

Greenmount – July 2011

After the usual grocery shop on Friday 1<sup>st</sup> July, I decided to tackle my pain in the bum using the old Germoloid cream. I know this is used mainly for piles and the doctor says I don't have those but I also found it useful in treating my anal fissure many years ago before it was fixed permanently using non-intrusive surgery. This did seem to bring a degree of relief.

I also used one of those small pillows you can warm in the microwave to apply warmth to the painful area during the evening and this, together with a soft cushion and the cream improved matters considerably.

I continued the cream treatment on Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> July, prior to visiting Matthew on our way to Asda at Pillsworth for yet more supplies, although not of the essential cream.

Matt's garden looks a bit like the Good Life, with lots of greenery and most of it edible. I left him playing with a Cisco router, a Cisco IP telephone and a laptop running Cisco Call Manager in a Linux Virtual Machine Environment, as I drove off to Asda with his angle grinder I had borrowed. Complicated things, these angle grinders.

Our objective at Asda was primarily to obtain some organic sugar in order to turn our blackcurrant crop into jam and to buy some specific brands of organic beer. We can't get these anywhere else. We did pick up a few other items as well but they were out of stock of the large, plastic plant-pots we wanted.

We returned to Matthew's house, or, to be more precise, garden, to grab another bag of soil, surplus to his requirements, which we had forgotten earlier and then drove on to Newbridge Garden Centre for the large, plastic-plant pots and some canes before returning home.

Following a late lunch, Jenny made good use of the plant pots and canes, re-potting a number of plants of the edible variety Matthew had given us some weeks previously. Then she prepared an evening meal of rump steak and vegetables with a bottle of Jacob's Creek Shiraz and we both got potted.

On Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> July we were up early. Jenny and Rachel went to Church Parade with their Beavers and, just for a change, I put on a collar and tie, suit and black leather brogues and went along to the service. I must say that it was most enjoyable and Andrew, our minister, makes it most entertaining.

After the service, I discussed the Ralph Rooney book, "The Story of My Life", that is being republished this autumn and which I was producing for the publishers, with Christine Taylor and one of Ralph's relations, Brian Allen. He's a tad more local than Sharon, another of Ralph's relatives, who lives in Australia.

On returning home, Jenny told me that several people had remarked on how smart I looked, being used to seeing me around the village in working clothes that are more holey than righteous. She explained that I hadn't always looked like a tramp and that

my present lifestyle is a rebellion after having to wear suits, shirt and tie throughout most of my working life. Up the revolution.

In the afternoon, back in my rags, I decided it was time to start bricking up the hole in the outside wall, around the bathroom waste pipes. I cut the first brick using Matthew's angle grinder and managed to mortar it in place before tea. Yes, folks, there's mortar this bricklaying than you'd expect.

The following morning, it was time for brick number two and more cutting. That inserted and the tools put away, I turned my attention to cleaning up the mess, the UPVc and glass of the doors and windows around the patio being thick with red brick dust. How is it that one job always turns into several?

For the first time since I repaired it last year, I brought out the pressure washer and gave everything, including adjacent properties, a good soaking. Fortunately the neighbours were out. During the process, the hose pipe sprung a leak and that now needs replacing. The list of jobs is growing.

Having put away the pressure washer, on the basis that if I put things away properly, I'll probably be able to find them again the next time I want them, this level of tidiness being a rarity for me, I emptied and cleaned the kitchen waste recycling bins yet again and even managed to find time to replace the failed light bulb under the new car port ceiling.

As I settled down to work on my computer, Jenny decided we would pick the blackcurrants. Guess which of us went into the middle of the bushes and which one stood on the lawn holding the container into which I put the fruit – oh what a giveaway!

On Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> July, I kept my appointment with the doctor, for a change. It seems my ongoing complaint is one of those things one has to endure, like life. He can do no more, it being nothing serious and instead of advising me to keep taking the tablets, it is a case of keep using the cream, as required.

I called round at the Old School, next door to the surgery, to see Mike and Christine, who were planning the photographic clues for the Treasure Hunt on the coming Sunday and Mike gave me a lift back home, which is all of five minutes' walk. He called in so I could arrange the 32 pictures on two sheets of A4 and print them out for him. He also asked me to look for contractors to re-paint the badminton court on the floor of the Old School hall after we (note the WE) have sanded the wooden floor in the first week of the school summer holidays. I sent off three requests for quotations. The plan is to re-varnish the floor afterwards (the WE is implied), which should prove interesting, if not smelly. It looks like I'm going to have a busy summer.

The recent few fine, warm, sunny days gave way to rain again and what was forecast as a fine week a couple of days ago is now forecast as a wet one. Obviously the Met Office is run by women. They keep changing their minds.

This is just the kind of weather for making jam. The 2¾ lb of blackcurrants yielded 5½ lb of jam, which should be enough to preserve me for the next three months.

