idea so I let it mull a while."

I am impressed.

“Do you have any other ideas?”

“Well, just about Ming City.”

“Go on.”

“It will take a year at least before metal prices go down and you start building stockpiles.”

“Yes.”

“Why don’t you run a metals stockholding business? Buy by the hundreds of tons and sell by the hundredweight?”

“The normal obstacles for that business are in obtaining a large enough secure site, and in funding the purchases of metal.

“You are doing that anyway for your own purposes.

“Instead of paying for a security guard in the day you will have a worker who sells stock to all comers. It costs you no more and you make a profit.”

“Mark.

“We could have been doing that for the last thirty years. We just never thought of it.

“Your ideas seem such obvious common sense when you come out with them.

“So why didn’t I think of that?”

“I will tell Daniel to start planning on Monday.”

I so wish that Mark Johnson was my son. I am not knocking Karen, but what a young man Mark Johnson is.

CHAPTER 19: Malc Dow

Our television series “Terrible Tykes” has hit the television industry like an earthquake.

The formula is new.

The quality is high.

The music is terrific.

The child performers are outstanding. The children are not only very competent musicians, they have personality and character.

The children were not chosen because they are attractive, but they are attractive children.

I do not need to tick diversity and social exclusion tick-boxes thank goodness.

If I did, this group of children ticks most of the boxes. There are two genders, three religions, and four ethnicities across the ten children.

Carlo my Music Director tells me that some of the children are stated as having special educational needs!

I was amazed to learn that because it is not obvious that any of the children have special educational needs.

Carlo is having a lot of fun by not telling me which of the children they are.

I could put my foot down and insist on knowing, but I am letting Carlo have his fun.

The ten child musicians supposedly live in two adjoining houses.

In a fifty minute episode they play eight pieces of music including two solos.

There is a story line. There are four adult actors but the adults are just foils to bounce the stories off.

From the literally tens of thousands of fan letters the children receive each week we know that the children already have significant individual fan bases and a tremendous collective following.

Answering each letter is a big task. I have two young women working full time just on answering fan letters.

The BBC has always led for audience sizes in the afternoons and early evenings. The Thursday evening children's magazine program recruited a child chef, David Wilkins. "Dave The Chef" raised audiences to within sight of parity with the BBC.

"Dave The Chef" was so popular that he showed on two nights each week.

David has since moved on to have his own daytime cookery program.

"Dave The Chef" was succeeded by Robert Graham who held Dave's audience.

We show on Thursday night after Robert's cookery segment.

"Terrible Tykes" has brought ITV to parity with the BBC.

We cannot have two programs a week of "Terrible Tykes" because the children need time to learn their music and to learn their lines. There is a significant likelihood of reducing the quality of the performances.

We can't do it.

Our audiences are still growing.

The audience demographic has changed.

In addition to the extra children we are attracting a surprising number of adults who simply enjoy the music.

People tend not to change channels much. If they watch a program they will often stay with that channel all night. The larger audiences attract more advertising revenue.

The broadcaster was desperate that our program should continue into a second series.

We have signed contracts with Mr Vincent for a second series to take us through to August.

We were able to negotiate a greatly increased price for the second series because "Terrible Tykes" attracts a larger audience than Children's ITV has ever attracted before.

The BBC is having lots of meetings trying to decide what to do.

The BBC cannot just copy the opposition's programs and program formulas. The BBC needs to find a "magic bullet" to compete with Robert Graham and with "Terrible Tykes".

As the Americans would say,

"Good luck with that!"

Our company has decided not to bid to help the BBC. If we have any good ideas we will keep them to ourselves.

Our job is to make "Terrible Tykes" even better.

Our company Dower Productions already had a good reputation. Now all the broadcasters are very interested to listen to our pitches for our other new programs.

Tom Driburg came up with a great idea.

The supermarket that funds Robert Graham also advertises during our program.

The supermarket has now agreed to pay a lot of money for our child actors to wear the supermarket's range of clothing during the filming. The children earn two thirds and our company earns one third. It will be the easiest money that I have ever earned.

The calendar, the CD and the DVD are all selling well. There is also a book about the making of the series, which consists of lots of photos taken during filming together with some linking text.

The "Christmas Special" is in the can. It is tremendously good.

Kali Daar's brother Sahid whom I met at the Hewsons' house has set up an official web site for fans of the program.

Sahid pays me a share of the income he makes from the web site.

A larger share is paid to Mr Driburg to divide among the child actors.

I have to say that it is a very good web site. The photos of the children from only a few years ago are very popular.

In the FAQ (frequently asked questions) section the children are asked how much money they earn.

Dan Wilbey says,

"We don't know.

"Our parents and grownups are looking after the money for us. We will each be told on our eighteenth birthday. Until then we just don't know.

"The series is so much fun that most of us would do it for free!"

Tom Driburg's comment to me was "Dream on!"

The children's fees were moderate for the first series.

Tom Driburg has negotiated a very good deal for his child actors for the new series. That is Tom's job.

As Tom says, it is not just the filming day that he charges me for. Just as important if not more important is the time the children spend learning and perfecting the music and the scripts beforehand.

If you count in the time the children spend preparing, and that the children are perfectly prepared when they arrive for filming, Tom's fees for the first series were very reasonable.

We all know that Tom's children are delivering terrific programs.

Representing all of the children increases Tom's negotiating power.

For the second series Tom will charge me the price of five small cars per episode.

On top of that the children have some income from the downloads, more income from the Christmas goods, and more income from Sahid's web site.

They will soon have additional income from the supermarket for wearing the supermarket's clothes during the second series.

In theory we could replace all of the children with new less expensive actors, but the audience would hate it.

It would be challenging and very time consuming to find a bunch of actor musicians who are as good as these children.

Tom has me over a barrel here.

Tom could go to the BBC with his children this afternoon and be paid as much or more as we are paying the children. We both know that.

Tom knows not to be too greedy, but Tom is making sure that the children are properly paid.

Tom refuses to sign long-term contracts for the children. In his position I would not agree either.

Tom insists on equal payment for each child actor.

The download fees go to the actual performers. We all know which children are downloaded the most.

Tom's argument is that the children are each of them tremendous and each of their personalities and performances makes a significant contribution to the series. Peter Wilkins' jokes for instance are never downloaded, but they are repeated in every junior school playground the day after the broadcast.

Carlo checked with the children.

The children really have no idea how much money they are earning.

The children trust Mr Driburg to negotiate for them and they trust Mr Hewson and the Trust Committee to look after their money for them.

They are very fortunate children to have such competent adults.

Mr Hewson told Carlo that the children are too young to understand the amounts of money involved. As the children get to fifteen or so Don will help each child to understand their personal finances.

When the new contract comes in the children will be earning so much money that the fostered children will be required to pay board from their earnings. The board money is deducted from Mr Hewson's income. It makes no financial difference to Mr Hewson.

All the children who write in or email during the autumn will receive a Christmas card featuring a photo of the entire cast. We expect to send out over a quarter of a million Christmas cards! We have employed a mailing company to do the packaging and posting just before Christmas.

The program is a runaway success.

I have had to step back because I have a business to run.

Carlo Stewart is in practice running the "Terrible Tykes" program because Carlo selects the music and he sees the children every weekend. Emily manages the writing team. Emily works closely with Carlo.

Filming starts again on 29th December and goes through to the 5th of January.

The children already have the music they are to play, and the scripts.

Tom Driburg negotiated for us to give a piano to Kali Daar to practice on, and another for Gerald Butler. It seems that the Wilkins have a piano. I am paying for four monthly piano tunings and for four piano teachers.

There will be more filming over the February half term.

We will use every holiday until we have the entire second series in the can.

Then straight after the school year finishes, assuming we have a contract for a third series, we will try to film six months of episodes.

We do not want to find ourselves filming every Saturday in Manchester. The kids have said that they prefer to do blocks of filming rather than to work every Saturday. Everyone feels the same.

I am impressed that Mr Hewson is so very firm about the children not losing school time. It is a nuisance, but I respect Mr Hewson's policy.

Carlo has started going to Yorkshire at the weekends again. Carlo says that these are a really wholesome and dedicated bunch of children. The children are down to earth, and are not prima donnas at all.

Carlo says that this is still one of the most enjoyable jobs he has ever had.

I saw a youngster called Andrew Johnson at the family concert cum audition.

Carlo says that Andrew is now good on the guitar and on the bagpipes.

I have already heard Andrew sing. The scripts for the second series are virtually all written now, so we cannot introduce Andrew. We will introduce Andrew in the third series I think.

I am pretty confident that there will be a third series. Mr Vincent would be crazy to risk his current very high ratings.

A long running series is fairly easy to manage. A long running series gives even more credibility to our production company.

"Terrible Tykes" is established and it is already very profitable.

We have a tremendous bunch of kids. The adult actors are very happy to have secure well paid work. They are allowed to take on other commitments around the series.

If the series is a success and it looks like going on for a long time we will have an interesting problem.

Do we stay with the existing children as they get older or do we keep adding children at the younger end and phase out the older children?

For the third series I would like at least one extra girl. The choices seem to be Margaret Graham or Linda Donkin or Freda Graham. Or perhaps we could take a girl from outside the extended family. I don't know.

Carlo says there is a girl whom I have not seen. This is Peter Wilkins' younger sister Janine. She is a good pianist and singer.

Janine is very close to Sally Johnson, Dan Wilbey and Max Hewson. Janine is friends with everyone.

So maybe we will take Janine and Margaret for the third series alongside Andrew.

The reviews we have had for "Terrible Tykes" are amazingly good.

"Terrible Tykes" is nominated for a significant number of television industry awards including. "Best new program", "Best musical program", and "Best children's program".

Kali Daar and Derek Donkin are nominated for "Best actors".

Our first series is shortly to be broadcast on Australian television and on Canadian television. The children will have a little more money for that.

One of the American television producers has licensed our format and he is recruiting for child musicians.

Bless Tom Driburg for introducing me to this group of children.

CHAPTER 20: Dennis Wilkins

My sister Helen and Martin Jenkins are going to marry next summer, in July.

They are a really nice couple, and I am sure that the marriage will work. Not like the last guy, who was just a nothing.

Helen needs a strong person as a husband. Martin Jenkins is strong but Martin is not violent.

David is funding the wedding, and catering. We will all help with the catering.

The Sal Hewson Trust Fund will pay the deposit on whatever house Helen and Martin buy.

My A levels are going fine.

The tutor Don hired is working with me. It all seems straightforward now. The tutor is making me read ahead in the textbook so when the teacher starts to teach I already know it. Then the teacher is filling in the holes for me.

I like these A levels. I never thought I would.

Andria is enjoying the practical side of nursing and the studying. Now Andria is studying for a purpose she enjoys studying much more.

David has his GCSEs this year. He is going to give up the Youth Theatre Club after the Christmas Pantomime to concentrate on his studies. David is now Lighting Manager.

Amy and Diana are stopping dancing at Christmas until after their GCSE exams. This will give me a lot more free time.

We will be making an advertisement over the February half term, but we don't know yet what it will be.

My brother Peter has always been a nice kid. He enjoys the celebrity the TV program gives him, without it going to his head.

The tutor David pays for is helping Peter. It is Latin, French and Maths that gives Peter trouble. For some reason Peter finds German not as difficult.

With the tutor's help Peter is surviving.

We are thinking about whether to transfer Peter to Tryton High School where he will find the school work much easier.

Janine has started doing judo. Janine and Sally Johnson are great mates and they love doing judo together.

Baby Angela is not a baby any more. She is full time in Nursery and she goes into Reception just before Christmas. Angela is a great kid. Angela and Damien are very close.

Our parents are fine. Dad is gradually regaining his spirits.

Sahid Daar is a bit embarrassed.

The police have made their anti-terrorism arrests. They arrested an uncle of Sahid's friend. The police were not monitoring Sahid's emails as Sahid had thought. They were monitoring the computers at the other house and naturally they read Sahid's incoming spoof e-mail.

Sahid is cogitating on the whole Islamic terrorism issue. Sahid has never before thought that it was anything to do with him.

Uncle Jalil has close to put Sahid under house arrest. Jalil has the imam working with Sahid three nights a week working on one's duties as a Muslim. Poor old Sahid!

Mark Johnson is utterly pissed off. The poor lad wants to be seeing his girlfriend in England but instead the poor guy is going to China.

Karen Byram is cross with Mark because once again they will be apart.

All because Mark stepped up to deal with one of Mr Byram's problems!

Mark is driving now, and Mark drove to the Byram's house to collect Karen.

They were going to go ballroom dancing in Meldon, as they usually do on a Tuesday night.

When Mark arrived at the Byrams' house it was an emotional disaster area.

The Chinese young woman staying with the Byrams, Wen Dei (always "Wendy"), was in tears and nearly suicidal.

Cecil was shouting rude words about the Americans.

Irene and Karen were upset and tearful.

Cecil has been investing in China to set up Wendy's father as a manufacturer of bolts, nuts and threaded rod.

Normally having a foundry built in China is not hugely difficult.

Most of the foundries are still out of action because of the tsunami. So Mr Wong had placed an order with an American company for a "turnkey" installation of a modern foundry.

Installation was supposed to begin early in the New Year.

Today Mr Wong received an email from the American supplier.

Apparently the idiot American President has ordered that American customers must be given priority over foreign customers. So the foundry the Americans were preparing for China is going to be installed in Detroit instead.

The best offer the supplier can make is a place in the queue behind all the American orders. At least four years delay! They cannot promise to deliver even then. Sorry!

So poor Mr Wong is utterly stuffed.

Cecil is stuffed with him.

That is why the household was in hysterics.

Mark apparently said,

"The answer is in front of your face. It's obvious!"

Everybody looked at Mark.

“The foundry we have just fettled in Cleckheaton used to make nuts and bolts and threaded rod before the Chinese undercut everybody.

“It is in working order.

“You own it. Ship it to China!

“You could have it in production by the end of March.”

“Are you serious?”

“I know that foundry very well.

“I have spent weeks and weeks working on that foundry. I reckon a month to dismantle it, six weeks to get the containers to the factory site in China, and then three months at most to have it up and running.”

Then Mark swore.

It is very unusual indeed for Mark Johnson to swear.

“Barney can dismantle the foundry. But Barney can’t go to China to assemble it because his wife is seriously sick. Barney can’t go to China and leave his wife without support for three months.”

“Who else knows the foundry?”

“Well mainly me and Barney.”

“Could I help?” asked Wendy.

“I was studying Engineering at Shanghai University until the tsunami.”

“Yes. You would be very helpful at both ends.”

“Mark Johnson!

“Does this mean we are going to spend another three months apart?”

“That is why I swore, Karen.

“It was like I was jumping up and down on a cliff edge.

“The logic is horrible. You need a foundry in China. You have a foundry here.

The rest follows step by step.”

Karen stomped upstairs.

Karen was not suited.

Mark stayed at the house during long Skype conversations between Mr Wong, Wendy and Cecil. After an hour Mark was clearly on his way to China. Karen had still not come downstairs.

So Mark left.

The next morning Mark collected Wendy and Mark drove Wendy to Cleckheaton. They spent the day photographing and measuring every bit of the foundry.

Mark planned how to disassemble the plant.

Barney joined them in the afternoon. Barney looked over Mark's plans carefully and Barney agreed them.

The first step was to make careful drawings of every bit of the foundry. They took many more photographs.

Mark devised a numbering system for disassembling the foundry. Wen Dei and Mark spent a few days numbering every part, with some colour coding.

By now there were ten containers and two outsize containers in the yard.

Using cranes and forklifts the foundry was very slowly disassembled and packed into the containers.

When the containers were loaded and taken away Mark and Barney and Wendy went out for a celebratory meal together. All the plans and photos have been emailed to Mr Wong, just as a backup.

Mark had two days off, and then Mark was booked into a one to one Chinese course in Manchester.

Mark reckons he is not good at learning languages.

Cecil says that Mark is to learn Putonghua Chinese for five days a week until Mark flies to China. Poor Mark!

What makes it worse is that because Mark goes to College on Tuesdays for his apprenticeship course Mark is losing all his Saturdays to learn Chinese in Manchester.

Karen is furious at poor Mark.

Rebecca writes to the Johnsons once a month. The Johnsons say that the letters are now much more cheerful than they were at first. Rebecca is happy again.

Charlotte's CD is selling very well in the Christmas season.

"Good Riddance Rat" is Charlotte's song about the breakup of her hopes for a relationship with John Tarron. Supposedly written by "Emma Hewson" it is the best-selling song of the year in the USA and Europe.

Charlotte and Robert Graham took part in the filming of the "Terrible Tykes" Christmas Special during the October half term.

The kids have not seen the Christmas Special yet. They say that it was great fun to film, which is a good sign.

Little Dan Wilbey had some mistletoe on a stick on top of a helmet. Much of the humour was in Dan taking bribes from all of the children to wave the mistletoe over certain other children.

The long awaited kisses took place as intended. Charlotte and Robert got kissed, too.

Charlotte and Sally sang "White Cliffs of Dover" together.

Robert Graham came over as a really strong personality, which he is. Robert is a terrific violinist as well as a terrific accordion player.

There was a party at the end of the filming.

At the party the children presented Carlo with an African style wooden face mask of Carlo's face. Carlo was really touched.

Tohur loves his catering courses. He is lodging with a Muslim couple in London who have a spare bedroom. They both work long hours so they are very happy that Tohur often has a meal ready for them when they arrive home.

Ali Miah is thriving at Cambridge University.

The Donkins are getting to know their relatives from London. The meeting between Linda and the grandma who had wanted Linda aborted was a bit difficult at first but grandma broke down crying and that broke the ice.

Freda Graham and Jake Grundy have broken up amicably. They are still friendly if they meet. Otherwise the Grahams are much as ever.

The Hewsons are all good.

CHAPTER 21: Don Hewson

All of the children are doing well. I am very happy with the career paths the older children are following. Tohur and Mark each have their foot on their respective ladders.

Abdullah Daar has now decided to become a teacher, but he is going to read for a Music Degree first. As Abdullah does not have any qualifications in Music he intends to spend a year at a School of Music before beginning his degree studies.

Abdullah has been having singing lessons for about a year now.

The Doncaster fashion co-operative is doing well. The designs for Emma's dresses and Karen's dresses look really good.

Now that term has begun the gym exercises with Emma and Karen Wilbey are reduced to twice a week.

Emma's special exercises are as often as she will let me, which is most nights. Sahid is now out of disgrace. Uncle Jalil gave the poor lad about a month of house arrest before relenting.

Sahid is distinctly cross that he has had to stop buying properties and instead Sahid has to save up for his tax bill.

Most sixteen year old lads would be content to own four houses and a factory unit free of mortgage.

As Sahid says, by the time Sahid pays his tax bill Sahid may be down to his last quarter of a million pounds!

All the performers know that I am administering their money. They do not know how much money I am holding for them. I have a bit extra for Max and Dan because they were actors in a film.

All of the children have earned significant amounts of money from the music downloads which collectively run into the millions. Derek, Sally, Kali, Gerald and Max lead the table, in that order.

Then there are the payments for the individual actors. Currently all actors are paid at the same rate. The children are also on percentages of the DVD and Christmas goods sales.

I heard from Mark Johnson that the Mormons accept my view that Sally is too young to truly consent to tithing. They are content that I have created a "Sally B" account for Sally's tithes.

The new Mormon Bishop, Bishop Singleton, visited us. Bishop Singleton sat down with each of Mark and Charlotte to check their incomes against his tithing information. The Bishop was happy.

Bishop Singleton was amused that "Good Riddance Rat!" was written by Charlotte. He will keep Charlotte's secret.

