

CHAPTER 15

I must admit to feeling a bit guilty in hindsight at being paid by STC while I was in hospital, and then recuperating - I already knew that I would be leaving in three months. They also sent me on a management course as soon as I was OK to travel to the Brighton venue; the course turned out to be very valuable for me, but not for STC - sorry!

I see from the file that I finished the previous chapter in 2003, but it is now February 2006. Hannele, a Finnish friend, wrote to me in April 2005 to say that she had finished all the chapters online, and when would there be more? My one and only fan! So I really must start again with the story of the cats and the rest of the family.

Just to clear up where our working lives had got to, in April 1972 I left STC to start our own marquee hire business, initially working as, in effect, a sub-contractor to Davis Shute's firm, Marquee Hire Services. As we were already using our Tam name, I just registered one more - Tam Marquee Hire.

In 1972 our cat family had been stable for a few years with Susie, Nooky, Chalky, Sara, Cleo and Koshka. Of the dogs, only Sheba was still with us. The next cat to join us was in 1973 by which time our new working lives had settled in after some changes.

To start with I worked with and for David - the way that worked was that he still had all the marquees and took the bookings. Either he or myself would visit potential customers and suggest what they should have and give them a quote. For the work itself the idea was that I would handle most of the marquee erection, using his equipment and panel truck, but for smaller jobs, I could use my Land Rover. We arranged that once a job was finished and paid up, then we would deduct the expenses (petrol, casual labour etc) and I would get a percentage of the balance. We did that each week and that suited me as I then had a more or less regular income, although varying in amount. The original intention was that David could do less physical work and have more time for his family and garden; if there was too much work in a week for me to handle, then he could either refuse a booking, or take it on himself. Unfortunately, it didn't quite work out like that!

All during the summer and autumn of 1972 we worked smoothly; most of the work was for private parties but some was for club events, summer fetes, and so on. The latter would of course tail off by the winter. Spring, summer and autumn were the peak times and I found that I was working flat out most of the time. Much more than expected and the reason for that turned out to be that David was taking on much more work than forecast - he had a new pair of hands on the job and so just kept on taking the bookings!

Towards the end of the year the work slackened off a little so I had more time to develop the other business that Myrtle and I wanted to have available as a backup for ourselves. In the meantime, David was getting bookings for 1973 and it soon became obvious that my being 'on the job' had helped to bring in more customers from the satisfied ones we had from the 1972 season - even more private parties. People had realised that the heating and

lighting I had being installing for them meant that they could still be comfortable even in the colder times, so recommended us to their friends and relations.

Unfortunately in 1973 it became clear that David was getting greedy - he took on far too much work for me to handle, so started again to do some himself. In the end he was starting to pick the easier ones for himself and jobs that I booked through my own efforts were potentially jeopardised if he considered that they took second place in the priorities for equipment. Early in the winter I had it out with him and as he would not change the way that he was behaving, I withdrew from the arrangement. He grudgingly offered to let me 'hire' his equipment for jobs I would book on my own behalf, but he stated that any jobs he later booked that might clash, would take precedence! A completely nonsensical arrangement! Myrtle and I agreed about this, and decided to buy a marquee of our own and make other smaller awnings and so on for our own business. In January 1974 we took delivery of the marquee, and before the spring I had made one awning for a specific booking, quickly followed by three more. Very soon the bookings to us enabled me to get more equipment and I soon made our own additional marquee from the pattern of the one we bought. In 2006, that marquee is still with us and in occasional use for our friends!

In the meantime, late in 1973, our next cat arrived. I saw an advert for an August litter in Friern Barnet, and Eric asked if he could have one. We collected a kitten that evening - the mother cat was very sadly killed the day before by someone using their driveway to reverse a car. She was just sitting and waiting for her family to come home. In September that year Susie had died at the ripe old age of 18 years - she always considered herself to be Eric's cat as she was there for his birth and always around him for the next fourteen years. We were all sad when she left us, and of course Eric particularly missed her, so a new little tabby cat was just right for him - Benjy, who started off as Benjamin, but was then renamed Benjemima once our vet corrected our mistake!