There was another, smaller crop to come in a few days and my thoughts at the time were that may find its way into a demijohn if there is enough of it.

In the mean time, I advertised our crop of unwanted gooseberries on the village website as free to those who want to come and help themselves. Having had second thoughts, I may go and pick them and put them in a demijohn as well, but not the same one as the blackcurrants.

I spent Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> June researching Ralph Rooney's family tree and getting nowhere fast. I thought the Dearden family was hard enough but the Rooney family is positively elusive.

Between 6<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> July, I did manage to vacate my Davros position to give the kitchen floor a good scrub. Six buckets of filthy water and a bottle of Dettol disinfectant later, it looked and smelled a lot better. This is not surprising considering it is six months since it was last cleaned – by me. I don't do it that often because I don't want to get a reputation as a scrubber.

I also made something of an impression on the logs, stored under the car port and increased our stock of firewood to 15 bags. At £5 a bag, that's an investment of £75 and, like so many investments in this country in the recent past, it will, too, soon be going up in smoke. I have not yet plucked up enough courage to invest in a chain saw and I am cutting the logs by hand. Not that I've taken up Karate. I'm using a 21 inch bow-saw, a small axe and a fair-sized hammer. There are still plenty of logs still to go at and I've saved the biggest until last, on the basis that my muscles will also be bigger. One interesting observation is that I work up a fair amount of body-heat, expending all this energy and by the time I've finished a session, I don't need a fire.

Week commencing Monday 11<sup>th</sup> July was quite a busy one. Taking the opportunity of the fine weather, I cut the grass, tidied up the borders and finished bricking up the hole in the wall round the waste pipes from the bathroom. The bricks do look better than the old plastic bags that were stuffed in the hole.

Jenny seemed to spend most of the week washing and ironing, apart from the evenings, when she was out for most of them. I do give her time off now and then.

On Tuesday she and Rachel went to an extra-ordinary Group Scout Meeting. Essentially, the object of the meeting was to inform our Group Scout Leader that, while she has many good qualities, she has upset a lot of good people with her manner and the way she speaks to them. Her people skills are even worse than mine. The meeting did result in a resignation but not the desired one and the Group lost yet another valuable and dedicated member of 20 years' devoted service.

On Wednesday, Jenny and I attended the Village Community Group meeting, held at the village cricket club, at which the main agenda item was the planning of the Fun Run in September. We also approved the funding for the republication of Ralph Rooney's book, "The Story of My Life". My recent efforts have not been in vain. Nor was my attendance, as I stayed on with Mike and Frank for a beer or three.

Thursday and Friday were Beaver nights and, being the last of the term before the summer break, Jenny gave them a little party. I kept well out of the way for most of it, helping Mike to reinstall Windows on his desk top computer after it refused to load up, even in Safe mode. I prefer computers to people because they are logical and do exactly what you tell them to do. The only problem is that when they do something wrong you can't shift the blame on to them.

Friday 15<sup>th</sup> July saw an end to the second brief, dry, sunny spell and we were back to the usual grey skies and damp conditions. Not that it worried me, staring at computer screens after the weekly shop.

Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> July was yet another wet and challenging day, much of it self-inflicted. I had decided not to buy the weekly Radio Times magazine this week on the basis that most of the TV programmes are rubbish. Instead, I resolved to rely on the electronic programme guide to decide what to record. I can access this in a number of ways on either my desk-top computer, Jenny's lap-top computer or on the television and I ended up using the latter.

I was going to use the Hauppauge WinTV software on my desktop but when I loaded it, I was invited to download and install the latest version, which I did – or, at least, tried to do. Having successfully downloaded the software and run it to uninstall the existing version of the software and drivers, I rapidly discovered that the new software did not include the drivers for my hardware. I sent Hauppauge a rather curt message.

I eventually hit on the idea of letting Windows install the drivers automatically, after a reload, using the facility to search the Microsoft Update web site. Thankfully this worked and I then installed the latest version of the WinTV software. Not that it looks any different to the old version. What a waste of time that was. Thanks, Hauppauge.

On Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> July, I awoke, after a restless night, with a bit of catarrh, an irritating throat and a bit of a cough. I was still breathing though – just. You know what they say – it's not the cough that carries you off, it's the coffin they carry you off in. By Sunday night, I was feeling dreadful. I felt quite cold and resorted to lighting the fire for the first time for a couple of months or so. Overnight, I had considerable difficulty sleeping despite three drops of Olbas Oil on my handkerchief and being smothered in Vic Vapour Rub. Not every woman's dream.

Monday was not much better and, to make matters worse, I couldn't go out for any fresh air because it was pouring with rain for the third day running. In a moment of recklessness, I submitted my name to the hit list of Cairn Energy. According to Greenpeace, Cairn Energy, an Edinburgh-based company, is leading oil exploration from the UK in the Arctic.