I explained that none of the younger children know what they are earning. I do not want the children to know.

Bishop Singleton and I went through Sally's income and tithes accounts without Sally being present. My calculations are correct.

I like Bishop Singleton. I barely saw Bishop Collins. Bishop Singleton is definitely an interesting guy.

Bishop Singleton said that when Mark goes off to China for a while this will leave Charlotte as head of the family for a while. If I think Charlotte needs support then I am please to tell him.

Part of Bishop Singleton's problem is that one of his good activists has gone sick, and another has moved away. There is as much work to do as ever but now there are fewer activists to do it.

In normal circumstances Bishop Singleton would give Mark more of a role, but Mark is studying six days a week. Then Mark will be away in China for three months. Then soon after Mark returns Mark will turn eighteen and he will go off on his missionary service.

There isn't much point in Bishop Singleton giving Mark anything significant to do.

Bishop Singleton says this girl Karen Byram seems to be a nice young woman. Karen and Mark will probably split apart during Mark's two year absence on Missionary duty.

Even among Mormons young couples usually break up because of the time apart.

When Mark returns there will be Mormon young women interested in comforting the returned missionary.

I told Bishop Singleton that Mark's relationship with Karen is currently pretty precarious. Even though Mark is going off to China on Byram family business Karen is still unhappy.

Soon after Mark returns from China he will go away as a missionary.

Karen is already unhappy about an absentee boyfriend.

Bishop Singleton told me that Mark is recognised in the ward as a pleasant and quietly very capable young man.

In any growing organisation like the Church of Christ of Latter Day Saints there are always more jobs to do than good people to do them. A competent person like Mark will always be in demand.

When Mark returns from his missionary service there is a fair chance that Mark will be headhunted by the Stake (the administrative district like a diocese) to become involved with youth activities across the Stake.

It will be good experience for Mark.

Will Mark still be living with us then?

I said that I will keep a bed for Mark. By the time Mark returns from missionary service Mark and Rebecca will be in their twenties. I expect they will choose to move out, possibly with the younger Johnson children. I don't know. It is just too far off.

Andrew Johnson is good enough on the bagpipes to be entering bagpipe competitions. Andrew is earning "highly commended" placings at the moment. Andrew and Michael and the gang are entering ballroom dancing competitions and they are enjoying them. They are also enjoying judo.

The Mormon children seem to enjoy their Sundays at the Mormon Church.

The Wilkins are fine.

David Wilkins says that Tohur and Robert appear to be each on about four per cent of the Christmas market. As David has lost only two per cent of market share then the other six per cent of market share has come from the other celebrity chefs.

The supermarket is very pleased with all three young chefs.

Tohur has more time for his judo because the catering courses only take up four short days in each week. Being in London Tohur is able to visit a dojo every night of the week if he wishes.

Going to a dojo one evening Tohur was attacked in the street by a gang of eight racists who wanted to beat up an Asian.

Tohur had the patience to let one racist hit him before Tohur hit anyone.

Tohur used only necessary force, thank goodness. Tohur did not know this at the time, but there was good CCTV coverage of the entire incident.

The police gave Tohur a copy of the CCTV film as a trophy. The gang have all been charged, even the ones who ran away.

Ali is learning Mandarin Chinese. It is the Putonghua dialect that Mark is also learning.

Ali says that a lot of the undergraduates spend more time and money on drinking than Ali does on learning Putonghua. At least Ali will have something to show for his time.

Ali says he is doing well on his course, doing well on his airline flying training, and doing well on his helicopter flying training. Ali is advising on catering for his College's May Ball.

Ali is happy with the world.

Fulesa enjoys taking part in the TV series. She is unhappy that Ali and Tohur are away so much. Fulesa seems to have adopted Mark as an older brother.

The twins also miss Tohur and Ali.

Linda Donkin is still happy with her flugelhorn boyfriend. I heard Linda tell Freda that brass players learn to control their breathing, so each kiss can go on for a very long time. Lucky Linda.

Emma has had a quiet word with Linda. Even though Linda has not had sex yet Linda has been to the doctor for a contraceptive injection. I am much less worried now.

Linda has GCSE exams this summer. The school says that Linda is doing fine. Linda and Charlotte are having coaching in Maths and French.

Derek is surrounded by girls whenever I see him.

I was starting to give Derek my "birds and bees" lecture when Derek said, "Look, Don. I am a Muslim.

"Until I am married I cannot have sex.

"Does that make things easier for you?"

It certainly does.

Colin Donkin is a lovely boy. Colin is a little wild and unthinking, like most eleven year old boys. There is cause to watch Colin, but no real cause for concern.

Georgina Donkin is enjoying the TV program.

Georgina is very happy to find that she has an extended family. The Donkins are all happy with their new relatives, even Linda.

Freda Graham is a happy girl. She does not have exams this year. Freda does not have a boyfriend at the moment.

Freda says that until she meets another lad as good as Jacob Grundy or Mark Johnson she is not bothered with lads.

Freda does sketches of the "Terrible Tykes" cast every three months for the program. Freda is earning good money for this work.

Robert Graham is doing well in school. Robert is doing well in life.

The important issues for Robert are his cooking career and his exercises. The violin comes third, and the accordion fourth.

Margaret Graham missed the cut for the TV program. Margaret is having singing lessons, piano lessons, drum lessons, and guitar lessons so she may step into any vacancy that occurs.

The little Grahams are fine. Simeon is learning to play the drums. Jenny is learning the guitar.

Our son Max enjoys having long hair.

Max knows that I am not keen on his having long hair.

Max enjoys having long hair knowing that I do not like it.

As Emma says, Max may not be my biological son but Max has inherited some aspects of my personality.

Max is very conscious of his appearance,. Max washes his hair every day.

I took Max into the study and I told him that he was being a little sod.

Max smiled.

So I told him I had only one option. We have to have a huge hug.

We did.

Alice is growing more like her mother every day. Beautiful, intelligent, talented, and strong-minded. Fortunately Alice seems to worship me as much as I love her. Our relationship is very strong.

Alice manipulates me as any little girl manipulates her father.

Damien was a little thug. The judo has calmed Damien down a lot.

Damien is in many ways a very sensitive child. When a young child is close to tears Damien will always be in there offering love and reassurance.

Arthur is a sweetie. Kate is cheerful and playful.

Emma and I are great.

Emma has decided that she is going to carry on as a Deputy Head. She is not going to bother to try for promotion. She can handle life as it is.

There is nothing about a Head Teacher role that appeals to her.

The Terrible Tykes TV series is a huge success. It has brought ITV audiences almost to parity with the BBC on a Thursday evening.

The broadcasting company is very happy.

Mr Vincent has been promoted because of his success in children's television.

Mr Vincent still has children's programs within his empire.

Elizabeth Mountford has become Area Manager at her office. Elizabeth said that she is going to keep the Donkins because of a promise that she made to Linda Donkin. So Elizabeth is going to keep us Hewsons, too.

Rebecca's bedroom is empty. Mark is alone in his bedroom. There are many empty beds.

My view is that I have no spare space. I suspect I will have a phone call from Elizabeth one day saying "pretty please", and "just for a few days".

For the moment, life is good!

CHAPTER 22: ALI MIAH

My girlfriend George has recently chucked me because she has found a better man.

George is older than me. George wants a man the same age or older than George.

The new boyfriend is twenty-six. He is much more what George wants. I am just too young for George.

I miss George. George was really good company.

I felt comfortable and easy with George.

But George is going her own way. I wish George well.

I would take George back in a heartbeat, but that is not going to happen.

I have a few female friends. They are just friends.

I am getting friendly with Fan. Fan is an Engineering student from Beijing in China. Fan is very good about talking to me in Putonghua.

Putonghua is the Beijing dialect of Mandarin. It is the Chinese official language.

It is the Chinese dialect I am most likely to need if speaking to any bureaucrat or office in China.

I spend about eight hours a week in the language lab learning Putonghua. It is better for me than the same amount of time spent in a pub or a College bar. It is certainly cheaper.

I have conversational Putonghua now, but I do not have engineering and airplane vocabulary. Fan and I talk about Engineering subjects in Putonghua, which helps Fan with his Engineering and helps me with my Putonghua.

The Engineering Department is happy with me.

Prof told me that I am an example of what a student should be. I help the other Engineering students. I contribute to wider University life. I have a good relationship with the Royal Air Force and with the airline.

Am I intending to stay on for further study after my Master's degree?

I told Prof that at the moment my intention is to become an airline pilot for the airline.

Prof said that if I ever change my mind I should contact him. That was cheering. Every Friday I fly large airline passenger planes either on simulators or for real. This is paid for by the airline.

I am qualifying on the family of long-haul Boeing airliners so that I may fly long-haul flights for the airline. That will be my career.

I am a cadet with the Royal Air Force University Air Squadron. I am flying helicopters now with the Royal Air Force so every Saturday I go to a helicopter squadron's base. I hardly ever see the RAF University Air Squadron of which I am a member.

I was called back to the Hercules Squadron to be decorated for my part in the airlift to China after the tsunami.

It is a new medal, the Dragon Medal, for those foreigners who took part in the post tsunami assistance to China.

At the parade I was wearing my cadet uniform, which is slightly different from the normal RAF officer uniform. I was also at the very end of the line.

When the Chinese Ambassador saw me, I was wearing this slightly different uniform.

I am below average height. I always look very young. I also look different from the other pilots because of my Bengali ethnicity.

The Ambassador looked slightly surprised when he saw me.

The Ambassador looked even more surprised when I smiled at him and I said in Putonghua,

"It does not matter if a cat is black or white. If it catches mice it is a good cat!"

This is a famous saying in China. It has political resonances in China because Chairman Mao hated that saying.

We had a bit of a conversation in Putonghua, and then he shook hands and moved away.

The Hercules base commander spoke to me afterwards.

“I didn’t know you spoke Chinese?”

“I didn’t.”

“I have been learning Putonghua at the language lab at the university all this term. I am pretty good now.”

The May Ball committee are grateful to me for my suggestions about menus and food costing for the May Ball.

I know enough from working in restaurant and hotel kitchens to be able to suggest what we could provide that the ordinary student will enjoy.

The Romantic Punch that Linda Donkin invented was ceremoniously made and tested in the College bar. The Committee approves. It is now called Committee Punch.

I have agreed to give three days during and in the run-up to the May Ball as Catering Leader. I will not actually touch their meat or their alcohol but they are cool with that. Marinating joints before cooking them is not exactly rocket science but apparently it is a new concept to the Committee.

I am using some of Mrs Shah’s recipes for the desserts. I found a recipe for a great sauce to go over ice cream that contains an alcoholic drink called Grenadine. The Committee nearly got sauced on the sauce. The Committee is very happy with the sauce.

The Vegetarian Option was easy. I just took Tohur’s Vegetarian Special that he cooked for the Tryton Hotel Christmas Dinner.

The Committee had me prepare a dish and serve it to ten vegetarians in the College. The vegetarians approve.

Several vegetarians asked me for the recipe. I said that I will give out copies of the recipe after the May Ball.

The Committee is also very pleased with the “Hair Of The Dog” drink I propose to serve with breakfast.

The Committee asked how as a devout Muslim I seem to have such expertise with alcoholic drinks?

I said that I had learned a lot from watching the barman at the Tryton Hotel. I didn’t tell them that the barman had given me a few lessons in making cocktails.

I have also studied a cocktails recipe book that Don loaned to Linda Donkin.

I have had a message that next Saturday I will have to fly a helicopter to the University Air Squadron base because the Base Commander wishes to speak to me.

I have no idea why. Perhaps he wishes to congratulate me on the Dragon Medal?

If I were in trouble it would have been a message to come to the base immediately.

So I am not in trouble. I will find out soon enough.

I spoke to three of the best hotels in Cambridge. Two of them use the same supplier for meat, and all three use the same supplier for vegetables.

The Committee has agreed to purchase from these suppliers instead of from the usual college suppliers. There was a bit of a stink about that.

I said that King's canteen provides good food at moderate prices. For the May Ball, for the prices people are paying for tickets, we should provide incredibly good food. So we need the very best quality materials.

I did not intend to insult the College's suppliers. But I would not be persuaded to use the College suppliers for the May Ball.

The Committee meets weekly, and sometimes more often, to plan the May Ball.

I meet with them for ten minutes every second week or so to keep them updated as to my catering plans. The Committee is very happy with the arrangement.

Apparently there have been problems around Catering in some years but I seem to be on top of the task.

I told the Committee that in my Third Year I intend coming to the Ball as a guest rather than working in the Ball. The Committee have agreed to allocate a couple of first year students to be my core team. The core team will have to run the catering next year without me.

I was happy and confident and curious when I reported to the Base Commander.

The Base Commander seemed much less happy to see me than I was to see him.

"What the blazes have you been up to, Miah?"

That was a worrying beginning.

"Sorry, sir. What have I done?"

“Apparently you speak Chinese?”

“Putonghua, sir, yes.. I have been learning Putonghua since I came back from China.”

“You spoke Chinese to the Chinese Ambassador.”

“Putonghua, sir. Yes.

“I told the Ambassador that I was so impressed by China that I began to learn Putonghua soon after I returned from China.”

“You bloody idiot!”

“Sorry, sir?”

“You also told him that you have qualified on the Sea King helicopter?”

“Yes, sir.”

“We have an invitation for you, you personally, to spend a month with Chinese Air Sea Rescue next summer.”

I was very surprised.

This probably showed on my face.

He looked at me.

“Politically, we have to accept.

“That has skewered you for learning to fly the fuel tankers.

“You won’t have time.

“Between now and next summer we need to qualify you to fly every helicopter we can lay our hands on. For two weeks this coming Easter you will be at RAF Culdrose with our Air Sea Rescue to gain experience of how we do Air Sea Rescue.

“Culdrose will also give you as much night flying experience as they can give you.

“Then when you get back we need a very long written report on your experience.

“Can you read Chinese?”

“No, sir.”

“You need to learn.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Miah.”

“Sir?”

“Learn to keep your mouth shut.”

“Yes, sir.”

I don't suppose that I am the first or the last young officer in the history of the Royal Air Force to be told to learn to keep his mouth shut.

I am not offended.

I wonder if anybody ever told the Base Commander to learn to keep his mouth shut?

I am sure that twenty years ago he was young and cocky. It is a shame what age and experience and responsibility have done to him.

This secondment to Chinese Air Sea Rescue is a tremendous opportunity.

The requirement to learn to read Chinese is a real pain. It will be very time consuming. Losing two weeks at Easter to fly helicopters doing Air Sea Rescue is great, but it reduces the time I will have for preparing for my exams.

I can do it.

Thank goodness I don't have a girlfriend. And thank goodness I don't spend time drinking and then suffering from hangovers.

It was only some months later that I learned that I had caused fifteen kinds of administrative nightmare for the Royal Air Force.

The first problem is that student cadets do not represent the Royal Air Force.

Student cadets certainly do not represent the Royal Air Force abroad.

Student cadets do not fly operationally with the Royal Air Force.

Student cadets do not fly operationally with foreign air forces.

I have to be called to the Colours for my RAF Culdrose stint because I will be flying operationally. I will have to be called to the Colours again for my secondment in China.

I will only be twenty when I go to China. That is very young for the responsibility of representing the Royal Air Force abroad.

Calling a cadet to the Colours is extremely rare. I was the first since 1939.

Calling the same cadet to the Colours three times to in a year is distinctly “off”.

If I were to dispute my being called to the Colours the Royal Air Force might be on a sticky wicket.

The Hercules flying was arguably an operational emergency. The secondment to China is not any kind of operational emergency.

Apparently several issues about my Chinese secondment went up to an Air Vice-Marshal.

From where I am as a lowly student cadet an Air Vice-Marshal is several steps above God! I am probably the first non-Royal cadet to be discussed by name by any Air Vice-Marshal in a very long time.

The invitation is personal to me.

Politically the opportunity is one that the Royal Air Force has to accept.

In due course a Chinese Air Sea Rescue pilot will be invited to spend time at RAF Culdrose. Any means of improving relationships with the Chinese military is politically important.

As a student cadet I can just quit any time I like. Calling me to the Colours means that I can't quit.

They have to call me to the Colours so that I am fully in the Royal Air Force. I will be paid a wage instead of the student cadet daily payment.

In the Royal Air Force I am now definitely "the famous Miah".

For the airline I am becoming "the infamous Miah". When I told my student liaison officer about recent developments she laughed.

"With the Dragon Medal we were intending to put you on long-haul flights to China."

Long-haul flights to China pay very well. I have blown flying for the airline for two summers now.

I am on a four year course after which I will become a full time permanent pilot. I will fly for the airline in my third summer instead of for all three summers.

"You won't have time to fly with us this summer. Would you like to spend six weeks in our Engineering section at Heathrow?"

"Yes, please!"

So that was agreed.

All I have to do now is to keep my mouth shut and my head down. There is so much work that I must do before my exams this academic year.

CHAPTER 23: Don Hewson

As we approach our sixth Christmas of fostering I have to count my blessings.

Nothing is going wrong to my knowledge, and much is going right.

Lots of men of my age are already dead or they are in poor health.

I stopped smoking when I was shot at the age of twenty, and I never started again.

I was an underage drinker as a schoolboy but since I joined the Army I have not been much of a drinker.

I have had to exercise every day because of my injuries from the shooting so I have always been fit. I have never been even a few pounds overweight.

Our doctor says that I am one of the fittest men of my age that he has ever seen.

There was a long period when I lived with my first wife Sal when I thought that I was incapable of generating children. Emma my second wife has given me Alice, Damien, Arthur, and Kate, so that worry is laid to rest.

Dennis Wilkins' comment when he heard that Emma was pregnant for the fourth time was,

"And you tell me to put a lock on it!"

A lot of men of my age are poor. I have a house free of mortgage that must be worth six hundred thousand pounds. I am within sight of my second million in savings and investments. I earn very good money from fostering – more than I did as an insurance company actuary.

By the standards of rich people I am not rich, but by the standards of a lad from a tough South Yorkshire Council estate I have done very well.

It is all the result of luck, hard work, and living carefully. Choosing two good wives has certainly helped.

I am supposedly retired after being made redundant seven years ago.

For the last five nearly six years I have been fostering children.

It is work I enjoy. There are hard and difficult moments but most of the time I am thoroughly happy.

The biggest happiness is in seeing children learn and exercise new skills. The children come to me uncertain and unhappy. They leave me prepared for adulthood.

That is my job. I am happy with what I do.

For me, fostering is much more than a hotel operation with bum wiping. I have the privilege to be trusted with vulnerable children. I do my best to give them confidence and experiences and skills and attitudes that will give them a chance in life.

I am ambitious for my children.

I am possessive of “my” children. The children understand that I really am committed to each and every child.

The terminology nowadays is that I am a foster carer rather than a foster father.

The truth is that I am a foster father.

I like that. The children like that.

The social workers may witter if they wish. Some do. Some don't.

The children all know that they are “Don Hewson's children” rather than being “no-one's children”. This knowledge gives the children emotional security.

On behalf of the children I have had run-ins with schools, with social workers, and with other folk. The children know that I am their advocate and their champion.

I have standards for how the children should behave. The children know these standards.

Generally the children keep to my standards.

The odd lapse from perfection does occur. I may growl or shout. Hardly ever do I need to punish a child.

I am the leader of the household. The children like it that there is a leader.

Our marriage is good. Emma was a teacher when I met her. Not long after we married Emma became the Deputy Head of a junior and infant school. During her most recent and probably her last maternity leave Emma told me that she is going to continue working because she would be bored and frustrated if she did not have a job.

