

CHAPTER 14

Chapter 13 was a very long one as it covered a long period in our story in a way that I felt was especially important. I must now leave you in suspense a bit as to how we all arrived in our new home, and go back to where I left off in 1970. (Since I wrote that introduction, I have got rather behind, and Gerd is nagging at me to write more about our life in Denmark. I will start a new book, so look for Book 2 if you want to jump forward in time.)

With all our involvement in sound, lighting and theatre work both amateur and professional, we got invited to undertake all sorts of odd jobs and came into contact with many different people. One year we were asked to provide the complete lighting and sound system for performances of a youth group funded by Middlesex of the York Mystery Cycles. The performances were at the Wren church next to Holborn Viaduct. At that time I was being considered for a job at the new theatre lighting organisation called Theatre Projects and so Brian Benn and another of the designers came to have a look at the system we had installed and were running for the performances. They liked what they saw and so Richard Pilbrow offered me the job. Unfortunately, the money they could pay then was only what I was getting at STC and the extra travelling expenses into St Giles plus meal costs meant that I just could not manage on the pay. Regretfully I had to say no to the offer - they could not make any definite promises on pay rises as they had still to establish themselves sufficiently well to be certain of their own future. In fact they became very successful as a large business while we carried on with our own small business affairs and became successful enough to be able to suit ourselves and in fact to buy their services many times over the years.

Amongst the many other contacts we had at the time was one that led to a very different sort of lighting work. We heard from a man who had a marquee hire business and needed a special lighting set-up for a customer's evening party. I suggested that some of our stage floodlighting equipment would do the job and he asked me to do the work for a sensible price. I was very interested in the whole idea of providing lighting in such an environment and together we worked out different lighting schemes and prices to suit the various marquee arrangements that he had. Naturally, while waiting to get into the marquees, I didn't mind pulling on the odd rope to help while he and his part-time workers were putting them up. Within a short time I was being asked, and paid, to do some part-time work helping with erection and dismantling even if lighting wasn't necessary. David, the owner, had had various other businesses and having sold his last big one, had decided to start a small business that didn't need a permanent staff. Learning that we were used to working in our own various part-time business activities over many years, he suggested to me that I might like to have a specific business arrangement with him as a sort of non-capital 'partner'. From his point of view he could see being able to undertake more work without himself having to work more hours, thus generating more income and making better use of the marquee stock that he had built up. From my point of view it meant that I could, relatively safely, leave STC and work full-time for myself, without having to have capital to start up and with a small income almost guaranteed straight away.

For a couple of years I had been getting so far up the management ladder at STC that it was seriously affecting our home life. However, in the situation I was in, I couldn't just stop at the level I was, and so either had to continue on the upward path or get out completely for it to make any difference to us as a family. The problem of course was that of getting an income if I worked for myself. Just moving to another firm would only be successful if I used my STC qualifications to get onto another promotion ladder and it would probably be nowhere near our home. Thus David's offer warranted very serious consideration. This was in the autumn of 1971 and he needed an answer during the winter so that everything could be ready for the busier time of year starting spring 1972. We all discussed the pros and cons and decided to take the chance. We had already something to contribute to the enterprise with the lighting equipment stock that we had built up and our Land Rover which was ideal for such work. Myrtle was earning with her own part-time job as a dark-room technician at Finchley Memorial hospital and it looked possible for us to exist on the work that David could forecast should be available. There was one small problem that had to be sorted out first and that was readily solved. I had had both arms badly damaged as a child and already one had had to have more surgery to save my right one from paralysis. That was completely successful and now the same problem was starting on the other one. I contacted the hospital surgeon who had told me to call him as soon as I had any problems and it was arranged for me to have the second arm fixed after Christmas and before the New Year casualties started to come in!

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