

CHAPTER 8

Over the next couple of years we settled into a steady family routine. A few years before the puppy and kitten excitement, my work had changed and we had a little more money available. I started work at STC as a 'lab-boy' at 16 and then after a few years was upgraded to junior engineer. (I know this is supposed to be about cats, but I have to mention the people who live with the cats from time to time! It's the same with photographs - Myrtle is always saying, why are the pictures always of cats and never show me!) Eleven years after I started in the development laboratory, in the meantime studying part-time for my electronics degree equivalent and becoming a fully fledged engineer, I was offered the chance to be trained as a work-study engineer. This was new for that part of STC so we had in the training group a trade union shop steward with the plan that he would take the same training and the unions could be sure that nothing underhand was being planned. In the event, after half a year of training and practice, the unions still had not finalised their new agreement with STC and so we could not actually go onto the shop floor to start our work. It so happened that some other factories within the organisation had already installed such agreements, so most of the group were temporarily transferred out of New Southgate. I was unlucky! As I had my own transport and an electronics background, I had to go the furthest to Harlow every day on the trusty motorcycle combination. After travelling less than three miles to work, the long journey every day in the winter was exhausting and I had so many colds and flu again that I got back to Southgate after only a few months and life got back to normal for me. Looking back on that time, the hardship is forgotten and I can be grateful for the chance that I had to learn about the electro-chemical processes that were so much a part of the work at Harlow.

Thus another phase in our life started which had ramifications later on. I still could not be put to work as a work-study engineer, so was seconded to a planning team which was to plan STC's first factory in Northern Ireland. The work was initially concerned with all the physical design details of a factory floor and offices, but when it became time to consider how the new work force were to be recruited and trained, I was shifted to learn how to become a trainer of instructors. This involved some time in central London at STC's management training centre and then I and the newly appointed training manager moved back to Southgate to set up a complete training facility in what was to have been the new sports pavilion. That was only the start of many different and increasingly responsible jobs, none of which involved work-study, over the next eleven years.

What with two young children, increasing work responsibility, youth drama work and Myrtle's own part-time work making clothes for private customers, we had little time to train the puppies in the same way as we had for Tina. They had the usual local walks, but two together we found to be difficult to get full concentration, so they only had an elementary training. We also found that Podge was a totally different character from his mother and sister and far too headstrong for the boys to handle. In fact, he eventually managed to break free of his rope run one morning and ran off. Within a day we had a report from the police that his body had been found on a road about a mile away - he was three years old.

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