I run the home and the foster children very well. Emma cannot think of any improvements she would make if she were home all day.

Emma has seen what her Head Teacher does.

Emma has decided not to go for promotion. She will stay as a Deputy Head.

Only three weeks back at work after her maternity leave Emma has become Acting Head Teacher!

The Head has gone off on sick leave with shingles. The Head will be back, but for the next three to six months Emma is Acting Head. Poor Emma!

Emma does have something to look forward to.

Our son Max had a part in a film where he played a character in childhood. The adult actor is the world's female heartthrob, Dee Lishus. At the Premieres in

New York and London Max and Emma will meet and be photographed with Dee.

Emma is dieting and exercising to look as glamorous as possible.

Emma always looks pretty good, but Emma is now really working on her appearance.

Max has a younger half brother named Dan Wilbey. Dan and his mother Karen are going, too.

All the clothing for the four of them is being provided for free by some children I used to foster. The Daars have their own fashion business in Doncaster.

The Daars say that the opportunity to make “red carpet” dresses is financially hugely important to their business. They are grateful for the opportunity.

Emma and Karen are delighted with the design proposals from the Daar fashion collective.

So yes I am happy with the world.

All the children are doing well.

Charlotte Johnson is a bit cross that she has earned more money just from writing the pop song “Good Riddance Rat” than she earned from performing her double CD of religious songs.

I said to Charlotte,

“The Lord works in mysterious ways”.

Charlotte thought about that and then she burst out laughing.

“He does!”

Charlotte is now trying to write pop songs because they sell better and pay better than most hymns. Charlotte is also writing more hymns for her next CD.

So Charlotte is happy and busy. Charlotte is richer than me.

Charlotte is not far off rivalling David Wilkins for wealth.

David and Charlotte have been in the same group of friends for the last four years. They will stay friends.

Charlotte has her GCSE exams this year. Charlotte is working well there so I am not worrying.

Mark Johnson is a lovely lad. He had a good idea, and as often happens to people who have a good idea Mark is landed with implementing the good idea.

Mark suggested that the spare foundry in Cleckheaton that he has just finished fettling should be dismantled, shipped to China, and reassembled.

Various more senior or more experienced people all have good reasons why they cannot go to China for three months. Mark is therefore in charge of the job. The foundry is dismantled and it is on its way to China.

Poor Mark has never been good at languages but he is now spending five days a week in Manchester having intensive Putonghua lessons.

With one day a week on day release at College, and his Mormon activities, Mark does not have much time for his girlfriend. The girlfriend is taking this badly.

Karen is also cross with Mark that Mark is going to China for months.

Seeing that Mark is doing all this for Karen's father one might think that Karen Byram would be more gracious. But Karen isn't being gracious.

My generation would say that Karen Byram is a spoiled young madam.

I am not saying anything. This is for Mark and Karen to work out between themselves.

Mark is off to China in early January for three months or so. Mark is still only seventeen!

Mark says that at seventeen Horatio Nelson was in command of a ship with a hundred lives depending upon his skills and abilities. Mark is only moving a foundry.

Mark says that it is a big job for someone aged only seventeen. Mark says that he is very fortunate to be in charge of the project rather than just working on it. Mark seems quite calm about the entire exercise.

Rebecca Johnson has been away over half a year on her missionary activity for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Rebecca had difficulties at first but after about five months Rebecca suddenly became cheerful and upbeat in her letters home. Rebecca will return sometime in early July next year.

The little Johnsons are fine. Sally is confident and feisty and she is really good company. Andrew and Michael are fine.

Our son Damien was attacked at school at the beginning of this term. Andrew has spoken to the bully.

Andrew says that he did not exactly use threats to the bully. Andrew counselled the bully as to the likely consequences of a further attack on Damien.

The bully has agreed not to bother Damien again.

Andrew and Michael are both great children.

Linda Donkin is a happy lass. I still don't know what a flugelhorn is, but the flugelhorn player at the Byram Willerton Brass Band is making Linda happy. Godric now comes on some of our Friday evening outings. Godric is studying for A levels and he has just applied to University to read Accountancy. Godric earns extra money teaching the flugelhorn at the Byram Willerton Brass Band Academy. This takes place in a purpose built band building in Cecil Byram's Willerton Headquarters.

Linda has decided to take a catering course after she finishes her GCSE exams. Linda has given up working at the Tryton Hotel because it clashes with brass band activity.

Linda has told Emma that she and Godric are not having sex. They are just enjoying each other. Linda has had a contraceptive injection so she cannot become pregnant in the next three years. Just in case.

Linda is sixteen so there is no legal bar to them having sex if they wish.

Not that legal bars to sex bothered me much when I was a teenager.

Derek Donkin is quite surprised that he has become a babe magnet in real life.

Derek is a nice looking boy.

Like every High School child Derek has had the hard word about not getting involved with the opposite sex. At barely thirteen years old that isn't normally much of a problem.

There are a lot of girls who like Derek and a number who are romantic about him. Derek is running the "just an ordinary child" line that all the children have been told to run.

Our kids walk to the High School and come back from the High School together so there is no safety or security issue.

Derek enjoys golf and wood carving with my friend Sebastian. Derek is often with Sebastian and Sebastian's wife Sara.

Colin Donkin is a good lad. He has a friend Eric who was originally very shy. They spend a lot of time together.

A real breakthrough is that Eric has agreed to become involved in ballroom dancing alongside Colin. Our household dancers are training Eric before he goes to Miss Addie's dance school.

Eric's mum is very pleased that Eric is coming out of his shell.

Georgina Donkin is happy enough. Annie Donkin is fine.

Freda Graham is happy. There is no boyfriend at the moment, but Freda is happy.

As we had hoped for, Robert Graham is having the odd twinge in his lower body. We record the location, the duration and the intensity of each twinge.

We also note what activity Robert was doing at the time.

Robert is even more motivated to exercise now that his exercise has produced results.

Some of the Mormon teenagers that Charlotte recruited last January are still helping Robert. They are also encouraged by seeing results. About half of them drifted away over the summer to mow lawns and dig gardens, but they are back now for the winter.

Robert is going to host a "thank you" dinner for the volunteers in February.

Robert is doing well at school. Robert's TV sessions are very well received.

Robert has David Wilkins and Tohur Miah advising him, an advantage that David Wilkins did not have when he started out.

What I like about these youngsters is that they see the three of them as being in competition against all the other chefs, but they do not perceive themselves as being in competition with each other. They work really hard to help each other to generate really good programs.

The younger Grahams are fine. Margaret is still hoping to be recruited to the "Terrible Tykes" television series.

Margaret can now offer singing and piano and guitar and drums. Simeon and Jenny are still learning to play drums and guitar. They are both learning both instruments.

Ali Miah is having a great time at Cambridge.

Tohur Miah is having a wonderful time at the Cordon Bleu Academy in London.

He says he is learning a lot.

Tohur is having lots of judo opportunities because he is based in London. He visits dojos several times a week. Tohur is very fit.

The youths who attacked Tohur have now been charged with a number of similar attacks. They have not had their trial yet.

Tohur still runs his web site for Islamic children in care.

Max is doing fine at the choir school. He and Peter Wilkins and Gerald Butler are celebrities in the school because of their TV program.

There are regular introductory evenings at the choir school where the local public schools make presentations about how wonderful they are, trying to persuade us to send our sons there when they leave the choir school.

We Hewsons do not have to make any decisions for another eighteen months.

Gerald Butler has less time in hand because although Gerald is in Max's year at the choir school Gerald would be a year above Max in a normal school.

I think that Manchester Grammar School is the obvious school for Gerald because Gerald is so bright.

I am not sure that Max is bright enough to gain entry.

I would like Max to be happy and successful during his teenage years, not paddling furiously to avoid being left behind.

Peter Wilkins definitely needs a different school. State school or fee paying?

By the beginning of September Peter and Gerald will have earned enough from the TV series that they can afford fee paying schools and University education if that is what they wish to do.

The same is true for Max, although of course I would pay for Max.

Alice and Damien are happy at school. Arthur has another year or so before he goes to nursery school. Kate is a happy baby.

My biggest concern is what Santa will give the children for Christmas. There are enough musical instruments and bicycles for everyone's needs.

Derek recently worked out that there are enough pages of sheet music from Dower Productions to paper the long wall in the study.

The children are ahead of schedule in learning their music and their scripts.

Carlo Stewart is happy with them.

Carlo says that our children are such good musicians that they could become session musicians. That is high praise from Carlo.

I am happy for children to do something and to do it well. Whether it is judo or music or cooking or climbing or flying or Mormonism does not matter.

I was just as happy funding the children to do ballroom dancing at a national level.

I am completely relaxed about whether the children earn money.

I have never been desperate to earn money. It has just flowed to me and stuck to me. Somehow I seem to have generated a gang of competent people towards whom money flows. I am not sure how that happened.

More important is that all the children are happy and successful.

CHAPTER 24: Amina Daar

My father is getting better.

I drove Dad and Abdullah to the mosque the other day and Abdullah went in with Dad. It is the first time that Dad has been out of the house since he came home from the hospital. I am so pleased.

Now Dad's friends from the mosque have started visiting to chat. That gives me much more free time. I need it because I have a factory to supervise.

Mina is at school and Shakoora is in Paris on her internship.

Abdullah has made another set of advertisements with Amy and Dennis. They are set around ballroom dancing. All three of them are excellent ballroom dancers so the advertisements were shot very quickly. Amy wore Daar dresses during the advertisements.

The dresses for Emma and Karen are still being sharpened. Emma is losing weight so her shape is changing.

Karen Wilbey is pregnant so her body is changing shape, too. We Daars are hugely excited by this opportunity.

Shakoora spends all her spare time in Paris exploring fabrics and shoes and handbags, trying to find stuff that is exactly right for Karen and Emma.

Shakoora will be back in England soon.

That awful tsunami in China has made absolutely no difference to the number of English women and girls who intend to marry next year.

For the past ten years or longer almost all the bridal shops have ordered base wedding dresses from China and then they made alterations to fit the individual customer. Most of the bridal shops cannot make large numbers of wedding dresses from scratch.

The interruption of the supply of wedding dresses from China is causing panic in the bridal shops. We have ten young women now churning out base wedding dresses to sell to bridal shops. Our dresses are flying out of the factory as we seem to be the only UK based supplier.

Sahid did a good marketing job for us. Sahid paid the social media to advertise our bridal dress supply business to every person who used the word "wedding" or "engaged" or "engagement" or "fiancé".

We have five basic designs, and we produce in sizes 12 to 20. We will supply other sizes if requested.

The wedding preparation season really gets under way from February and March. We will not hire any more people because by February the Chinese will be back in production. We will be pushed to keep busy the workers that we have.

Mina has designed several ranges of base bridesmaids' dresses. Mina had Janine Wilkins pose in one dress from each range and Sahid put the photos up on our site. We have had some orders already.

As the wedding season picks up hopefully we will have more orders.

Helen Wilkins is marrying this summer. Helen is going to buy her bridesmaid dresses and wedding dress direct from us. We have told Helen that we will give her a huge discount. Helen was so good to us when we used to live together with the Hewsons.

If Karen and Emma's "red carpet" dresses are popular we may make a few dozen at £20,000 or £25,000 each. Crazy as it sounds we will sell more dresses at £25,000 than at £20,000. It is to do with the psychology of wealthy people.

Mina enjoys designing bridesmaids' dresses and we are happy to let her contribute that way.

Sahid has his GCSE exams in the summer. Sahid is such a bright lad that we all know he will do well.

Sahid is earning a lot of money.

Sahid was very relieved when Mr Byram said that he is going to honour his contract with Sahid. The money from Byram's is the biggest source of income for Sahid.

Then Sahid has a web site that he created for fans of the "Terrible Tykes" TV series.

Sahid also has the rents from the three houses he rents out. One house is owned jointly with Abdullah and is rented out.

Sahid does not charge us rent for the factory unit we use.

Sahid has a lot of money in the bank. Some money will have to be used to pay income tax but Sahid has enough money to buy two or three more houses if he wishes. Sahid is not sure what to do with his money. Sahid is genuinely open to suggestions.

Our internet web site is climbing the search engine rankings. Sahid posted a few films on You Tube about the process of making a dress. He just filmed Shakoora and me making dresses over the summer, edited the films, and they are up!

Sahid has also linked to us from the other web sites he runs. Sahid says that we are having thousands of visits from the "Terrible Tykes" web site.

Sahid says that even if the children viewing do not buy our goods, the act of the children visiting us and spending time on our web site pushes us up the rankings. The higher we are on the rankings the more likely it is that people who have money to spend will find our site.

Some children (or their parents) are buying ballroom dancing dresses or bridesmaid dresses.

The accessories are selling well. Our manufacturer is nowhere near the Chinese coast and he has been able to manufacture the goods we need without difficulty.

Shipping the goods to us was more of a problem for our supplier because most of the Chinese ports were wiped out in the tsunami. One port in the North of China is working so our supplier exports through that port.

Abdullah is sitting his A levels this summer. His AS levels were respectable.

Abdullah is going to spend a year at music school after his A levels. Then Abdullah will probably go to university.

Mina is doing well at school.

Amal is happy with his dancing.

Jibral and Kali are also at the High School. Kali is not bigheaded about her TV appearances.

Fosia and Ahmed are well.

Our family has huge respect in our community, which makes us all feel good.

Mina does the book-keeping for all the family businesses.

The taxman came to visit one afternoon. He said that he was very impressed with Mina's accounts.

So all is well.

CHAPTER 25: Mark Johnson

A foundry is interesting. You have to heat metal to a very high heat until it is liquid. So what do you use to contain the liquid metal? The containers are usually ceramic. Ceramics are hard to heat, so once you have your ceramic container hot you want to keep it continuously hot.

You pour the molten metal into moulds. The moulds are generally formed in sand.

While your moulds are cooling you have to move the container of molten metal so that you can pour it into other moulds, until the metal is all poured out.

Alternatively you have the moulds on trays and you keep replacing the trays as you fill them. The disadvantage of this is that you might shake or even drop the moulds. So normally you move the container along a line of moulds.

It is more economical to keep the container operating continuously hot rather than to be reheating it from cold. So you need an enormously long line of moulds. By the time the container has got to the end of the line of moulds the first moulds should be cool enough to handle – with tongs, obviously. You can have two parallel lines of moulds and then you work back and forth along the line.

If you make a mistake somebody gets splashed by molten metal and dies.

The mechanism for heating the container moves with the container. You have to have a hopper that drops cold metal into the cauldron. The hopper usually moves to the cauldron to fill it when more metal is needed.

Although it is possible in theory to change from one metal to another in practice you don't. You can change the moulds easily enough, from bars to ingots to rods or to flat plates. Normally though flat plates are produced by a roller, which the Cleckheaton foundry does not have. There are modern foundries that extrude rods and bars and wire and plates, but Cleckheaton is an old and simple design.

A more modern foundry like our Neverthorpe foundry produces wire by extruding it.

The Cleckheaton foundry just makes very narrow rods.

Once the rods or bars or wire are cool enough to be used without heat being a problem you use machine tools to smooth off the sand and to smooth the rough surfaces. At that point you can sell the rods and bars or you can work on them.

You use machine tools to create a chamfer and to carve the thread.

A bolt is just a short length of threaded rod with a shaped head on it. You can make the shaped head by chopping up a wider rod and then combining while hot, or you can bash the end of the rod while it is hot to create the hexagonal head.

For nuts you drill a hole through the length of the rod, slice it, and then engrave a thread on the inside of each nut.

All the scrap metal produced is collected to go back into the hopper.

I think it should be possible to create a mould where there is an inner solid rod for the metal rod to form round. This would mean that one was only drilling to polish the hole rather than having to drill the hole. The only thing I can think of is perhaps a ceramic rod that one would then drill out. Anyway, they were not doing that in 1910 when the Cleckheaton foundry was built.

We have shipped an entire assembly line to China with all the machine tools, the hot zinc bath, the acid baths, and everything else. One puts in metals at one end and nuts and bolts and threaded rod come out the other.

The basic idea is pretty simple.

When Cleckheaton was built everyone worked on Imperial measurements like inches, but the machine tools we are sending can cut to metric sizes.

Running a foundry economically is a real skill. I am glad I had experience at the Neverthorpe foundry. Some poor devil is going to have to work with three shifts of Chinese workers to train them in how to work the Cleckheaton foundry economically and safely. Someone is going to have to train the Chinese maintenance mechanics.

It suddenly dawned on me who that poor devil will be. Who else knows how the foundry works and has Putonghua?

I will be in China even longer than I had thought.

Mr Wong can use the Cleckheaton foundry to get production under way. A foundry that has cost Mr Byram close to nothing and is then operated by workers at Chinese wage rates will be very profitable even though it is not modern.

Mr Wong can upgrade with the American foundry when it actually arrives. The American foundry will be a much more modern foundry with clean extrusion of wire and rods and plates and much more mechanization. The "all singing, all dancing" modern foundry will cost over twenty million pounds. It will take a while

to become more profitable than the Cleckheaton foundry where the total capital cost is going to come in at under £200,000.

I will be in China for three or four weeks after the foundry is built, to train the workers. I will return to England just in time to sit the exams at the end of the first year of my course. Then I will turn eighteen and I can go off to be a missionary.

I had a word with Bishop Singleton about timings.

I am supposed to apply to become a missionary no more than four months before my missionary service begins. If I apply in January just before I go, then four months from then is very early May, before I have sat my exams. I will not quite be eighteen then, so my application in early January is too early and it cannot be accepted.

I cannot apply while I am in China.

There is a person in China who has pastoral responsibility for all the Mormons in China. He won't know me.

He would ask me to wait until I return to my home ward in England. When you are as old as Bishops are, four months is not a long time to ask someone to wait.

The other thing is that I am not clear that the man actually is a Bishop.

There seems to be an informal understanding that we Mormons do not try to spread our religion in China and in return the Chinese Government does not persecute Mormons. The Mormon organization in China is deliberately very low key. The man is described as an administrator rather than being called a Bishop or a Stake President. Imagine having a Stake the geographical size of China! Wow!

I am not sure that there is a Stake for China, just a number of isolated Mormons and a few Mormon wards. Apparently Chinese Mormons and Western Mormons are not allowed to associate.

I will not be involved in these issues because I will be too busy.

The tsunami wiped out most of the Chinese coastal cities so I am not sure that there are many Mormons left in China outside Beijing.

So I have to wait until May to apply.

If I do not apply until early May, then I will not go off on missionary service before early September.

I will probably be working fourteen hour days six days a week in China. I will return to England exhausted. After four months of just working normally I will be fit to go on missionary service.

I will have to speak tactfully to Cecil. If an apprentice works overtime the apprentice is entitled either to overtime pay or to time off in lieu.

I am not paid as an apprentice because I was a manager before I became an apprentice. My pay as a manager is actually profit share on the catering. My job title is "Catering Manager".

If I speak nicely to Cecil he might let me take some holiday in lieu of overtime.

If I have been working 84 hours a week for four months, then logically I must be entitled to four months off! It is an interesting thought. I do not want four months off.

The Putonghua classes were like slow torture for the first three weeks. Then it all fell into place and the next three weeks were almost a pleasure. I have never been any good at languages before.

My Putonghua teacher says that living in China for four months, not speaking English, will come close to perfecting my Putonghua.

Over this year the Catering Department of Byrams has bought more than £150,000 of meat and vegetables and sundries. My "little gifts" were a crate of champagne, four crates of whiskey, two turkeys, a side of beef, two sides of pig, and two lambs. Also some boxes of fruit and vegetables.