Soon came a major change in our family itself - Michael was old enough to go to university! He chose to go to Brighton, so Myrtle undertook to load up her car with all his necessities and transfer him to a room that he found that was almost on the front. He soon found that he needed more room, so he and Alison rented a small flat together that was farther inland, and again Myrtle helped out. Soon being deprived of cats took its toll, so they got themselves a female tabby kitten (in 1977) and named her Soi. Myrtle's earliest memory of her is the game she developed - chase a ball all the way down the several flights of stairs from their flat, and then demand that someone went down to retrieve it so she could do it all over again!

From time to time Michael and Alison needed a kitten sitter, so Soi came to stay with us for a week or so at a time. She was very sweet and well behaved so she fitted in without trouble. In later years, once Michael left university and came back to live in Poppa Webb's house with Soi, she would visit most days. She of course had to have her own cat flap. When in need of company she would commute up the drive, but when Mike was expected home, off she would go again. Towards the end of her life she was almost blind and very unsteady on her legs, but she would still make the trip when she felt she wanted to. She died the year after we moved to Denmark at the good age of 18 years.

The years following 1973 were largely uneventful in both our work and our family until the year 1977 when Soi arrived and we started on a new experience. Before then Eric was ready to leave school and had to decide which way he wanted to go. Sensibly he decided that a career in music might not be all that stable, so he should have other earning possibilities. In the end he chose to go to Brunel University to study engineering, and took a part time course at Middlesex Polytechnic studying dance. But some years before that he had been the cause of many later changes in all our lives.

While still going to the RSM he was asked through a friend if he would play trumpet at a Cockfosters school in their production of Noyes Fludde. He asked us if we would give him a lift there and stay to see it in rehearsal, and of course we said yes. While there, we were introduced to the teacher who was producing it and had the idea to ask him if we could bring our tape recorder along to record the actual performance - our son was to be famous!. The school was intrigued by the idea, and agreed to us doing it. After the performance later in the week, the teacher said that he had been asked by the head if our recording could be turned into a record for the school to sell. I had to say that I wasn't sure, but I thought that I could ask a friend what might be possible.

Now this gets a bit complicated to explain how we knew a friend who could help!

Back in Chapter 6 I explained how we came to lease some of our land in 1968. A few years later, Ernie asked us if we would talk to some young friends of his who had made a proposition to him regarding parking a caravan on the part they were leasing from us. They came to see us, and it turned out that the caravan was a rather *large* one that they were converting in to a mobile recording studio, and it was too vulnerable to theft and damage where they lived. That of course interested us by itself. We agreed that we would let them make an arrangement as long as a proper concrete base was laid to take the weight. I also agreed to extend a power point from our garage to near the base so they could work on and use the studio in situ. To make it simple, I provided a coin meter so they could simply pay us for the electricity as they used it. Over the next few months we got to know them better, and watched as the project proceeded. Finally came the great day when they were able to try it out for real - they both worked for the TV South Bank studios and got a job to do when the studio needed an extra recording truck for a show. Mostly it went well they told us when they came back, but the suspension collapsed with the wheels ending up largely being supported by the wheel arches!!! There was definitely too much weight! They cured that by having an extra chassis made with two bus wheels on the axle - then the workshop lifted the whole thing (minus the old wheels and suspension) on to the chassis and welded it in place.

As they were professionals they were the friends we could ask about the school recording. They told us that after we edited the tape to ensure clean beginnings and ends for the two sides of an LP record, we would need three more things. First, take the tape to a disc cutting room to have the master discs made. Second, take the masters to a factory to have a quantity of pressings done, and, thirdly, think about the printed label and cover. The first we did at their suggestion by going to De Lane Lea at Wembley where we had our first experience of the art. The mastering engineer was Dick and that was the start of many new

experiences and friendships. I asked him where he would suggest I found a factory for the pressings, and he suggested a south London firm owned by the fabulously named Charlie Rumble (and son). What a name for the manufacturer of records where the last thing needed was a rumble!

Charlie sorted out getting the label printed so I had to make a design for it - that general design lasted for many years. The cover was simply solved as the school art department wanted to get involved, so I got a supply of blank card covers from Charlie and the school printed their designs front and back on to paper which they then stuck on to the card. Finally, we put together 500 records for sale to the parents and the whole project was pronounced a great success. I still have one of the LPs complete with cover and Eric and our "recording company" names on it.

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