Hands up all those who remember the Gulf of Mexico oil spill. (See the appropriate environmental web pages on this site). How long did it take to cap the well there in the warm waters of the Gulf? Having answered that question, now for the big one. How long would it take to stop and mop up an oil spill under the Arctic ice and how would you do it? For a start, Cairn Energy don't know because they haven't got an Oil Spill Response Plan, at least, not one they dare share with anyone. I know because

I've asked to see it. So has the judge of the case against Greenpeace activists in the Netherlands, they being charged with criminal damage against Cairn Energy for trying to stop them.

A spill of oil under the Arctic ice will not only prove extremely challenging to those responsible for cleaning it up but it will seriously damage the wildlife there. I've said this before and I'll go on saying it. The oceans are the life-blood of this planet and if they die, everything dies. Making a vast fortune from oil won't give anyone or their descendants any future – quite the reverse and what's even more to the point is that no matter how much wealth and power you amass, you sure ain't takin' it with you when you go – and you will go, sooner or later. I suppose polluting the earth is a bit like being a suicide bomber. You know you have to go sometime so you might as well take as many people with you as possible. And most of us are guilty of complicity, since oil plays a large part in our lives, either directly or indirectly.

By Tuesday my catarrh, irritating throat, breathing and cough were accompanied by a tight chest and I thought some fresh air might help. It was a dull day, but fine, when I set off. After about fifteen minutes, I managed to find a rain shower, which did little to improve matters. At least I was dressed for it and, apart from my trouser legs, managed to keep warm and dry. The going over the fields was not bad to say that it had been teeming down for the last few days and a couple of modest climbs raised my pulse and my lungs were full of fresh, if damp, air.

On Tuesday night my breathing was so restricted and my coughing so frequent that I decided to sleep in the lounge, first to give Jenny a chance of some sleep and second to provide more support for my head. Not that I slept much, managing to snatch a few hours' sleep between three a.m. and seven a.m.

On Wednesday I felt dreadful yet again and didn't do much except cough and splutter. I decided to try some cough medicine we had on Wednesday night and managed to sleep in bed for about seven hours.

There was not much change on Thursday. I was up about seven, prepared breakfast, washed the pots and emptied and cleaned the recycling and waste bins, all before Jenny was up. Kill or cure, that's my motto. Despite feeling sick as well, probably from the second dose of cough medicine, I accompanied Mike to the publishers in Rochdale to arrange for the printing of the Ralph Rooney book. After lunch, the cough medicine being confined to the cupboard, I converted a couple of LPs to MP3 and started work on a cassette tape.

On Thursday night I was back on the settee in the lounge and awoke on Friday morning after about three hours' sleep to find a fly buzzing round me. I thought it was a bit premature, myself. I took Jenny grocery shopping. She doesn't get out much. I managed to stagger round the stores. It's a good job they have trolleys to lean on. We spent the best part of £200 and that didn't include any wine or beer, just whine. Neither did it include much meat, since Tesco seems unable or unwilling to source a good supply of the organic variety.

On Friday night, Jenny persuaded me to go back to sleeping in bed and ensured I did so by dosing me on fresh lemon juice and honey, followed by a cup of Rooibos Tea

just before bedtime. I managed two four-hour naps, punctuated by a two-hour coughing session between four and six.

On Saturday, despite still feeling like death warmed up, I finished the conversion of the cassette tape to MP3 and managed to find enough strength to review the programmes for the week and set up the recordings I wanted. I even managed to complete and burn my fifteenth Jazz CD. Rachel helped Jenny pack the car for the car boot sale the following day since I was in no fit state to do so.

Attempting to sleep on Saturday night was a disaster and I don't think either of us slept much. Jenny was up at 5:30 to go to the car boot sale on her own, this being the first decent Sunday we have had for several weeks and an opportunity not to be missed. After Jenny had gone, I managed to drop off for about four hours.

I awoke on Sunday and showered, hoping that might make me feel better. How wrong can you be? After a late breakfast cum lunch, I started to proof read the Ralph Rooney book, the draft being sent by the publisher, while listening to my latest Jazz CD. Jenny came back shattered but a little richer. I decided to sleep in the lounge yet again to give her a good night's rest.

On Monday 25<sup>th</sup> July I had the bright idea of going for a walk to get some fresh air. Our five or six mile trek took us down the Kirklees Trail to see how the development work was progressing and to try to get a look at the construction of the new viaduct. There was not much evidence of any change to the trail itself since we last went despite the planned opening in September. We did manage to catch a glimpse of the new bridge and I took a telephoto shot of it through the trees. It looks impressive but there was no sign of any workmen. So what's new?

On Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> I awoke at 8 a.m. after managing about eight hours' sleep with a coughing break between 4 and 4:30. What's more, I slept in bed. I spent the day cutting the back lawn, picking the last of the blackcurrants, tidying up the borders and removing the weeds from the block paving. I gave up on the latter at about 5 p.m., feeling somewhat drained. I spent the evening coughing. Jenny gave me another Rooibos tea laced with honey to ensure another relatively silent night. She was somewhat disappointed.

On Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> my recovery took a step backwards. Despite making the effort to run some errands in the car, I felt very weak towards the end of our shopping spree in Asda, not, I might add, as a result of the bill, since I didn't pay it. I was pleased to be back home, though I'm not sure how I managed to drive the five miles or so and, after lunch, fell asleep for about three hours in the chair. I did start to feel better in the evening but was unable to take advantage of some night-time cough mixture Jenny had acquired from the local chemist's shop since I had consumed two glasses of wine. No wonder I felt a bit better. It seems that, from a description of my symptoms, the pharmacist thinks I might have an allergy to something rather than a virus and that I ought to go and see the doctor. If it is an allergy, the doctor won't be much help. If it isn't, he'll prescribe antibiotics and I don't like taking those, so I don't really see much point in consulting him.

In any case, I have heard there is a trend in the NHS of fobbing off older patients to avoid the cost of treating them. If this is true, it is somewhat worrying and a sad time for the NHS.

There are those of us who prefer to place our trust in natural remedies, though, unless it's something really serious, in which case, there is always have the option of consulting someone privately, provided one can afford it.

I slept better on Wednesday night and my cough seemed to be less troublesome. My breathing was still difficult at times; I have found that being able to breathe is something of an advantage.

On Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> we rose reasonably early and I continued to remove the tons of moss and weeds from the block paving at the back. I was expecting cooler temperatures and some cloud, showers being forecast at some point during the day. By lunchtime, it became almost too hot to work in the warm sunshine, not that I'm complaining and I was thankful for a break. I reckon if there were about twenty of us, we could do the whole of the block paving in a day. Since there's only me.....

After another night of broken sleep, we rose early on Friday 29<sup>th</sup> for the weekly shop, calling at Matthew's house to see them before they went off on their Mediterranean cruise and to obtain instructions for maintaining his fruit and vegetable crop while he and Carrie are away. Since much of the crop will be ready during the next two weeks, this could well be in our interests.

Both of us managed a more restful night on Friday and on Saturday 30<sup>th</sup>, after spending the morning tidying my desk and filing documents on my computer, it was time to tackle yet more of the block paving at the back. I have cleared the bulk of the patio and it does look very nice. No doubt it will remain so for about three weeks, until the weeds and moss start to grow again. It could all do with being re-laid on a proper bed of cement and sealed to prevent weed growth. Unfortunately this would cost a lot of money and we don't do enough car boot sales to cover it.

On Saturday evening, I finished proof reading the draft of Ralph Rooney's "The Story of My Life" and sent the corrections for Mike to review before forwarding them to the publishers.

We were, or rather I was, up early on Sunday morning intending to go to the car boot sale at the station car park in Ramsbottom, for which Jenny and Rachel had packed the car the previous afternoon. My first instinct was to check the weather forecast. No it wasn't. My first instinct was to go back to sleep. My second was to check the weather forecast. I should have followed my first one. Showers were forecast between 7 and 10 a.m. The last time I looked, there was no rain on the radar until Tuesday.

Anyway, I was up and awake and coughing, so I stayed up. Sure enough the rain started about 8:30 and we had a couple of very light showers the hardly wet the patio and the damp soon dried up. By the time Jenny came downstairs there was no sign of the rain and she was not best pleased.

I spent the day tidying my paperwork, filing documents on my computer and then clearing more of the weeds from the block paving. Jenny tackled yet more washing, a pile of ironing and cleaned and polished the lounge and dining area. What exciting lives we lead.

I did suggest going for a walk. I have found the booklet of Holcombe Moor, now on the village web site, including a map showing Pilgrims' Cross, John Turner's Cave and Bull Hill to name but three places I have not yet been. I'm not sure Jenny would appreciate the climb up Redbrook or crossing the soggy peat moor known as Wet Moss, for very good reason, to reach these places of local renown but I am keen to see them. Rumour has it that the sea and the Fylde coast are clearly visible from the tops of these moors, perhaps two to three hours' walk from home. That's there, followed by similar to get back home again, so it's a day's journey in all.

According to Ralph Rooney, it's only about 30 miles from Bolton to Fleetwood and he walked it well within the day. Mind you, in the latter half of the 1800s, there wasn't much option for most people, when stage coaches drawn by horses were still very much the mode of transport, gradually being taken over by the steam engine.

On that note I shall close this month's update as we steam into August and Matthew and Carrie steam, or rather, chug, into the Med.