As we are a Mormon and halal household we could not use most of it.

I gave the champagne to David Wilkins to help with Helen Wilkin's wedding next summer. One turkey went to the Butlers who are sharing Christmas Dinner with the Kelners and Andy Haines. The other turkey went to a financially stretched Mormon construction worker whom I have helped before.

Some joints of lamb and pork were given to Bob to distribute to Mormons in need. One crate of whiskey went to Derek's Golf Club for their Christmas charity raffle.

One joint of pork and one shoulder of lamb went to Emma's parents. And a leg of lamb went to Irene, Karen's mother.

The rest of the whiskey went into the Christmas raffle at the Neverthorpe works. So did the rest of the beef and the pork.

The fruit and vegetables we could use at home so we did.

For the next two Christmases I will be away. I have told Bert the chef that what he does with the "little gifts" will be his decision.

Karen was being very snippy with me one Saturday evening. She was cross that I am working six days a week. She was cross that we are going to be apart while I am in China, and then apart again during my two years of missionary service.

I was tired from my Putonghua class and I snapped.

"Look, love. This is the man I am.

"It is not just China. It is not just the missionary service.

"Even after we are married I will be out of the house every Sunday, some Saturdays, and a few weekday evenings on Church work. Every week.

"If every time I come home you moan at me, is that going to make me want to spend more time with you or less time with you?

"That may be your intention, but it will not work. All it will do is to make me less keen to spend time at home.

"I don't think you can live with a Mormon husband. I am a Mormon.

"Have a good think about it. I would rather be your friend for life than your unsatisfactory husband for a short time."

I went home.

There were a few days of silence. I went round on Tuesday to take Karen dancing. While we were out Karen said that she had decided to end our relationship. So we cried.

I took Karen home early.

I went home and I cried.

We love each other, but we know that we cannot live together.

Cecil was sympathetic. He said that Irene and he still think highly of me. Thank God Karen and I have come to this decision before there were children!

Karen is young. She will find someone else.

I am young. I will find someone else.

Cecil wants me to stay with Byrams because I am an extremely effective manager and I am a very good person.

Charlotte said that she likes Karen but that I have made the right decision.

I said that it was Karen who had made the decision.

Charlotte said that was very clever of me.

It took me a few hours to figure out what Charlotte meant.

I am not as clever as Charlotte thinks I am.

I realised that waking Charlotte and her roommates at two in the morning to tell Charlotte that I am really stupid would be stupid.

Tohur is home from London for Christmas.

Ali will be home soon.

The Cambridge University term finished a few weeks ago. Ali has been practicing taking off from and landing on Royal Navy ships at sea.

After New Year Ali will be on an American base using some helicopters that the British military do not have.

The Royal Air Force has very little information about Chinese helicopters. They are giving Ali a great range of helicopter experiences so Ali will be able to fly whatever the Chinese give him to fly.

It is not quite Christmas yet. The sales of Christmas goods for Tohur and Robert are going extremely well. When the supermarket pays them in January they will both become millionaires. They are both close already.

The "Terrible Tykes" Christmas goods have gone really well. Divided among ten children the amount each child has earned will still be very respectable.

Charlotte's religious music CD has done pretty well, particularly in the United States. The DVD that the dancers put out has had comparatively only a moderate sale.

Don asked everyone what they wanted Santa to give for Christmas. I have asked for a Chinese cookery book in English. Andrew has asked for a CD of bagpipe music. Charlotte is having a Daar dress. So is Sally.

Michael has just discovered "Winnie the Pooh" and he wants anything written by A.A. Milne. I think that the illustrations make "Winnie The Pooh".

Matt has trained up one of the apprentices to work on the Neverthorpe foundry to replace me. I am going to be allowed to take Christmas off and not go in to do maintenance.

Bert and the team did a terrific Christmas lunch at the factory.

Irene and George are working on my ex-services project. They are getting on with each other very well.

Irene is concentrating on the design of the elderly persons dwellings, and she is visiting quite a few old peoples' dwellings. Irene says that asking the residents about design is a sensible thing to do.

George is having good discussions with the planning officers in Meldon and Barnsley.

George's new boyfriend seems a nice enough man. He works in his daddy's factory which he will one day inherit. He and George are very happy. They are living together.

CHAPTER 26: Rebecca Johnson

Our Mormon communities are built around families. Most of us Mormons do not move around the country very much.

It is so easy to settle into the comfortable furrow or rut that is your ward community.

At eighteen or nineteen we leave our comfortable furrows and we go somewhere else or usually several locations somewhere else for two years or for eighteen months. It is two years at eighteen years old for males and eighteen months at nineteen years old for females.

Sometimes you are a little older because you might have to finish off a course or you might have to work to earn some money.

Mummy is not there to do the washing and the ironing. Dinner does not appear on the table until you cook it.

The washing up and the cleaning does not do itself. Your laundry lurks in the basket until you wash it and dry it and iron it.

Thanks to Don Hewson I am a good cook, and I can keep a kitchen very clean. The rest of the experience was a shock. I never realised what Ruth Lightfoot does for us at home.

Lots of people did not realise all that Mummy does.

Added to that shock is the experience of being mixed with strangers in a part of the country where you have never been. Or quite often in a country you had never even thought about visiting. The Scottish dialects are a bit odd, as well. They are not like our Yorkshire English.

Growing up as a Mormon you know that you will become a missionary and that all this will happen. It is still a frightening experience when it does happen.

Added to that my partner Hannah and I were the least successful Mormon canvassing team in the history of Scotland. We were miserable for months. When we were transferred to Edinburgh our fortunes improved. We were not quite the most useless pair of Mormon missionaries that Scotland has ever seen.

We averaged an invitation for a cup of tea about once every two days. Mormons don't drink tea or coffee so we carried with us a small container of a powder that we are allowed to use in place of say instant coffee. Some Mormons use chamomile or peppermint tea bags but there is some argument about whether those are still strictly speaking tea. We Johnsons do not use them. Nor do Hannah's family.

Hannah and I have been split up. We are paired with a couple of young women who are in their final six month placing.

My new partner Katy is a terrific woman, incredibly jolly and happy.

Katy just loves people and that shines out of her.

My role is simply to watch Katy and to learn. Katy smiles and she makes eye contact and she is just so nice. I am learning so much from watching Katy.

Katy is not putting this on. Even when we are off duty Katy is jolly and happy.

With Katy we average three invitations for tea a day!

I realise what Hannah and I were doing wrong.

We are intelligent and intellectual and we came over like a pair of schoolteachers. Many British people leave school as soon as they can. A lot of British adults do not like schoolteachers.

Katy is the cheeky cousin who can make Dad laugh even though he is dying of cancer.

Katy and I arrived at one door where the woman was a total emotional wreck.

Katy just sat and held her hand and let her cry while I set to to make the kitchen tolerable. When I had spent forty minutes making the kitchen fit to be seen we moved to the living room and I cleaned up in there. Katy barely mentioned the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints,

The lady said we were very welcome to come back next week.

I asked Katy what her thinking had been.

"If you are stood with a great weight on your toe you want someone to lift the weight off your toe. You do not want to talk about dress designs and fabrics.

“You lifted that poor woman’s living conditions and I lifted her emotional situation. She has no-one to talk to. It was all bottled up.

“Next week when we visit we will find it easier to have a conversation with her.

“You have to approach people as they are.

“Your cleaning was practical Ministry.

“Well done!”

We visited the woman a few more times and then we stopped visiting.

The door is open for her but she must decide herself to walk through. The local ward will visit her at intervals when they have time.

I have learned so much from Katy.

I have no idea what is going on at home.

I saw an edition of “Terrible Tykes”.

I know them all of course. The kids appear to be having a great time. That is all the information that I have.

I decided not to watch the program every week. It would only make me more homesick.

We are based in Inverness at the moment. It rains every day except when it snows. There is a lot of snow and ice this December.

The wind blows all the time.

We are visiting the dormitory villages around Inverness. I had never realised that Hell has dormitory villages. I would hate to live here.

I am told that Inverness does have a summer but I think I must have missed that day.

When eventually I have a honeymoon it will definitely not be in Inverness.

Hannah is in Aberdeen so we do not see each other.

I have been told that my next placement will be in the South West of Ireland.

Lots of rain but the people are friendly. Apparently the rain is soft and warm, a definite improvement on Inverness.

Katy will go back to her home in Hastings in early January. She has no idea what she will do. If there are no likely lads about Katy will get a job in London and meet Mormon men there. Katy wants to meet the right man. That is high on Katy’s priorities.

I am not in such a rush. I want to have a life and a career. Then I hope to marry the right man.

At the Inverness ward Christmas concert I played the piano and I sang. That went down well.

One of the Mormon families in Inverness invited Katy and I to enjoy Christmas Day with them. That was so nice.

There were little children and junior school children who all really enjoyed Christmas Day.

On Christmas Day afternoon the children insisted that we must watch the Christmas Special for "Terrible Tykes".

I was in tears for most of it.

I had to explain that these actors are my family and I miss them all so much.

The family were terribly impressed that I am the sister of Charlotte Johnson and of Sally Johnson. I helped to teach Robert Graham to cook. I have rolled Max Hewson on the carpet for being cheeky. Max is often cheeky. So is Dan Wilbey. I have rolled Dan. I have rolled Peter Wilkins and Colin Donkin. I have hugged all of the children and I have kissed most of them.

Katy said that I have kept quiet about knowing all these famous people.

I said that I must make my way in the world as Rebecca Johnson. I do not want to go through my life always known as "Charlotte Johnson's sister". I am very proud of Charlotte but I do not usually tell anyone about the relationship unless I am asked.

There was no point in trying to visit people until after New Year so Katy and I spent our time cleaning up our flat. We will be leaving it in about two weeks' time. I found my flute in my suitcase. I practised the flute for a few days until Katy begged for mercy.

I have learned so much from Katy. Roll on South West Ireland!

CHAPTER 27: Emma Hewson

I am surprised to find that I am enjoying being Acting Head. I use the assemblies to try to encourage ethical discussions among the children. The first ten minutes of each class after assembly are for the teacher to draw out the children around the ethical questions that I have raised. The teachers are given crib sheets of questions to ask to keep the discussion going.

The teachers report that the children are so enthused the teachers rarely need the crib sheets.

Mrs Rollins is a very strong “top down” leader. I am trying to have all the teachers “own” the school’s policies or to suggest improvements. I have similar meetings with the non-teaching staff.

Mrs Rollins is so strong a leader that most of the staff have never had to think about or talk about why we are here or what we are seeking to achieve.

I have changed that.

It has not all been comfortable. If it was all comfortable then there would be no point in doing it.

I moved some classroom assistants from the top year into the lower years and into the nursery.

I have told the staff that so far as I have the power or influence to do it I intend that the classroom assistants will all move through the school with their current cohorts of children. I want each classroom assistant to know their cohort of children deeply.

The top year teachers were not happy.

I said that if my strategy works then each cohort will arrive in the top year with classroom assistants who have been with those children for five years.

Classroom management will be much easier.

I gave a Child Protection talk to the teachers and the classroom assistants. I told them what to be aware of and what to look for.

They all know what to look for now and what to do. After that talk four staff members raised concerns about individual children. The teachers had felt that there was something wrong but they were not sure it was worth mentioning.

After my talk they were raising their concerns.

I had given a Child Protection talk when I first arrived, but it did not have the impact that this talk did.

I saved a bit of money by reducing the frequency of the grass cutting over the school year. Mrs Rollins believes in short grass.

I thought that reducing the frequency of cutting over the summer holidays would not be harmful. This allows me to spend more money on art materials.

There is evidence that communal singing builds school harmony and improves child behaviour. We have a school sing last thing on Friday afternoon.

One class sings a song to the rest of the school.

After that we all sing a few songs together. The children love it.

A lot of the parents come in for the sing. We normally have difficulty attracting parents to come into the school building, but the school sing is bringing them in. I am surprised to find that I am not working significantly longer hours than I was. I have a part time teacher in to cover my Deputy Head teaching commitment. I used to spend at least five hours a week in discussions with Mrs Rollins. That saved time has gone a long way to making Acting Head possible.

Don is much as ever. Don is having a wonderful time with just Arthur and Kate at home on school days. There are no other little children. Don has two sets of nappies to change but Don is not fussed.

Don worries about all his girls of course.

Our sex life is very good. I had a contraceptive injection so I cannot have children for three years. That increases my enthusiasm. Don is always enthusiastic. I have lost weight and I exercise a lot more than I did. The sex is even better!

Our Christmas this year is relatively quiet and uneventful. The children are ready for their TV filming and they are amazingly calm about it.

There is not much dialogue for any one child to learn. The children have private rehearsals with Freda or Margaret reading the adult parts.

Peter is delighted with the jokes that are a major part of his scripts.

Kali and Gerald and Peter have pianos at home now so there is not a constant fight to get on the piano like there used to be.

This is Mark's last Christmas with us for a few years. Mark has asked for turkey again.

Tohur is leading the cooking for the reunion. There are so many Cordon Bleu skills and taste sensations that Tohur wishes to share.

When Ali came home Ali slept for nearly twenty-four hours.

The Royal Air Force is very keen that Ali should not let down the Royal Air Force by crashing a Chinese helicopter. So Ali is gaining hundreds of flying hours on every helicopter the Royal Air Force has or can borrow.

The Royal Navy was very happy to give Ali experience of landing a helicopter on a rolling deck during a storm. Then they let Ali do it at night. Eventually Ali was landing on quite small ships in storms at night.

Ali bent a couple of helicopters but the Navy were quite cheerful about it. They say that they will just bill the Royal Air Force for the repairs!

Ali says that there is a Wing Commander near London who has taken personal charge of Ali's training.

The Wing Commander has sent Ali a schedule of his training from now until the beginning of July when Ali goes to China. With the Americans Ali will be flying monster helicopters and assault helicopters. By the time Ali goes to China Ali will be as good as the Wing Commander can make him.

During his university Reading Week in late February Ali is to spend a week in the Royal Air Force Engineering workshops maintaining helicopters. At Easter Ali is at RAF Culdrose learning Air Sea Rescue.

Just before Ali goes to China he will have two weeks with the Inter-Forces Language School polishing his Putonghua.

One cannot fault the Royal Air Force. They are investing so much training in Ali. Ali is just dozing over Christmas.

Ali has University work to do but he plans as well to spend a lot of time with the younger Miah children.

Ali and Tohur will visit Mrs Shah a few times.

Ali and Mark have had a few conversations in Putonghua to amuse the children. Mark is now ready to go to China.

Christmas day was fairly quiet. Santa's presents were mainly musical instruments, bicycles, and dolls.

On Boxing Day, Don had his black and white pudding breakfast.

Robert and Tohur are filming after the reunion so they are eager to cook over most of the Christmas period.

Tohur has learned a lot from his Cordon Bleu courses.

Don is impressed by the food that Tohur is turning out. Tohur has another two and a half years to go at the Cordon Bleu Academy!

Everyone came for the reunion. The little Sachs children have all grown so much. Diana Green is so beautiful now. The Daars all look well. Our Famous Four are as handsome as ever. The little Miahs are getting bigger!

The Daars brought Uncle Jalil. It is the first time we have met him. He is a nice man.

The Wilkins are all thriving and happy. The Wilbeys came. And Amy Waters and her parents. Grace and Nigel came of course.

It was a thoroughly happy event.

Andy Haines and Sandra Kelner are going to marry in the summer. We will cater for their wedding. It will not be the same weekend as Helen Wilkins' wedding to Martin Jenkins.

Nigel is studying for AS and A levels but he has not decided whether to go to university.

Amy and Diana have GCSEs this year so they will stop dancing at the end of February. Originally they were going to stop dancing at Christmas but they have agreed now on the end of February.

Immediately after the reunion "Terrible Tykes" started filming in Manchester, Ruth Lightfoot and Karen Wilbey are chaperoning the Tykes. That is a nice earner for both of them.

Robert and Tohur and David Wilkins are filming their cookery programs. Sahid is helping them.

Helen Wilkins is chaperoning David and Robert. Tohur is sixteen and so Tohur does not need a chaperon.

Charlotte wrote a new song that Mr Driburg has placed with the same terrific female singer.

"I Ain't Kissing Toads!"

It is a further reaction to John Tarron's "betrayal" of Charlotte.

I think Charlotte is a bit hard on John.

Charlotte was very deeply hurt.

Fortunately John does not know that these songs are about him. So far as I am aware Charlotte never kissed John Tarron anyway.

The song is coming out under my name so that Charlotte's pure religious image is not muddied. I don't mind.

Mark flew to China yesterday. Ali is off to his American base tomorrow and after that Ali will go on to Cambridge. Tohur is back to London shortly for more of the Cordon Bleu course. Rebecca is still away as a missionary.

Our dresses and outfits for New York are ready. The film company has paid for our flights and for our hotel.

Max looks really great in the suit that the Daars have made for him.

Karen Wilbey and Dan look good, too.

I know that Karen has no money so I gave Karen a chunk of cash just to make sure that she has no problems.

We have all taken out medical insurance just in case.

Sahid Daar has emails ready to send to fashion journalists and fashion editors all over the world just before the Premiere.

Shahida Daar is coming to New York to be our dresser and child-minder.

Shahida is not travelling First Class like us. She is travelling to New York by a cheap airline.

All our American visas have come through.

At the moment, all is well.

Mrs Rollins is quite ill. Mrs Rollins is definitely going to be off for a full six months. Maybe she will be off longer.

School starts next Monday but of course I am going in today to get ready.

Don is left with the rump of the household. Linda and Freda are sensible teenagers. Margaret Graham is no trouble. The little ones all like each other.

Heinz is a great friend to everyone.

CHAPTER 28: Cecil Byram

Mr Wong and I were terribly let down by the Americans.

We wanted a state of the art twenty million pound foundry.

The 1910 or so Cleckheaton foundry by comparison is a joke. On the other hand the Cleckheaton foundry has cost me buttons, and the whole thing will be up and running very cheaply. It will pay for itself and it will begin to generate profits inside three months.

Mr Wong has quietly invested some of my offshore family funds and a significant number of machine tools into about a dozen different Shanghai factories. Mr Wong takes a percentage of course.

Poor Mark is landed with implementing his bright idea of moving the Cleckheaton factory to Shanghai.

The experience will certainly bring Mark on as a manager.

I had a word with Mark's supervisor Matt, and Barney and Garth, and Meldon College. We are putting Mark forward for the "Apprentice of the Year" award.

You don't normally ask an apprentice in his first year to move a foundry to the other side of the world and to learn Putonghua as well.

We will not tell Mark he is nominated unless he wins.

The College has arranged for Mark to communicate with one of his tutors over the Internet. Mark has to write a weekly progress report with photographs. Mark will be taking a laptop with him.

Wendy Wong went back to China early because she needed to supervise the laying of the concrete raft that the foundry will sit upon. Wendy is also going to put walls up and a high roof.

Wendy will be foundry manager.

Mr Wong is going to buy another piece of land for the American foundry to be built on. He says that all the machine tools that I sent him are now in use in various factories in Shanghai.

Karen was weepy for about ten days after the break-up with Mark.

Karen thought that Mark might try to negotiate a compromise.

Karen was a bit miffed that Mark just accepted Karen's decision without argument.

Irene told Karen that once a couple have decided to split it is better to have a clean break than to have a limping unsatisfactory relationship. Mark is being a gentleman.

We don't see Mark at our house now, which is understandable. I barely see Mark at work because he is studying Chinese.

On Mark's College day release day Mark comes to Willerton after College to maintain contact with me.

Irene is really interested in this ex-services project. She loves the idea of building sheltered accommodation for elderly people. Irene likes the idea of helping ex-services people. George Aaron is in negotiations with all kinds of people to make the project a success.

I am very happy to see Irene engaged and happy. Irene and George are becoming friends, which is good for Irene.

There were so many long-term component supply contracts on offer that all five factories in the group are working at full capacity.

The manufacturing side is very profitable. Before the tsunami the Neverthorpe factory generated over twelve million pounds a year manufacturing profit. With our five factories all working at full capacity we earn over seventy million pounds a year manufacturing profit.

As a rough rule of thumb one can usually sell an established business for about ten times current profits so the value of Byrams has gone from roughly eighty million pounds to roughly seven hundred million pounds.

I made insultingly low cash offers for each factory with a three day acceptance period. The liquidators and receivers normally accepted. The new factories cost me less than two million pounds each, fully equipped.

We could do even better by putting on a night shift, but I do not like night shifts. If there were a war on it would be a different story.

We could in theory work the factories eighty hours a week and then the business would become worth one thousand two hundred million pounds. We don't have enough metal to double production.

Daniel told me that we have a significant surplus of aluminium. Do I wish to sell it?

I said that we would sit on the aluminium for a few weeks longer. If we have a metals sale in January we will sell the aluminium then. And if not then we will just sell aluminium.

Or I could increase production maybe another fifteen per cent.

The only night working we have is the Neverthorpe foundry turning out nuts and bolts. We have the Neverthorpe foundry on twenty-four hour seven day production.

We have metal stocks to keep the Neverthorpe foundry working continuously for a year. For about four months we are likely to be the only supplier of nuts and bolts in Europe because only Byram's has our huge stocks of metal.

We also have a huge supply of steel wire at Neverthorpe so we took some machine tools from normal production to turn the steel wire into nuts and bolts. That part of the factory is also on twenty-four hour production.

Apart from the manufacturing profit we also have windfall profit from the currently very high metal prices.

Once the Chinese are properly back in production I will reduce the foundry to a short monthly run just to keep the skills base alive.

Shortly after the conversation with Daniel I had a visit from a civil servant from the Department of Trade and Industry.

He told me that the Government is thinking of impounding my metal stocks.

"Why?"

“Your metal stocks are strategically important.”

“If metal is strategically important then why don't you use the Government stockpiles?”

“There are no Government metal stockpiles.”

“Let me make a suggestion to you.

“If you impound my stockpiles you will be sending a message to British industry that there is no point having stockpiles because in a crisis the government will impound them.

“Nobody in their right mind will ever invest money in metal stockpiles again just for you to impound them.”

“If on the other hand I make a few billion from these stockpiles then I will be motivated to create stockpiles for the next crisis. I will fund the stockpiles for the next crisis out of the profits I make from this crisis. There will be no cost for the Government.

“Which is better for Britain?”

“Now, what is your real problem?”

The real problem is that a Defence manufacturer is desperate for aluminium.

The manufacturer had come to our aluminium auction but the manufacturer was outbid. By the time the manager involved had obtained permission to buy aluminium at our obscenely high prices the sale had finished.

We had sold all the aluminium that we wished to sell.

The manufacturer approached us a few days after the sale and the manufacturer had been politely rebuffed.

The production of military planes is now almost at a halt. The manufacturer needs forty tons of aluminium plate and three tons of aluminium piping. And half a ton of aluminium ingots.

“Is this Rapacious Engineering?”

“Yes.”

“Our policy is that we expect to use our metal to make goods for our long-term customers.

“We only sold off metal that we were certain we will not need during the current crisis.

“Rapacious missed out on that.

“Rapacious has a terrible reputation for not paying their suppliers on time.

“We do not want Rapacious as a long-term customer.

“We would not have accepted a long-term contract from Rapacious even if they had offered one. So we did not sell to Rapacious.

“We have no plans to sell more aluminium at the moment.”

There was a silence.

I looked at the civil servant.

“You are saying that it is our patriotic duty to sell to Rapacious?”

“Yes.”

I did some calculations on my calculator.

“OK.”

“I make that one million nine hundred and eighty-three thousand six hundred and sixty four pounds. Here are our account details.

“If Rapacious pay the money into our account they can collect the metal two working days later. This offer is open for three days only.”

“That is fifteen per cent more than the original price.”

“Yes it is.”

“I would prefer to keep the metal and to make my manufacturing profit by making components from it. It helps to build more goodwill with long-term customers.

“You have persuaded me that it is my patriotic duty to sell to Rapacious.

“We do not wish to deal with Rapacious at all.

“It is not my patriotic duty to sell to Rapacious and to lose money myself.

“This way I do not lose out. It is up to you. If Rapacious can buy the aluminium cheaper anywhere else then they are welcome to do so.

“Our standard terms are “Payment In Advance.””

The civil servant left. The next day Rapacious telephoned me. They want to buy the aluminium, but they wish to buy it in instalments. Really they are hoping that the price will go down over the next few months. Also, they want thirty days credit.

“If I commit to sell to you then I have to reserve these stocks and I cannot sell them to anyone else. And I cannot use them myself.

“That is bad business for me.

“It really is simple.

“Pay or don't pay. Collect or don't collect.”

They paid. They collected.

We actually filmed the collection so that they could not claim that we had “shorted” them. That is the kind of company they are.

There was a military police escort for nearly two million pounds worth of aluminium. I half suspect that the Ministry of Defence does not trust Rapacious either.

When Byrams Bearings becomes a public company we will probably sell the manufacturing business at fifteen or twenty times earnings. The Byram family will become richer still.

I could buy some more factories and accept some more long-term components contracts to keep them busy. Garth says that he could manage an additional two factories if I wish to expand in the New Year. Managing long-term contracts is just so much easier than short term contracts or a mixture of short term and long-term contracts.

Garth is managing nearly one and a half thousand people, and juggling production across five factories.

The general metal supplies situation is picking up. I will probably have another metals auction in January to reduce our stocks further. Daniel is working out what we can sensibly sell. That turns of course on whether I decide to expand further.

We are making enormous profits by charging for our stockpile metals as if we had had to buy them in today, but that is a windfall profit rather than long-term profit.

The metal stockpiles started as a tax avoidance exercise.

On average we are selling metal at twelve times what it cost us to buy it because the market price has risen so much. If we sold all our stockpiles, that would fetch £2,400,000,000. Two point four billion pounds!

We have almost a quarter of the metal left.

The windfall money is invested.

The windfall ought to be taxed, but I am avoiding that tax, too. I am declaring it as capital gain rather than as earned income.

I am reinvesting that money in a wide variety of investments, deferring the capital gains tax indefinitely.

Mr Porteous is helping me to invest nearly two billion pounds.

Mr Porteous says that my problem is not to make a lot more money, but to avoid losing money.

I invest in ten leading companies on each of half a dozen stock markets.

I decided not to invest in component manufacturers because of the danger of sparking an anti-trust or cartel investigation.

Mining company shares are very high at the moment so I am not buying. Mining shares will drop eventually and then they might be worth purchasing.

I am not interested in buying land or property.

When the engineering side of Byrams is floated as a public company we will keep the investments business in the family private company.

Mr Porteous advised me to keep a hundred million pounds invested in very short term loans to a wide selection of reputable banks. Opportunities may arise where having virtually instant cash may allow me to make a good investment. Three hundred million pounds would be even better. When Mr Porteous sees a good investment he will tell me.

The brass band building is completed. Kevin Hanson is a very good Clerk of Works. Kevin Hanson is very good at quite a lot of things. I had not realised originally that Kevin Hanson is a former Sergeant in the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers.

I loaned Rose my Human Resources manager and David my Finance manager to the band as advisors when the band appointed their Director of Music.

I have met Alfred the Director, and I see him at Willerton most days.

We barely speak because there is no need.

As I leave the factory each evening there are usually children and young adults coming in for music lessons. They all look so happy and eager!

I am not unhappy that Karen and Mark have broken up.

It was inevitable.

Karen could not live with Mark if Mark is out half the time being an active Mormon.

If Mark were incompetent then Mark would not be asked to contribute so much time to the Mormons. Mark is highly competent.

The Mormons will keep giving Mark more challenging jobs.

Eventually Mark will end up with a managerial role in the Mormons. Unpaid, of course!

Mark is not one of those incredibly strict religious people you sometimes meet who are frankly tedious. He is a normal straightforward young man until you get to his sticking points.

Mark does have a sense of humour, but it is rarely on display during work hours.

Karen has made the decision.

Karen chucked Mark, officially.

Unofficially I half suspect that Mark had come to the decision but then Mark let Karen break with him.

That would be good manners. Mark has good manners.

At least they can still speak to each other. It would be awkward for Irene and I if Karen and Mark hated each other.

I suppose full marks to Karen for spotting an intelligent and competent young man.

I hope the next boyfriend will be as good. Hopefully he will be an agnostic!

Karen reports that she has been invited for a New Year's Eve party in a castle in Scotland. It is the ancestral pile of a girl Karen was at school with. The girl's brother is very good looking.

Irene and I have refused permission.

If Karen did not have her rosy spectacles on Karen would realise that this is just another of the invitations that she received at school and that she moaned about. Now that Karen is known to be richer than people had previously thought Karen is being invited to meet a better class of fortune hunter.

If any lad wishes to meet Karen he can come to Yorkshire to do it.

I don't care if the young man does have a title. All a title means is that one of his distant ancestors became rich by fair means or foul. It would be difficult to find a Scots aristocrat who does not have treachery or treason or murder somewhere in his family history.

My money is partly inherited but it is honest money.

After the stockpile sales I am richer than most of the British aristocracy.

I have no interest in becoming Lord Byram or in Karen becoming Lady Wotsit.

What I want for Karen is a decent husband.

Mark Johnson would have been fine, even with his Mormonism.

The lads and young men I have had visiting from Europe are all the serious sons of manufacturers. They are very down to earth practical lads.

I will keep inviting lads like this. Maybe one of them will spark Karen's interest.

Karen still has no idea what the family is worth.

Karen is only seventeen. Karen knows that there is money abroad that we are not telling her about.

Karen has no idea how much money we are making on the metals stockpiles. Irene and I will have to tell Karen fairly soon.

An heiress who will eventually inherit approaching three billion pounds is very attractive to a fortune hunter. She is a worry to her parents.

My company bank manager asked if he could visit me, and also for permission to bring his Regional Manager.

I agreed.

I had a fair idea what was coming.

There have been more than three dozen approaches from banks and financial advisors who wish to help me to invest my money. There have been many approaches from people who wish to buy Byrams.

Our bank has been our company bank all my life.

Byrams Bearings has never owed money to the bank.

I feel as emotionally tied to the bank as I do to a good dry cleaner with convenient parking.

I have always had a different bank as my personal bank because my father told me that it is better that one bank does not know everything. Like my father I do not have a high opinion of bankers.

So Fred the company bank branch manager came with his Regional Manager.

I recognised one of their early comments as a Masonic introduction code.

I am not a Freemason so I felt no need to respond.

I am not against the Freemasons. I just have no interest in Freemasonry.

My business has increased dramatically at a time when many components manufacturers have gone under. What am I doing so right?

I had Daniel Mason come in and show his photos of metal piles. The photos of the little lad with bagpipes and wearing a kilt with stacks of metal running away in all directions, is always visually impressive. The forklift truck helps to give scale.

Then Daniel gave “before and after” tables showing metal stocks as they were on the day of the tsunami and as they are today. Beside the stocks as they are today are today’s commodity prices and an arithmetical calculation suggesting what our stocks are worth today. At current prices we have about six hundred million pounds worth of metal stocks.

The bankers were I think a bit stunned.

Daniel left us.

The bank manager said that the bank would like to help me.

“How?”

The bank would be very happy to manage my investments for me.

What would the bank charge?

The bank normally charges two per cent.

“So if my money earns six per cent you want a third of that?”

“Yes.”

My face probably showed what I thought of that.

“What is in it for me?”

“You would have access to our worldwide information sources.”

“Looking at the past five years, has your bank earned so much above the average for investors that the two per cent you charge actually pays for itself?”

The Regional Manager did not answer that question so the answer must be

“No”.

“Investing and managing money can be worrying and stressful Mr Byram. You would be buying peace of mind.”

“I have more than one and a half billion pounds invested in sixty leading companies around the world. I have three hundred million pounds out on three day loans and seven day loans to twenty reputable banks.

“I have a bookkeeper who watches the money and who reports to me weekly.

“My family trusts have more money invested offshore.

“I have peace of mind.

“I am intensely relaxed.

“I just can’t see what you can add.”

“If you decide to expand you might wish to borrow money from us.”

“I have no thoughts to expand beyond my resources, so thank you for the offer.

“I really do not wish to borrow money.”

“What are your plans?”

“I have over a year’s supply of metal for my business. The metal supplies situation is improving, so a year’s supply is more than enough. I might sell a bit more metal at the current fairly high prices.”

“Once the metal supplies begin running smoothly again I will build another stockpile and I will wait for another supplies crisis. I do not mind waiting another twenty years for the opportunity to make a few billions more.”

“I intend to float the manufacturing side of Byrams in a few years time. Or I might sell it to private investors.

“I have a few business ideas.

“I expect with three hundred million pounds in my back pocket I will have the opportunity to get involved in company rescues or joint ventures or something.

“We will see.”

Too many of my friends have been damaged by banks.

I have no time for bankers.

Those two were typical parasites.

Maybe I will set up my own investment bank.

The family plan to build stockpiles against an interruption in metal supplies was a good idea.

If you think that for more than thirty years we have been investing three quarters of our earnings into the stockpiles then we ought to have had a good return.

We have had a phenomenal return. Grandad would be shocked at how well we have done.

The project has been much more successful than we ever expected because the metal supplies crisis was much more severe than we had ever expected.

The English ruling class has a snobbery about where your money comes from.

Land is good. Trade is vulgar. What I do, metal bashing, is definitely downmarket.

From my point of view we work hard and we provide components that other manufacturers need. We employ well over a thousand people.

I am proud of what we do.

There is also ruling class snobbery about not running any business or enterprise yourself. One uses managers to run your businesses for you.

I come from the class below the ruling class.

Karl Marx called us the bourgeoisie.

We know that we run our own businesses and we are proud to do it. I could have retired years ago and put managers in to run Byrams.

Why should I?

I live happily on my relatively modest salary.

Before the tsunami I had over sixty million pounds offshore and a million pounds in savings in the UK.

After the tsunami I have a huge amount of money.

I am still the same man.

I see no reason to change my life.

I wish I had a good son. I will have to hope for a good son-in-law. Maybe Karen will become a competent manager one day.

I am not prejudiced against women. Karen is a sharp young woman but at seventeen Karen is not yet a world class manager. I would love Karen to be an impressive manager but at the moment she isn't.

Mark Johnson is an impressive young man. Mark has this knack of identifying what is important and then putting his finger on it.

Mark thinks outside the box.

If Mark was say twenty-eight I could see Mark working for McKinsey or one of the other top flight consultants.

At seventeen Mark just comes out with these ideas. Some are brilliant!

Mark suggested that we should contact the other companies who make brass band instruments. They were all out of brass.

There was nothing wrong with them as businesses. Without raw materials they were worthless as businesses. Various Byram family trusts bought them for buttons.

The Byram family now owns most of the brass musical instrument manufacturing in Europe.

Technically the companies are all owned by different entities. They are all in competition with one other.

They do not know that really they are now all owned by the same family. They do not need to know. Well done Mark!

We bought the businesses cheap because they were worthless.

Byrams released the brass and the family trusts put in the funding to help the companies to get back on their feet. The returns on investment are very acceptable.

One thing I did I am very proud of.

I set up the Irene Byram Education Fund.

There are bright and intelligent people in the Byram's workforce. Some of them are certainly capable of earning a University Degree. Being working class people with families they cannot afford to go to University.

Irene and my mother interview the applicants. The only requirement is that the applicants are currently employed by Byrams.

They may be funded for two years at a Further Education College like Northern College or for a University like Ruskin College at Oxford. I am easy where they study.

Some are studying through the Open University.

After successfully completing one qualification they may apply again for funding for further study.

So adults working for Byrams have help available if they wish it.

Many years ago the local councils used to give grants to fund promising children to attend ballet school or acting school. That is long gone.

Children and grandchildren of Byrams staff may apply to the Irene Byram Education Fund for funding. We are currently funding a girl from Cleckheaton to attend a ballet school. It costs even more than Karen's public school did. That is what it costs!

There is no way that a capstan lathe operator can fund that.

With the confusion of modern families "child" includes "step". Beyond "step" we look at the realities rather than at the formalities.

I have more money than I can ever spend in my life. I am giving some people a hand up.

With hindsight I should have started the Fund years ago.

Surprisingly the suggestion came from Mr Porteous.

Mr Porteous said that I will have more pleasure from funding this kind of education than I will from anything else I do in my life. So far, Mr Porteous is right.

Irene and my mother enjoy their involvement.

I also fund for Engineering Union members to take short courses with or through their Union.

I am not in conflict with the Union. If the Union members go on courses for Health and Safety or for Negotiating it does not harm me.

A Trade Union is a fact of life. I would rather deal with intelligent properly trained Union people than with idiots.

Each of my factories funds a junior football team. It costs us buttons but it is a contribution to the local community.

CHAPTER 29: Mark Johnson

I had read some information about China on the Internet. I did not read about post-tsunami Chinese society because it is too soon after the tsunami for much to be written.

Mr Wong was one of thousands of men who had built up large manufacturing companies in the long Shanghai boom. Mr Wong was in Japan on a business trip when the tsunami struck Shanghai.

Mr Wong is a widower. He took his daughter Wen Dei with him because Wen Dei had never seen Japan. That decision saved Wen Dei's life.

Mr Wong is one of about twenty survivors from the thousands of millionaires in Shanghai. Mr Wong suddenly found himself with no home, no business, no workers, no family, and no money.

The bank that Mr Wong had borrowed from drowned in the tsunami so Mr Wong has no debt either.

A Japanese trading partner owed Mr Wong money for a recent delivery so he paid that to Mr Wong. Mr Wong was not destitute but compared to where he had been Mr Wong was poor.

When Cecil Byram visited China after the tsunami China Mr Wong was made. Access to capital to build a foundry and a long-term exporting relationship to England allowed Mr Wong to start up in business again.

The Chinese Government has created a "Reconstruction" ministry that has huge powers. They sold Mr Wong some land to build a foundry on. There is a newly built road to the harbour running alongside the foundry site.

There were survivors from Shanghai.

A few thousand people from a city of more than twenty million people survived with just the clothes they stood up in. Unfortunately the tsunami hit in the middle of a hot May night so a lot of the survivors were naked.

They have no jobs, no food, and no clean water.

Mr Wong is a prince among this poverty.

Wen Dei supervised the laying of the concrete raft and the building of the external walls and roof. She has a team of workmen who helped her.

Some of the workmen are women, but they are always addressed as males.

The containers from England are lined up outside the building. There is not much accommodation in Shanghai so there are half a dozen other containers where the workmen live. There are a few women and children there who I assume are their families.

I have been given an entire container to myself. I have been given a woman of about forty who will do my laundry, clean, and cook. Mr Wong pays her wage. I suspect that Mr Wong's wage will not be generous so I will give her a tip as I leave.

There is a chemical toilet in my container.

In the empty foundry building there is a block of toilets, showers and washbasins that are all in working order.

Mr Wong told me that if I want a girl or a boy my housekeeper will arrange that. I nodded my thanks.

It was a few hours before I realised what this offer was.

I told the housekeeper that I know Mr Wong intended to extend me every courtesy. However I do not wish to have sex in China.

In my religion I am only allowed to have sex when I am married.

In my religion I am too young to marry. So no girls or boys please!

I think the housekeeper was quite glad of my decision. I certainly was.

Imagine if you are a teenage tsunami survivor and you are so desperate that you have to sell sex to live.

They take you to this ugly foreigner. And then the ugly foreigner doesn't want you!

One embarrassing situation avoided!

Wen Dei had organised the containers in the order that we wanted them.

The first job was to build the cranes and the gantries. Once we had those up we moved stuff past where the foundry will be, because after the foundry is built it would be difficult to move some of this stuff. There is a huge door at the far end through which we can bring stuff in and out if we need to. It was easier to use the crane to move everything.

This is not a rush job.

I noticed that as the containers were emptied they were moved to the far side of the foundry ready to take the finished nuts and bolts for export.

There is a gate on the inward side of the compound for raw materials and a gate on the outward side for the finished products.

Just inside the inward gate there is a huge area reserved for stocks of raw materials. There is a sand pile on part of it. I had the sand covered because we need dry sand, not wet sand.

I learned some rude Chinese words from the workmen. They are fairly similar to the rude words used in England.

I am "eunuch foreigner".

This has different connotations in China because at one time the eunuchs ran everything in China. I cannot work out how to show them that I am not a eunuch, so I am just letting it go.

The Chinese were amazed that I do not drink alcohol or smoke. I don't even drink tea.

I eat food in larger quantities than the Chinese are used to. I think I would rather be "foreign eunuch" than "greedy hog".

I am working fourteen hour days.

Wen Dei's day is even longer because she lives at home with her father.

Mr Wong comes on an inspection visit once a week but otherwise Mr Wong keeps out of my hair.

The police came to see me because a Putonghua speaking foreigner is an object of suspicion.

I told the police that I have barely been out of the compound since I arrived. I do not know what there is to see in Shanghai but whatever there is I have not seen it.

The housekeeper seems to double as a Government spy because she confirmed what I said and the police accepted it.

Wen Dei explained that this woman had been a Communist Party organiser in Shanghai before the tsunami. This job as my housekeeper allows her to keep a close eye on me. It also meant that when the police came, as they would, the housekeeper would have tremendous credibility.

You cannot run a large enterprise in China without some spying by the Government. The Wongs have nothing to hide.

The factory does not have Internet access.

I go to the Wongs every Sunday to send emails to my family and to Cecil. I also go on the Mormon child in care social media site, and I communicate with the College.

The Mormon administrator in China has told me that I am the only Mormon that he knows of in Shanghai. There were Mormons in Shanghai before the tsunami but as none of them have made contact since the tsunami they are presumed all to be dead.

I had made it a condition of my going to China that I would not work on Sunday. I was slightly surprised one Sunday to meet at the Wongs' house a girl of about five years of age. The story behind her is that she is a tsunami survivor and she has utterly no family. The orphanage believes that her parents followed some foreign religion.

As most Chinese know nothing about any foreign religions they did not know how to question her to find out what her religion is.

I am almost the only Putonghua speaking foreigner in Shanghai so can I help? I mentioned "Jesus Christ" and her eyes lit up. She told me all about Jesus Christ.

She told me about Mary.

She did not recognise "Mormon" or "Latter Day Saints" or "Joseph Smith" or "Brigham Young".

I am not any kind of expert on religions other than our religion.

I had to study Religious Studies at High School but I was not really interested in other religions.

I know a bit about Islam from living with Muslims.

She did not recognise "Allah" or "Mohammed".

I took her details. She knew her date of birth, and her full name. She knew what school she used to go to. Her parents were “Mummy” and “Daddy” which was not much help.

She knew the house where she used to go on Sundays for Sunday School. She did not know the name of the street.

I sent an email to the Mormon administrator asking him to suggest how I should proceed.

The following Sunday the administrator had replied.

The child is probably an unofficial Catholic. The Chinese Government had been unhappy about Chinese citizens owing allegiance to the Pope. So they set up an “official” Catholic Church under the control of the Chinese Government. The Catholics who answer to the Pope are “unofficial” and they are persecuted.

His advice to me is to tell Mr Wong that the girl is not a Mormon. Beyond that it is better not to speculate.

If I suggest that the child is an unofficial Catholic she will probably be sent for “re-education”, which I would not wish to have on my conscience.

Then the administrator said.

“BACK AWAY. KEEP AWAY. STAY AWAY. IS THAT CLEAR ENOUGH?”

So I sent back,

“I will obey.”

The workmen are impressed by my courtesy and clarity in explaining what needs doing each day. I have become “the clever eunuch”.

I am quite pleased with that.

I had expected the reassembling of the foundry to take three months. After two months and a week we were ready.

I took a further week to examine everything minutely. The Cleckheaton design is straightforward. I am confident of the reassembly. I was just checking that all the nuts are fully tightened, all the bearings are oiled, and all that kind of small detail.

Across a foundry and a production line the checking takes a long time.

One of the maintenance team observed me and he kept making notes in a notebook.

After a couple of hours of this I changed the arrangements.

A Chinese guy does the checking and tightening under my supervision while the original guy takes notes. Then half way through the day they swop over.

The workmen were piling sand and stacking supplies of iron and zinc and acids inside the "ready use" areas of the foundry. Wen Dei was supervising the installation of the packaging equipment, the pallets, the forklift trucks, the supplies of printed cardboard boxes and plastic and so forth.

Huge supplies of raw materials are now stacked inside the "inward" gate.

When I was ready to start production the small team of workmen had all become supervisors. There are now about a hundred people who are going to work in the foundry.

There are even children of about eleven or twelve.

I was twitchy about such young children working in a foundry.

Then I realised that these children's other options for earning money were much less pleasant than working in a foundry.

Derek and Colin Donkin and Max Hewson and Peter Wilkins are eleven to twelve.

If disaster struck us in Tryton I would rather that the boys were working in a foundry than that they were renting their bodies to survive.

That is not a nice thought.

I was filmed all week as I explained absolutely everything that everyone needed to know. All hundred people moved through the foundry watching me. At each task I trained three shifts worth of workers in every task. We bought in rods for the workers to practice machining into bolts and nuts and threaded rod.

Then on the day we were due to start operations Mr Wong and a number of other Chinese men in suits appeared. I was not introduced.

Wen Dei had organised a high viewing platform for the "men in suits" where they could see everything but not be in the way.

We started off by heating the steel.

Everyone was at their posts. The "spare" people stood by their workstations to observe.

Once the steel was ready to pour klaxons went off and bells rang.

All the Chinese started singing.

I assume it was the Chinese national anthem.

After they had finished singing their song the pouring began.

Suddenly many of the workers disappeared.

I was told they were going to have some sleep because they are to be the night shift.

There are three shifts of workers alternating between twelve hour days, twelve hour nights, and rest.

Within the day we were loading the first bolts and nuts and threaded rod into a container.

The factory is up and working without significant problems. There were a few hiccoughs but nothing that was not easily resolved.

I stayed around for another three weeks, but it was becoming clearer and clearer that I had nothing to do.

The last two and a half weeks were very easy.

I did not leave the compound in case I was needed.

My housekeeper started to teach me to read and to write the Chinese characters.

The simplified Chinese script that is now standard across China is called Hanzi. The traditional Chinese script is now not used.

Eventually I was able to read Chinese guidebooks. I think I would like to visit the Great Wall of China some day.

Some of the museums look really interesting.

We agreed that I could now go home.

Wen Dei came to me. Wen Dei is the foundry manager. There is going to be a ceremony tomorrow to name the foundry.

The workers have asked that the foundry be named "The Clever Eunuch Foundry".

I was in tears.

I told Wen Dei that I had never expected such an honour!

On the day the naming ceremony was actually conducted by my housekeeper, now looking incredibly smart. Apparently she has been promoted to Personnel Manager.

Mr Wong made quite a funny speech. He said that I have been offered girls and boys to keep my bed warm, but I have refused. So one of my presents is an electric blanket! (Laughter.)

“Our clever eunuch doesn’t drink whiskey and he doesn’t drink tea. It is hard to know what to give him.”

Then Mr Wong held up what looked like a bolt and nut carved out of solid gold. This is a memento of my time in China. I was amazed.

I thanked Mr Wong. I thanked all the workers for giving me the honour of working with them. I made a few jokes about some of the incidents that had occurred during the project. I thanked them all again.

Then Mr Wong drove me to the local airport. He flew with me to Beijing. He made sure I caught the right plane to England. We shook hands and I left China.

With a foundry generating nuts and bolts and with a guaranteed export sale Mr Wong is now one of the wealthiest men and one of the largest employers in post-tsunami Shanghai.

Using Cecil’s money Mr Wong has fingers in many pies.

I gather there is nothing much happening at home. Cecil wants me to report to him when I return.

Cecil says that my first task will be to take a month’s holiday.

When I get home I will find out in more detail what is happening. I simply do not believe that nothing much has happened in three months in a house with nearly twenty children.

What to do for a holiday? I have exams next month. It is term-time so almost everyone I know is at school or at College. I will do some flying I think, just to get back into practice.

I have barely thought about Karen Byram in all the time I have been away.

I like Karen as a friend but the relationship is over.

CHAPTER 30: Don Hewson

I thought that things were going really well.

Rebecca telephoned on Christmas Day after viewing the "Terrible Tykes" Christmas Special. Rebecca’s current missionary partner is a really great person.

Rebecca is off to Ireland shortly for her last six month posting. Rebecca misses the family but otherwise Rebecca is happy.

Emma is still an acting Head Teacher so she is back in school setting up for the new term.

Linda is spending a lot of time away from the house with Godric.

Charlotte and Freda are around as my principal helpers. They are good kids.

My son in law Paul Thornton telephoned me late one morning.

My step-daughter Susie has been in poor health over the autumn.

Susie is normally happy and fit, but for some months now Susie has been tired and out of breath a lot.

Susie and Paul have not told me anything because Susie knows that I am a worrier.

If I knew Susie to be in poor health I would telephone Susie five times a week.

There would be stress on me and stress on Susie, all for no purpose.

Paul can afford Harley Street specialists and Susie has visited a number of them.

The good news is that we now know what Susie has.

The bad news is that Susie has Meisinger's syndrome. This condition is based on the heart being faulty.

There is no magic bullet short of a heart transplant that will set everything right. Individuals with Meisinger's syndrome sometimes respond to medication. There are half a dozen medications that sometimes work. "Work" in the sense that the condition does not become worse.

The bottom line is that Susie has been admitted to a private hospital in London. Susie is going to be in hospital for three months at least. It could be six months. Susie is never going to be fit to work again.

Six months from now Susie could be dead. Or Susie could be alive but not fit to leave hospital.

Susie might at best be fit to live at home with support.

At this time we don't know which outcome is the more likely.

Paul runs a stressful high pressure business where Paul is responsible for managing hundreds of millions of pounds of other people's money.

Paul is essentially a speculator. Finding the best speculations is hard work.

Paul can visit Susie in hospital every day.

Paul Thornton cannot run a stressful time consuming business, support a sick wife, and raise four children properly.

This autumn the nanny and the housekeeper/cook have been really wonderful. They cannot keep it up for ever.

Paul needs to find someone to foster the children and essentially to bring them up.

It has to be someone who is prepared to keep the children should Susie die or should Susie be unable to have the children live with her.

There is no-one in Paul's family who is equipped to take four small children for ever. Do I have space for four children?

The nanny will come with them if I wish.

Paul will pay the nanny and my normal foster fees.

I said "of course".

I do not need the nanny as I have Ruth Lightfoot during the week, and Emma and teenagers in the evenings and at weekends. On the other hand, if Paul feels that continuity is important for the children I have space for the nanny.

I told Paul that I have a discounted rate for family fostering.

"Oh, yes?"

"One good bottle a month, and maybe some specialist cheeses."

"Done."

Emma and I recently made a joint investment in Paul's fund.

Emma had intended to buy a house but as acting Head Emma just does not have time to locate, purchase, refurbish, and let a house.

Between us we have nearly half a million pounds invested with Paul. Paul knows that we are not poor.

I could not charge Paul and Susie foster fees for my own grandchildren.

I also know that Paul will find a way to push money at me. Paul will probably do it by setting up a trust for my children and putting the money there.

I telephoned Emma to tell her of developments. Emma said "of course".

At dinner I told the children the headlines. Rebecca's bedroom is empty until early July. The nanny can go in there. She will have to share with Rebecca when Rebecca returns.

Mark's bedroom which is shared with Tohur and Ali I had intended to leave empty so that any of the three can use it. Tohur or Ali will be visiting to see the family and to see the little Miahs. Paul is likely to sleep in there when he visits.

Max and Andrew will now be in that room, too, because with so many people we cannot leave a bedroom empty.

The two smallest children will be in our bedroom with Kate. The other two will share with Arthur.

Max laughed.

"I make that nine children that nobody is paying you for!

"It's a good job that you and Mum are rich!"

I technically have eighteen other children under my roof, but four of them are not actually here at the moment. So really I have only fourteen resident foster children.

Fortunately all of the children are all good children. The teenage girls are ever so helpful.

Susie's children and the nanny and Paul will arrive at the weekend.

Rebecca and Ali are over eighteen. Mark turns eighteen in a few months time.

Mark goes off to be a missionary in September or so.

I could buy a little house in Tryton for the children who are over eighteen. I will think on that.

I telephoned our family social worker Elizabeth Mountford.

Elizabeth has now become Area Manager of her area, with special responsibility for large families and Muslims.

Strictly speaking Elizabeth should pass us Hewsons to a colleague.

Elizabeth made a promise to Linda Donkin that Elizabeth intends to keep, so Elizabeth is keeping the Donkins. So Elizabeth is keeping the Hewsons.

Elizabeth could see my problem.

"Ouch!

"I would not add more children to your household but I cannot see that you have any choice.

"I ought to take a family away to bring your numbers down, but that is not easy to do.

"We will need to CRB the nanny.

I suppose if you have the nanny and you and Ruth then there is plenty of support during the day.

You have Emma and Annie at weekends so really you are fine.

"You are a saint, Mr Hewson!"

CHAPTER 31 : Emma Hewson

Taking in Don's grandchildren went smoothly.

Each month Paul's wine merchant sends us a mixed case of twelve bottles of very good wine.

Don and I very much enjoy drinking it.

Linda is the oldest child currently living in the house.

We think that Linda should learn to drink responsibly.

It is better for Linda to learn what really good wine tastes like, just so she knows. So some nights Linda is invited to stay up late and to drink with us.

Charlotte sometimes joins us for the conversation. Charlotte drinks water or apple juice.

The boxes of cheese that arrive every week are provided by a specialist cheese retailer in London.

The cheese is terrific. We now have a cheeseboard course at some meals.

Paul has set up an offshore trust for our children. We have no information about how much money Paul is putting in.

Very soon it was the last week in January, time for the World Premiere of Max's film.

We flew First Class to New York.

Max and Dan played checkers and they watched a film. They also visited the cockpit.

Karen and I drank a bottle of champagne. Karen is pregnant so Karen only had a couple of glasses. I had the rest, and then I slept.

We were met at the airport. The limousine drivers were carrying signs that read "Max Hewson" and "Dan Wilbey".

We were taken in two stretch limousines to a posh hotel where there were uniformed bellboys.

A young woman from the film company, Annette, went with us to our rooms.

There were two huge suites with interconnecting doors.

Annette seemed surprised that Karen and I intended to walk on the red carpet with our sons but she had no problem with it.

Annette told us that Dee Lishus will be arriving later today.

Dee suggests that we should all five have dinner together in his suite, as Dee would like to meet Max and Dan before the Premiere.

We all accepted.

Karen and I had big happy smiles on our faces that were almost indecent.

We laughed at each other's expressions.

The Daars had made day dresses for us. We all had baths and a sleep and then we went to Dee's penthouse suite.

We had thought that our suites were huge. The footprint of Dee's suite was as large as our two suites put together.

Dee was a bit shorter than I had expected. He is a really nice guy.

Dee looked at Dan and Max and he touched their faces.

Dee was very gracious to us. As soon as Dee realised that Karen is pregnant he made Karen sit in an armchair so big that one could sleep in it.

Dee said that he has not seen the film yet himself so he is very excited.

Dee has been told that Dan and Max were terrific.

Nobody had warned Dee that the boys have such attractive mothers.

In conversation Karen said that she works part time in a supermarket.

Dee said that his mother had worked in a supermarket. It was very hard work.

Dee was impressed when I said I am an acting Head Teacher.

Education was not a large part of Dee's life because his family had no money.

As soon as Dee could, Dee had left school.

Dee had busked with an accordion to raise money.

Max said that he plays the accordion.

Dee telephoned room service.

Dee asked room service to find an accordion and to bring it to his suite.

Dee enquired delicately whether we have husbands.

I said that my husband is retired. He fosters children.

Karen said that her husband is a shop assistant in a department store.

Then we moved to another huge living room, with a piano.

Max played the piano for a bit.

An accordion arrived.

Dee played a bit and Max played a bit.

Then Max pulled a DVD from his suit pocket. The Daars had made the pocket particularly large so that it could hold a DVD.

“Dan and me and a lot of our friends are in a TV show, “The Terrible Tykes”.

“This is our Christmas Special from Christmas.

“We have not planned the Christmas Special for this year yet. If I asked Malc and Carlo they would probably agree to let you play the accordion on our Christmas Special.”

Dee burst out laughing.

“I will view the DVD.

“I will think about your offer.

“This year is pretty fully booked. I will have to speak to my agent about it.”

Dee was impressed that Max is learning Latin and French and Spanish.

Dee told us about his tough childhood.

Dee has recently been divorced from his childhood sweetheart.

For a gorgeous leading man like Dee there are so many opportunities to stray that eventually Dee succumbed.

Dee’s wife recently had had enough and she had divorced Dee.

Dee does not blame her.

“So now I am a free agent.

“How about it, girls?”

We laughed.

We said that we are both happily married to good men. But it was nice of Dee to offer.

After dinner it was time to put the boys to bed, and then to go to bed ourselves.

In the morning Shakoora arrived.

We spent the morning ironing and checking dresses and chilling.

The boys had American TV so they were happy.

In the afternoon we all went out for a walk around New York. We ended up getting a taxi back to our hotel.

We had a room service dinner at seven.

We all showered and changed.

We all looked terrific.

Annette was visibly impressed by our red carpet clothing.

We had a stretch limousine.

Shakoora and Annette travelled with us, but they got out of the car two blocks before the cinema.

The limousine went around a couple of blocks and then it pulled up near the cinema.

There really was a red carpet.

There were dozens of photographers all shouting. Our sons were side by side with us mothers on the inside. We posed for photos with our sons and solo and together.

Then Dee appeared from nowhere.

The photos of the five of us went around the world. We were all so happy and proud.

We walked in with Dee. One of the film company people seated us, Dee in the middle.

Karen and I sat either side of Dee.

The two lads and Shakoora were in the row in front of us.

There were more photos of us.

Shakoora looked really good.

The film itself was interesting.

Dan and Max were terrific. One could see that Dan and Max had turned into Dee.

It is a love film.

The leading lady is enormously attractive. The little girl who played her as a child was also good.

Max had danced with that girl. Michelle Sayer will be at the London Premiere next month.

At the party afterwards we met the leading lady.

She told us that her name really is Candice Gumm, hence "Candy Gum". Candy is so nice.

Candy said that some of the film executives are cross about us going on the red carpet.

"But don't worry, honey. Guys like that always find something to complain about. Otherwise nobody would notice them.

"Stick to your guns!"

We all went home together in the stretch limousine.

Shakoora is sleeping in one of the spare beds. We all chatted until we got tired and then we went to bed.

In the morning Annette came in with the newspapers.
Dee was on the front page of many of the newspapers.
We five were on some front pages. The reviews of the film were terrific.
I thought it was a good film.
Dan and Max had some praise, which was really good.
Annette said that there had been a query from a journalist during the night. Max Hewson's agent is Tom Driburg.
Tom Driburg is also agent for the songwriter Emma Hewson.
I am Emma Hewson. So am I the songwriter Emma Hewson? Did I write "Good Riddance Rat" and "I Ain't Kissing Toads"?
I said that I had to phone Tom Driburg.
Tom told me that it was better to say that I am the songwriter Emma Hewson.
That sparked another bout of headlines.
Max and I were dragged round TV studios with Dee. We talked about the film.
I was very modest about the song writing.
I am hugely proud of Max.
Shakoora is like a puppy with two tails. On cable TV there are hundreds of channels. One of them is just about fashion. Karen and my dresses keep being shown!
Shakoora is shown, too!
The Daar fashion business and web site are mentioned every time.
Shakoora is in tears of happiness. She showed us the Daar web site. That has a photo of Karen and me with Dee Lishus. We look gorgeous!

CHAPTER 32: Ali Miah

I did not know what to expect from an American airbase. As a fig-leaf the base is called "RAF Alconbury" but really it is an American Air Force base.
There are thousands of big built Americans of all colours.
There are smaller Americans too, but you do not notice them so much.
I am probably the smallest male on the base. I am definitely the youngest looking.
I arrived wearing my cadet uniform.
After a short wait at the entrance a Major Dinsdale came to collect me.

Major Dinsdale was pleasant, intelligent, and civilised. I would say Major Dinsdale is in his middle to late thirties.

Major Dinsdale welcomed me warmly.

We dumped my case at BOQ (Bachelor Officers Quarters) and he took me to an interview room.

The coffee machine made really great coffee.

“So how did you become invited to visit Chinese Air Sea Rescue, Ali?”

“I opened my mouth, sir.”

I told Major Dinsdale what had happened.

He thought the story was very funny.

I showed Major Dinsdale my pilot logbook, and my training program.

He read both slowly and carefully.

He looked at me. It was as though Major Dinsdale was trying to look into my soul.

“You already have over two thousand flying hours?”

“Yes, sir.”

“You are qualified to fly a Cessna, the A322 Airbus, three large Boeings, the Hercules, four helicopters, and you are “just a cadet”?”

“Yes, sir.

“I also have Class 1 and Class 2 Heavy Goods vehicle and two kinds of forklift truck.

“And a car licence of course.”

This was obviously not in Major Dinsdale’s information about me.

“You have three languages, English, Quranic Arabic, and Putonghua?”

“My mother tongue is the Sylheti dialect of Bengali, sir.”

“I also have GCSE French at Grade A*.”

Major Dinsdale gave me a searching look.

I think he decided that in all probability Sylheti is my mother tongue.

I have no obvious reason to lie about my grade in French.

I would hate to be Major Dinsdale’s researcher being reamed out for all this inadequate research.

“You bent two Royal Navy helicopters last month and now you want to play with some of our helicopters?”

“Yes, sir.”

“You must have some pull, son.”

“No, sir,

“I am just a humble student cadet. I have no “pull”.”

Major Dinsdale looked at me. There was a silence.

Eventually Major Dinsdale decided that I am honest.

“Do you mean to say that you really don’t know what is going on?”

I looked at Major Dinsdale.

“Major Dinsdale.

“Not only do I not know what is going on, I am not aware that there is anything going on.”

Major Dinsdale looked at me as though I were a three headed laboratory specimen.

Major Dinsdale had intense curiosity about me.

After a while Major Dinsdale gathered his thoughts.

“Somebody has to tell you.

“I thought you would have figured it out for yourself.”

I said nothing. What the heck is going on?

It is not very often that anyone implies in the same sentence that Ali Miah is both ignorant and not very bright.

“The Chinese are a very strange people. Their way of thinking is at a tangent to everyone else.”

“Yes, sir.”

How is this relevant?

“Their approach to the West is that we are foreign devils who are not to be trusted.”

“Yes, sir.”

“So they give out no information at all.

“Our military attaches are confined to Beijing.

“Their military people do not speak to us at all.

“You will be almost the first Western serviceman to set foot on a Chinese military base in fifty years.

“There is so much we want to know.

“So much so, that our first question is “Why you?”

“Why Ali Miah?”

There was a silence.

I thought for a bit.

“It might be because I am so obviously young and dumb and harmless, sir.”

Major Dinsdale considered that.

He looked at me.

“I think you might be right.

“Not that you are dumb.

“But you do look young and dumb and harmless.”

“I am young. I look even younger.”

“Yes you do.

“Do you know what we want you to look for?”

“No, sir.”

“Nor do we.”

“Sorry, sir?”

“We have satellites that photograph all of China twice a day. So we don’t need you to count tanks and fighter planes.

“We want you to see what our satellites don’t see.

“If we knew what we wanted you to see we would not need to send you.”

“So you want me to look for what isn’t there? Or you want me to see what is there from a different angle?”

“That’s roughly it.”

“So none of us know what I am looking for?”

“That’s right.

“Everything we are doing with you is designed to make you a better observer as well as a better helicopter pilot.

“And a better Search and Rescue operative.

“Do you know what is really pissing your people off?”

“No, sir.”

“Two things.

“One is that they did not think of training a Dragon Medal recipient to speak Putonghua and to do what you did.”

“The other is that you have a cushy job as a bus driver lined up.

“The Royal Air Force is putting a tremendous amount of money into training you, and then you will leave them as soon as you graduate from Cambridge.

“They can’t send you to Beijing as an Air Attaché.

“They can’t use you as a Defence analyst.

“The only RAF man in fifty years to live on a Chinese base and you are going to walk away to become an airline pilot!”

“You seem to know a lot about me?”

“Since the invitation was received there has been a lot of research into you, Mr Miah.

“British Defence Intelligence, British counter intelligence, and us.

“The Chinese investigated you before we did.

“The Chinese probably spoke to your friends Fan and Elise. Fan and Elise very likely did not realise they were being pumped about you.

“In our researches you have come up clean.

“Your friend Hank says that you are a sharp cookie but your politics are only liberal rather than extreme.”

“Hank is CIA?”

“Hank is a lightning rod. Hank’s job is to see who hates America and why. You don’t hate Americans.”

“Hank is in the State Department. He spends all his life being polite to foreigners.

“While Hank is at Cambridge doing his Doctorate Hank is tasked with being a lightning rod. He enjoys it. Anyone would.

“The Hank you see is a caricature.

“Our assessment is that you are very clever, but you are not as clever as you think you are.”

Fair comment, I suppose.

“You are a very good natural pilot.

“You already have three rabbis.”

“Sorry, sir?”

I am a Muslim.

I don’t have one rabbi. Let alone three rabbis.

“A rabbi is a wise counsellor who looks after your interests and who gives advice and help when he can.

“One is the Professor who admitted you to Cambridge University. He would like you to stay on at Cambridge and to earn a Doctorate at least. He wants you to teach at Cambridge.”

Gosh! I thought Prof liked me but that is amazing.

“The second is the Chief Executive of the airline.

“The airline student liaison officer is under orders to be as nice as possible to you and broadly to let you do whatever you wish.

“Every contact she has with you she reports to the Chief Executive.

“The Chief Executive thinks it hilariously funny that after he bent all the airline’s procedures to hire you, the Royal Air Force has had to bend all their rules and procedures to use you to the full extent of your talents.

“You are barely twenty and you have made two significant bureaucracies bend around you.

“The Chief Executive says that you are a man to watch.

“Your University Air Squadron Base Commander says that you are the sharpest cadet he has seen in a long time. You are definitely promotion material.

“If you stay in the Royal Air Force you should rise to Group Captain, possibly higher.”

I was stunned by all this information. It partially explains some of the things that have happened to me.

“You know more about me than I know about myself.”

“Yes we do.

“And that has caused problems. The information we have about your extended family is so unbelievable that we had it checked twice.

“Do you know how many millionaires there are in your extended family?”

“Dollar millionaires or pound millionaires?”

“Both.”

“Well, pound millionaires will be David Wilkins, Charlotte Johnson, my brother Tohur, Robert Graham, Sahid Daar and Mr Hewson himself.”

“If you go down to dollar millionaires that will be the ten Tykes, Abdullah Daar and Dennis Wilkins.”

There was a silence.

“Have I left anyone out?”

“Who are the Ten Tykes?”

I explained.

“You left out Mark Johnson.”

“I don’t think that Mark is a millionaire.

“Mark was courting the daughter of a millionaire but that broke up.”

“Mark earns good money and he saves it. My guess would be that Mark at best has half a million dollars. Probably Mark has less than that.

“Unless Mark has some money that I don’t know about which I doubt.”

“Like you, Mark Johnson speaks Putonghua.

“Mark is in China at the moment. To find two unrelated young men from the same house both learning Putonghua and both going to China seems very odd.”

“If it wasn’t for the tsunami neither of us would be involved with China at all.

“The Islamic Mormon conspiracy did not cause the tsunami!

“In fact you Americans are more responsible for Mark Johnson going to China than I am.”

“Yes.

“We have checked this out from every angle.

“It is just coincidence.

“But we in intelligence work hate coincidences.

“We find five self made child millionaires in the same family hard to believe.

“Seventeen self made child millionaires is even harder.

“We are very impressed.

“Your extended family includes three television chefs, a member of the England judo team and three national level ballroom dancers.”

“If you look harder you will find two more County level judo athletes, a couple of film actors and some models.

“And the Tykes.”

I gathered from Major Dinsdale’s expression that Major Dinsdale’s researcher is going to be researching in Antarctica for a while! Or Equatorial Africa.

Somewhere unpleasant for sure!

Major Dinsdale nodded.

“It helps to explain why you are so confident and cocky.

“You come from a very successful family.

“You have your university education paid for by the airline and a job with the airline lined up.”

“Who is or was Sal Hewson?”

So I told Major Dinsdale about Sal Hewson and the Sal Hewson Memorial Fund.

“Have you read Sun Tzu?”

“No, sir. Who or what is Sun Tzu?”

“I will give you a copy. Sun Tzu is the leading Chinese theoretician on warfare.

“He wrote “The Art of War” more than two thousand years ago.

“Sun Tzu is required reading at every military staff college. The Chinese follow him devotedly.

“One of his major statements is that before you attack your enemy you must know a lot about him. We think the Chinese have decided to get to know the Western military powers.

“If we could choose who went to China we would send an officer in his late thirties who has studied the Chinese for ten years and who speaks the language fluently.

“Someone like me.

“Instead we have to send a young kid who isn’t even a serving officer.

“That is very clever of the Chinese.”

“You can be sure that when they send their officer to RAF Culdrose he won’t be a young cadet.”

”So why are you sending me?”

“You had the invitation.

“We discussed what to do.

“We decided that on balance we are better to accept the offer.”

“We?”

“When the Brits had the invite they had a problem.

“Apparently there are all kinds of administrative reasons why they should refuse the invitation. But they felt that on balance they should accept.

“They shared their thinking with us.

“We kicked it around and we agreed with the Brits.”

“Why are you telling me this instead of my Base Commander?”

“Your Base Commander is not on the committee.”

“What committee?”

“There is a joint committee working on this project. Wing Commander Beeson your training officer is one of the committee. I am another.”

“So am I to be a spy?”

I was uncomfortable with that.

“No.

“You are an officer who has been invited to spend time with the Chinese Peoples Liberation Army Air Force.

“You are expected to observe how they operate and to share what you learn with your colleagues.

“We are doing our best to bring you on from an ignorant cadet to becoming an excellent observer.

“In the two weeks you are with us you will learn to fly our helicopters. I will be working on sharpening your observational skills.

“You are Quran hafiz, so you must have a good memory.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Do not make special notes. Just remember everything and start writing as soon as the plane back to England takes off.

“While you are here you will qualify on our Sikorski and Pave helicopters. You will read Sun Tzu and Liddel Hart.”

“Liddel Hart doesn't sound Chinese?”

“Sir Basil Liddel Hart was one of the great military theoreticians of the twentieth century.

“You must also read Von Clausewitz the leading military theoretician of the nineteenth century.

“The Chinese will expect you to have read them.”

“So what am I looking for?”

“We want to know how the Chinese think.

“We want to know what the Chinese think.

“Having the Chinese explain themselves to a simpleton like you is the best way of us understanding what is in their heads.”

“Thank you, sir.”

Major Dinsdale looked disappointed.

“Ali, how likely is it that this year the Brits are going to try to recapture New York?”

I thought about that.

“Not very likely, sir.

“It is too far.

“There are too many people in New York to occupy it successfully.

“We couldn’t hold it if you tried to take it back, and you would.

“So no, we would not try it.”

“OK. How likely is it that the Chinese will invade Britain this year?”

I thought.

“Very unlikely, sir.

“It is too far.

“The logistics would be horrific.”

“Who should be worried about the Chinese?”

“The Japanese.

“The Russians.

“Their neighbours.”

“So why do we care?”

“A war with the Russians could lead to nuclear attacks and the pollution of the world.

“A war between China and Japan would damage world trade hugely.”

“Taiwan?”

“The Chinese would like to take Taiwan. If the Taiwan people defend themselves it would become very bloody.”

“If I were the Chinese commander I would probably empty the island of people completely.

“Bring them all home to China. Repopulate with mainland Chinese people.

“After the tsunami I am not sure if China still has the military capacity to invade Taiwan.”

“Exactly. After the tsunami.

“China lost a lot of its air force, about a quarter of its Army, and most of its Navy.

“So why are the Chinese opening communications with the West?”

I thought about that.

"They feel militarily weak.

"They might be frightened of the Russians. So they are beginning to think about allies?"

"Well Cadet Miah, we have spent millions on analysts.

"Our analysts have come to exactly the same conclusion as you.

"It took them a lot longer than it has taken you.

"How important is it to us to be allies with the Chinese?"

"It would worry the Russians."

"Is that good or bad for the West?"

"Probably good."

"Why?"

"The Russians are throwing their weight around in Europe because they think the Chinese can't attack them.

"If the Chinese are stronger or the Chinese have the West as Allies the Russians will probably be less aggressive."

"Do you see why you Ali Miah have "pull"?"

"I am just a pawn in this huge game, sir.

"I have no "pull".

"I am a pawn being pushed."

"Spot on.

"I see why your rabbis think highly of you. You are a very clear thinker."

"On Friday you will probably wish to go to the Mosque."

"Yes, sir."

"I will drive you off base to another Mosque.

"On this base everyone has been told to stay away from you.

"The reason is that you are going to China later this year.

"We do not want you to know anything that you might spill to the Chinese. So we are controlling where you go and who you meet."

"That sounds very believable."

"It happens to be true.

"There are a number of people who were transferred away from this base for two weeks to make it a hundred per cent certain that you do not see them, let alone talk to them."

"So can I tell the Chinese about these conversations?"

“Of course.

“The Chinese are not stupid.”

“The reason you are going to their Air Sea Rescue is that there is nothing there that matters. Inviting you is the opening move in a long sequence of moves that the Chinese have thought out.”

“Have you thought out our moves?”

“To some extent.

“We don’t know if we are playing Bridge or Poker or Canasta or Mah Jong at the moment.

“So we are happy to use a low value card.”

“Thank you, sir.”

Major Dinsdale laughed.

“Don’t look so worried. There is a game going on several layers above your head.

“You just be a good dumb little cadet and you do what we and the Chinese want.

“Don’t do anything clever or heroic or special because we don’t need it. We don’t want it.”

Over that two weeks I qualified on four more American helicopters and the Lockheed Search and Rescue plane which is just a Hercules designed for Search. It has huge amounts of fuel on board and it can fly for a very long time. It has enhanced observation facilities that I have been ordered not to talk about. I read the three books on military theory and I discussed them with Major Dinsdale.

We discussed everything in Putonghua because Major Dinsdale wanted to be sure that my Putonghua is good enough for this kind of conversation.

My English is barely good enough for this high level of conversation!

The process was intellectually stretching.

Major Dinsdale could be a University Don. He has a very good mind. Major Dinsdale had me studying information about the Chinese Armed Services both before the tsunami and after.

In fact we went back to the Japanese invasion of 1935 and the Chinese Communist insurrection that followed.

We discussed the issues between China and each of its neighbours. We discussed the Taiwan issue at length.

We discussed the relationship between the PLA (Peoples Liberation Army) and the people.

After a few evenings my Putonghua reached an acceptable standard.

By the time we had finished I felt that I had had a series of tutorials that were as fine as anything Cambridge could offer.

I thanked Major Dinsdale.

“You are a remarkable young man. You will be wasted as a bus driver.

“We can’t start you as a Group Captain, but I agree with your Base Commander that you could reasonably expect to rise to Group Captain.

“I will earn a lot more money as a civilian pilot.

“I think you Americans have a saying that talent follows the money.”

“I will think on that.

“I will see what I can do.

“Thank you for spending time with us.”

“Is your name really Major Dinsdale, sir?”

“Of course not.”

“If you need to contact me ask your Wing Commander Beeson to contact me.

“He knows who I am.”

Then I was back at Cambridge. With learning to read and write Chinese, and preparing for the May Ball, my helicopter flying, my airline flying, and my academic studies I had to close down my Sunday cooking sessions.

The rowing had died long before Christmas.

On Sunday mornings Fan helps me with my Chinese literacy and language. On Sunday afternoons we work together on Engineering, in Putonghua.

I did not ask Fan if he had had been questioned about me. There was no point.

Fan meant me no harm and Fan has done me no harm.

I had an email from Mark Johnson.

He says that he is now called “the clever eunuch”.

After checking with Fan I told Mark that this is high praise. I told Mark that compared to what most bosses get called Mark is ahead of the game.

Charlotte's song "I Ain't Kissing Toads" is being played a lot. It seems to encapsulate what a lot of girls and women think. Some of the female students at Cambridge sing it when they are drunk.

I know what Fulesa earns because I asked Don. I am the head of the Miah family so when I asked him Don told me.

The Tykes' biggest source of income is the Christmas goods. The second largest will be the supermarket paying them to wear the supermarket's range of clothing. The acting fees are next. Then Sahid's web site, and then the downloads.

The Tykes are doing very well financially.

Assuming that things go well Fulesa will be a pound millionaire later this month.

Good for her!

I used to worry about the future of our family.

One of my reasons for becoming an airline pilot is that I wanted to earn very good money to support the rest of the family.

Now Tohur and Fulesa will be able to contribute.

So if most of the financial strain is lifted from me, what do I wish to do with my life?

I like the idea of spending my life conducting research and teaching.

University lecturers are not that well paid, even at Cambridge.

I quite like the idea of a career in the Royal Air Force.

At the moment my biggest thrill is in the feather light landing of a huge heavy plane. So I should either work for the airline or for RAF Transport Command.

With the airline, provided I continue to pass the health checks, I should have thirty years of flying or maybe more.

In the Royal Air Force an able officer is promoted away from flying.

I do not wish to spend my life flying a desk.

So I think the airline is still the front runner for a career.

It is good to have choices.

CHAPTER 33: Helen Wilkins

I am very happy to be marrying Martin Jenkins.

We were together years ago.

We drifted apart because we were both young and busy.

Martin by then was at Leeds University so his life was centred in Leeds. I had a lot going on here in Meldon.

Now that Martin has graduated he is using his Engineering degree to be an assistant manager in a retail chain. There are not any jobs in Engineering.

The Chinese tsunami killed a lot of businesses in England.

Thousands of Engineering graduates with experience in industry are unemployed.

Martin had worked in the retail chain during vacations and they were happy to recruit Martin for management training.

I love teaching.

The school is a good school. I am learning a lot about how to run a school from watching the Head Teacher and the Deputy Head. The Head leads in all the issues concerning individual children. The Deputy Head leads the staff meeting discussions around Education.

The Head manages the non-teaching staff. The Head creates and maintains the school environment.

Every week a different teacher puts the current work of her class onto the display notice board in the foyer. Then the Head and the teacher have over an hour discussing each child in the teacher's class, with each child's work on the notice board in front of them. It works out at about three minutes per child.

The "Education" aspects of the task the teacher set are discussed.

It is like a tutorial or the Spanish Inquisition for the poor teacher.

If children do not make any mistakes was the task not stretching enough? If there are too many mistakes was the task too challenging? Why is the class doing this task? What is the educational value?

It would only be human for a teacher to try to alter what they teach to avoid being crucified by the Head Teacher. So each Thursday at the weekly staff meeting the name of the lucky teacher is pulled out of a hat and the current week's work is what is to go on display.

Every week we have to be aware that it might be our turn this week.

The only way to avoid trouble is to think out very carefully what the children will do and be taught each week. Then it does not matter when your name is selected. After the first few times a good teacher welcomes the opportunity to

have an in depth conversation with the Head about each child in the class and about what we are teaching.

The Head Teacher spends a lot of time out of the school at meetings.

Sometimes the Head sends the child's teacher to the meeting and the Head teaches the class while the teacher is at Social Services or wherever.

The Head tries to make sure that over time a teacher teaches every age group in the school so that the teacher understands how children think at each age.

I got caught out when I took a group of Year One children into the nature area. I told them to find an insect or a plant and to paint it. I meant that they should paint a picture of the insect or the plant.

I found a child painting a snail yellow.

As I started to tell her off she said,

"You told me to paint an insect, Miss!"

We have discussions about what each year group should be achieving, and what needed to have happened in earlier years for a cohort to succeed. There is a National Curriculum that we must follow.

The Head Teacher says that the National Curriculum is a guide rather than an educator's Zimmer frame.

At home my parents just live very quietly.

My parents have been poor all their lives. They could never dream of living in a large house in a quiet village like we do now.

My brother David is rich.

David's annual earnings are over two million pounds a year.

David has investment income, too.

David has assured our parents that if David never appears on television again

David has more than enough money to keep the family for ever.

David's cookery program is very popular so it is likely to continue. David turns out two cookery books a year now. David is a very sharp young man.

David works hard.

The experience of prison has scarred my parents deeply.

My parents no longer have confidence in themselves. My parents have confidence in me. My parents are very happy to let me run the family.

My parents have no money of their own so I give them spending money each week.

David's trust fund pays me money each month and I run the household from that.

I put some money in from my earnings but not much. I am saving.

David has a practice and experimentation allowance from the supermarket that in itself is almost enough to feed our family. David does not cook every meal but David runs the kitchen and David usually cooks.

Andria is training to be a nurse. Andria is paid when she does shifts in the hospital.

Andria and I had a fight about board because Andria feels that she should support herself and her child.

I accept Andria's board. I just bank the money quietly because Andria will need it one day.

In most families my brother Dennis would be a hero because of his income from his modelling.

Dennis's income is dwarfed by David's income.

Dennis is simply piling up his money.

Mr Hewson is the main trustee for Dennis. Dennis goes to the monthly finance meetings. Dennis agrees the investment strategy. Dennis sees the figures, and that is the closest that Dennis ever gets to the money he earns.

Dennis is no good with money so Dennis is happy with the arrangement.

David bought a piano for Janine to practice on.

David's argument is that if Janine earns the opportunity to join "Terrible Tykes" the piano will have been a terrific investment. And if not, it does not matter.

Young Angela is also learning the piano.

Peter is excellent on the piano because he was taught at the Cathedral School.

Peter is learning the organ. Peter is very good on the guitar, both acoustic and electric.

When Martin and I marry we will buy a house. We will have help from the Sal Hewson Memorial Trust. David will help us if we need help,

I want to leave it a few years before we begin a family.

CHAPTER 34: Don Hewson

All the children are back at school or college. Dower Productions has filmed seven episodes of the series, which takes them to just beyond February half

term. Filming on Saturday, Monday, Tuesday Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday of half term will still leave them short of two episodes before filming again at Easter. The problem for the TV company is that each child is limited to two hours work a day. Sally Johnson will not work Sunday and the two choristers find Sunday difficult, too.

Carlo has given us a shooting schedule where nine episodes are shot over eight working days. They will now film on the Thursday as well, but each child will have Tuesday or Wednesday or Thursday off mid-week. There is not the satisfaction of shooting a complete episode each day, but the nine episodes will be completed.

Carlo says that the children are terrific musicians.

Carlo knows that the children work at the music he gives them, because by the time Carlo arrives to hear them play they are already at a standard acceptable for broadcast.

All Carlo can do with them is to polish their performances further. Carlo says that the children are a joy to work with.

Carlo says that the children are “wholesome”, which pleases me.

Carlo says that the broadcaster and Dower Productions are negotiating for a third series to begin in September.

Assuming that there is a third series, the third series is going to have a running story theme about Colin Donkin and a mystery about whether Colin can really play the trombone. Then in the Christmas Special the Byram Willerton Brass Band will perform and Colin will play a trombone solo.

Carlo says that Tom Driburg is being very clever with his negotiating.

The Christmas goods and the supermarket clothing deal bring in a lot more money for the children than the actor fees.

Tom is not negotiating to double the actor fees again.

Tom is proposing to peg the actor fees but to take a higher share of the Christmas goods income and of the supermarket clothing income.

Psychologically this is easier for Malc Dow than increasing the actor fees again.

Malc employs or uses over a hundred actors in his various programs so Malc wishes to keep actor fees down generally.

Also this proposal does not involve Malc in paying out more money but just in receiving less windfall money.

These negotiations are going on in parallel with the negotiations with the broadcaster.

I told Carlo that Tom normally tells me nothing between the beginning of his negotiations and the final agreement.

I have an opportunity to intervene very early on if Tom's negotiating posture might cause difficulties in some way. If I have no issues then Tom negotiates the deals.

Tom Driburg came to Tryton to speak with all his child clients.

Tom said to the Tykes that one day the Tykes program will end.

If the Tykes program should end then obviously it ends for all of them. The children understood this.

"Terrible Tykes" is very popular at the moment.

If the program continues to be broadcast then over time the existing cast will become too old to be convincing as children. For the boys this will probably be when their voices break. For the girls it will be when their bodies change shape. The time will come when the girls are obviously teenage girls rather than children.

So for each Tyke the day must come when she or he needs to move on from "Tykes".

It is unlikely to be this year, but the day will come for each of them eventually. So we need to plan ahead.

Tom explained that each performer builds an individual persona. Tom can negotiate with Dower Productions what kind of music the children have as solos, to enable the children to build personas in the directions they hope to go in the future.

Once the children had grasped the concept I was amazed how clear they are about the directions in which they wish to go.

Derek Donkin is building a platform of comic songs and jazz piano because that is the performance base that Derek wishes. Derek says that he intends to become an entertainer rather than just a musician and a singer.

Kali Daar has cornered female romantic songs. Colin Donkin has the slightly left political and protest music, and "folk". Gerald Butler has male romantic songs.

Sally Johnson has cornered patriotic songs.

Max is a troubadour.

Peter Wilkins has the religious songs. Dan Wilbey has a rousing music hall repertoire.

Fulesa and Georgina have generic pop music.

There are some overlaps, but not many. For instance "Tipperary" is a Dan song rather than a Sally song because of the lyrics.

These directions and preferences are not carved in stone.

If the plot requires it any of the children will sing anything, but for their future careers these are the roads they wish to go down.

When playing in groups they all will play anything.

Tom's agreement with Dower Productions impacts on Carlo and on the scripts. Carlo commented that the children are playing to their strengths. It is very wise of Tom Driburg to have negotiated this agreement.

It is less trouble than you would think for Carlo.

Once you know that roughly every five programs Sally has a patriotic song or that Gerald has a romantic song it actually helps with the planning of the music and with the writing of the scripts.

Carlo commented that I appear to have gained some more children.

I told Carlo that these are my English grandchildren. I explained why they are with me and that they may become permanent.

Sally Thornton is named after my first wife, Sal Redfearn. Sally Thornton is just a little older than Sally Johnson. She had started piano lessons when she was living with her parents. Naturally she is continuing her piano classes while she is with me. Sally Thornton also has singing lessons.

Sally Thornton is ten, so Sally has to cook.

Sally was a bit shocked at this idea because at home Sally's parents have a cook.

I told Sally that our house runs on the basis that all children of ten and above contribute to the cooking. In fact some children under ten have volunteered to cook.

Sally was surprised to find that she has no choice.

Sally had a little tantrum, but nothing on the scale of the tantrums that her mother Susie used to throw at that age.

I gave Sally a choice.

Sally could be on kitchen rota with Robert Graham or not with Robert Graham. She chose "with".

Then Sally shut up.

Rupert Thornton is named after Paul's father. Rupert is seven years old. Rupert is learning the guitar on a child guitar that Max has outgrown.

Lucinda and Guy are a little young to play instruments. Lucinda is five years old and Guy is three.

The nanny, Beverley, is trained by a famous company called Norland who train young women very well. Paul is paying Beverley roughly the same wage as Beverley could earn as a qualified teacher at the same age. Beverley is a professional nanny with a degree and with very good training in the art of being a nanny.

On top of the wage Beverley has full board and free accommodation, and free use of one of Paul's cars, so she is better off than an equivalent young teacher. On the other hand Beverley is expected to put in a sixty hour week and to "live in".

Beverley has told me that we may have a problem in July because Beverley does not expect to have to share a bedroom.

The problem is flagged.

Hopefully by July my step-daughter Susie will be living in her own home with the children. Beverley will be there, too.

At a pinch I could cope without Beverley.

We have agreed that for the moment Beverley will work from seven in the morning until seven in the evening Tuesday to Saturday. Beverley will normally take the children to London and back every Saturday to see their mother in hospital.

Naturally I paid a flying visit to London to see Susie. Literally a flying visit because Dennis flew me to City Airport and back again.

Susie apologised for keeping me in the dark. I told Susie not to fret. I understand Susie's thinking.

When I was posted to Northern Ireland as a young sergeant I did not tell my parents because I was sure that they would worry pointlessly.

It is too early to tell what Susie's outcome will be.

Susie has the best medical attention possible. We just have to wait.

Emma enjoyed her trip to New York.

Emma is looking forward to the London Premiere towards the end of February. The girl Michelle who danced with Max in the film will come to Yorkshire after the Premiere to spend a few days with us.

I will take Michelle to King's Cross Station to meet Michelle's mother, who will take Michelle home to Staines. I will visit Susie in hospital and then return home.

Ali will spend half term (called Reading Week) in the engineering and repair workshops of a helicopter squadron. Our Tykes will be filming over February half term. I am going to take the little ones to a zoo. As many teenagers as I can muster will come to help out.

Carlo has recently told me that Dee Lishus will be in the Terrible Tykes Christmas Special playing an accordion duet with Max.

Apparently Dee viewed the DVD Max gave him and Dee thought the Tykes are a great gang of kids.

Dee is also impressed by the musicianship shown by all the performers.

Dee's fee is significantly large but the broadcasting company is happy to pay for a Christmas Special that will be watched by so many more adult women. The supermarket is happy.

Carlo says that all the adults are tickled by Max taking the initiative to invite Dee to take part in the Christmas Special.

Dee is going to sing with Kali and with Derek. This part of the Special has to be filmed on the first Saturday in September because of Dee's very busy schedule. The filming will be in London.

To avoid continuity issues like length of hair the entire Christmas Special will be filmed in the first week of September before the children return to school. Carlo is telling me this now in hopes of avoiding any of the children booking a holiday during that week.

Carlo says that the contracts are not yet signed but everyone is working on the basis that there will be a third series.

Carlo says that there is an idea floating in London that Carlo has been told to run past me. If there is a third series and hopefully even more series in the future, this will put a strain on the children.

Producing fifty-two episodes a year plus the Christmas Special is a lot to pack into the school holidays.

If the children were in London they would attend theatre schools, which are geared to children with acting or modeling commitments. It would be practical to film two episodes a week.

There would be little or no filming in the holidays.

If I wish to set up a stage school in Tryton or Meldon or really anywhere in the North, Dower Productions would be very pleased. They would film in Manchester every Monday and Tuesday on a regular basis.

Apart from the Christmas Special there would probably be no filming in the school holidays.

If there were a full time stage school in the North it is very likely that other children would join it.

Other people have considered setting up a stage school in the North, but there has always been an uncertainty as to whether there would be enough children to make it financially viable. With the ten Tykes as a nucleus my school would always be viable.

I told Carlo that Emma might be interested in running a theatre school. I will discuss the question with Emma.

At February half term Max is off to London with Emma for the London Premiere of the film. Max and Michelle have decided that they will dance on the red carpet. Michelle and her mother made a flying visit to Doncaster to see the Daars. The Daars are fitting out Michelle for free. Michelle and her mother slept in our study.

Michelle was impressed to meet Robert Graham and the Donkin boys. Michelle told the Donkin boys that all the girls at her school will be jealous of Michelle for meeting the Donkin boys. So Derek and Colin posed for a photo in which they were both kissing Michelle. We printed out the photo and both boys signed it. Michelle was very happy.

At the February half term most of the Tykes were filming on each day. The chefs were not filming.

Ali was at a helicopter base learning about the maintenance and repair of helicopters.

Beverley took Susie's children to London on the Wednesday to see their mother. On the Thursday we all went to Camelot, which is great for little children. Tohur and Linda and Charlotte and Freda came to help.

Tohur is cooking stuff that I would never have dreamed of producing.

If I retire from fostering I might take some of the courses that Tohur is studying.

Those of us who enjoy cooking are enjoying learning from Tohur.

Charlotte has written another pop song. This is "Are You The One?" where a young woman is trying to decide if a young man is right for her. The ending is inconclusive. Mr Driburg is giving it to a younger singer.

Mr Driburg has no difficulty placing songs by "Emma Hewson".

Linda and Godric have split up. Linda is resting on the romantic front.

One piece of good news is that Linda's mother Deborah visited her sister in London and Deborah enjoyed the visit.

It would be so good for Deborah if she can build relationships with her siblings and her mother.

Robert's dinner for his helpers was a great success. There was a lot of laughter and friendship.

After Easter, Robert Graham will visit Stoke Mandeville Hospital. That lad has worked so hard on becoming physically fit.

The Hospital said that at a minimum it will take Robert eighteen months to become fit enough. The eighteen months will be up at Easter.

At the three monthly visits the hospital consultants have expressed satisfaction at Robert's progress. So we hope the hospital will decide to perform Robert's first operation.

Damien was attacked at school by another child. It was a girl called Alice Henderson. Damien did not hit Alice back.

So Alice Henderson hit Damien a second time!

Angela Wilkins drew a teacher's attention to what was going on, and the teacher intervened.

The teacher telephoned me to report the incident.

Damien had a sparkler on his ice cream at dinner in celebration of Damien behaving so well.

It seems to me that the Reception class is a lot rougher than when Max was there. Emma says that there are some families where the children are rough

before the school civilises them. It is just unfortunate that Damien has had had run-ins with the Harris family and with a Henderson. Both are large unruly violence-prone families.

Emma and I discussed the theatre school idea. Emma is still Acting Head Teacher at Longlands School There is serious doubt about whether and when Mrs Rollins will return.

Emma thinks that Mrs Rollins will return. Emma feels that she owes it to the school to stay on until Mrs Rollins returns.

Some time after that Emma could give notice. Emma is supposed to give a full term's notice.

Do we wish to set up a theatre school?

It would be a normal school working around the acting and modelling commitments of the children attending. Or it could be a full blown theatre school like they have in London.

We have enough capital for any business we wish to set up.

Emma and I have stopped investing and we are just letting cash build up while we look for a suitable property.

For our convenience we would like the school to be in our village. There is no way that Emma and the children should have to travel somewhere every day.

Any other children will have to travel to Tryton.

Kali may decide to weekly board with us because the daily journey from Doncaster would be too lengthy.

The age group we will cover will be ages seven to fourteen, so school years Two to Nine. Derek is in Year Eight at the moment.

There are retired and supply and part time teachers around.

The subjects that Emma cannot teach the other teachers can teach at our school on Wednesdays to Fridays. We will pay teachers to come in for two half days to teach French or Science or Maths.

Emma can teach English and History and Geography at the Manchester Studios on Mondays and Tuesdays.

Emma says that with well behaved children in small classes one can get through everything one wishes to cover without difficulty.

Mr Driburg said that if the Tykes program should end we could simply close the school. Mr Driburg's gut feeling is that "Terrible Tykes" could run for a very long

time. The format, the choice of music, the quality of the musical performances, and the scripts are all outstandingly good.

There is no shortage of child musicians.

Mr Driburg thinks that the number of children in "Terrible Tykes" will stay stable at ten to a dozen. Dower Productions are not tied to the Hewson extended family.

Just because we have children whom Dower could select does not mean that Dower will select them.

At some point in the future there will be children taking part who are not Hewson children.

Mr Driburg thinks that a theatre school in the North could be successful. There is a need. We are within commuting distance for the large cities of Leeds Sheffield Bradford and Manchester.

We looked at what the London theatre schools charge. We also looked at the curriculums they provide.

We could offer most of this without great difficulty.

There is a capital cost for equipment, but once bought the equipment will serve several generations of children.

With only ten children the costs per child would be quite high. Looking at the fees the London theatre schools charge we could manage the revenue costs without any problem.

We would need to buy a building to use.

But do Emma and I want to do this?

It is good for the children to build them a future.

The Tykes cannot continue to use all their holidays for filming. Most of their free time and weekends is taken up with learning, practicing, and rehearsing.

Something has to give.

The theatre school is necessary for the children.

Naturally I ran the question past Elizabeth. Elizabeth said that Kali, Max, Dan, Peter, and Gerald are not in care and so for them Elizabeth has no views. For Derek, Colin, Fulesa, Georgina, and Sally Elizabeth will talk to the individual social workers concerned. Deborah Donkin must be consulted.

One significant problem Elizabeth foresees is that Mr Hewson taking from the children's earnings to pay fees to Mrs Hewson's school looks like a conflict of interest.

I told Elizabeth that the likely scenario is that Dower Productions would pay the school fees as part of each actor's remuneration. So I would not be paying Emma myself and I would not be taking money from the children. Elizabeth was happier with that.

It was time to float the concept with the children.

I started with the family leaders. They felt that the theatre school or drama school is better than the children losing so much of their holidays.

Charlotte was concerned about whether Sally would be tithing from the school fees.

My view is that Dower Productions gain from the children attending a theatre school. Dower paying for the school would be no different to Dower paying for the minibus or Dower paying for Carlo to visit or paying for Dan to have drumming lessons or providing a piano for Gerald to practice on.

These payments are not "income". They are necessary expenses to ensure the efficient production of TV episodes. So tithing is not appropriate.

Charlotte was happy with this.

The actors thought that the idea was sound. They would like to have school holidays as real holidays instead of as working days.

Ali spent his Reading Week working on helicopter repairs and servicing. He enjoyed it.

Mark is still in China.

We hear once a month from Rebecca. She is happy. She is now based in Cork.

Tohur was home for half term.