

Synopsis

January 2010, this story is of my life so far. What a journey, ups, downs, finally success. Here is snapshot of my journey. I now have a wonderful house, "Witsend", central heating a business I am very proud of. All possible as I had and still do have the support and loyalty of family and friends.

That knock on the door in November 1983 made my heart beat. No one in their right mind visited in the evenings. I was sitting in my caravan in a field in Hertfordshire the room had filled with smoke from the wood burner, I had no idea why. It was rocking around like a wooden top. I heard my friend Chris, "are you ok? The wind has blown the caravan roof off" I opened the door relieved my visitor was a friend and said "Come on, I am the one for the jokes" Sadly it was true, I hired tarpaulins to keep the rain out and stayed wrapped up like a mummy until the following February when my Aunty Jean & Uncle Billy came to renew the roof. There is always a positive. It was the only Christmas in 11 years in the caravan I had a tree which I put on top of the wood burner! I look back with fondness, Uncle Billy saying "In all my years I have never had to go to bed with my underpants on my head!" It really was that cold.

Winter turned to spring, birds sang, we must press on, so much to do.

What about now. Well I was born in 54, am now 55 and at last recently bought my very first chair of my choice to sit in, luxury. Was it worth it? Oh yes. Would I do it all again? Oh yes.

Full story

Can I really learn to ride? I was 6 years old, my sister Sarah and I went to Offley riding school. That was the start unbeknown to me or my parents of shaping my future. I was fortunate to have parents with a 'can do' attitude, especially my father who didn't mind at all that I was a tom boy. Once I learnt to ride I wanted a pony. I was told no, much too expensive. Not to be outdone I took all sorts of jobs and started saving.

An opportunity came for free riding on a chicken farm in Baldock, I was 13 years old. I remember so well that I told

mum if for any reason I fell off she was not to make a fuss. I did fall off! From there it went on I had to work on the farm in exchange for riding. One day the farmer asked me if I would like to ride a grey pony in the field. I was so excited, but this pony had other ideas. Everything a pony should not do he did, but I did not fall off. The farmer told me that I could buy him for £60.00. I counted my savings, £45.00, my Auntie and Uncle gave a me £15.00 an early birthday and Christmas present, it was 13th July 1967. Looking back that was my first lesson in business, negotiate the price.

My grandparents bought the tack and that was that. I did paper rounds worked on the farm, when I was 14 had a job in Tesco's, all to pay for the pony's keep.

From there one dream led to another, my next dream was to have my own stables.

My parents sent us to St Francis College in Letchworth a private school. Once I had my pony Interest in being at the stables outweighed being at school. I learnt how to skip out, the milk room door lead straight onto the street. Then run like hell to the bus stop by the library. If I went up stairs I could not only see when the bus came but also if any nuns were around. My mum used to say "I work full time to pay the fees and you little monkey are never there".

I left school at 15 without qualifications and went to train at an equestrian centre in Baldock.

My first job was with polo ponies. I looked after 6 for a small wage. It did not matter. My boss worked away during the week, it was like my own yard.

I worked 1 season there then with my friend Maggie went to Cyprus to work, a bit of an adventure. It was too much of an adventure, war broke out in 1974. I tell people yes I was there but I didn't cause it! I eventually got home thanks to the Navy getting us off the Island.

On my return I was offered a derelict yard for a pepper corn rent. I asked myself can I really make this work. You meet many people in life, two of them I knew would give me a straight answer, Tom Smith and Danny Dearness, both horse dealers. Their answer was, yes if anyone can, you can. It's the only approval I needed.

Well that was the start, I had by this time a car, MGB GT, which I sold for £950.00. I went to see Tom and asked for 7

suitable horses to start my riding school. We drove around and looked at many in the fields, Tom knowing my budget helped me select seven. On returning to the yard I asked him "tack is included isn't it?!"

True to his word seven were delivered with tack, I was up and running. The yard needed a lot of work, dad in particular worked hard. As I got to know local people they also became friends and spent most weekends helping to improve the yard. There was nowhere to live but we made what I optimistically called "The Cottage" for me. I had no bathroom an outside loo that didn't flush (you took buckets of water) but I did have a sink! It was very cold in winter, with only a small gas fire. I used to go round to Neil and Cath's who lived in the village for a bath. They became special friends.

My family and friends worked hard with me to make all the improvements. Without the good will of all of them it would have been impossible, I will never forget that.

After nearly 6 years the land was sold to developers, I had 8 weeks to leave. Imagine my feelings, no money to buy somewhere, my whole life was turned upside down.

I was offered all sorts of partnerships and renting opportunities but unwilling to go down that road again for fear the same thing could happen in a few years time. I felt empty, wretched and very unhappy. After running my own business I was not looking to work hard to build someone else's dreams, so again, sailing close to the wind, I bought a cottage in Hitchin. At the time I earned £30.00 per week. However I had it all worked out rent the 2 bedrooms and I use the front room as a bed sit. The rent covered all the expenses, I began to relax a little.

A friend saw in a local paper some land for sale in Hertford. I was not keen to go and look for fear of another disappointment. She did persuade me and I saw an opportunity. Now all I had to do was raise some money. Banks would have shown me the door but my dad's best friend Ricky had belief in me and through his finance company agreed to lend me some money at a very favourable rate. Off I went to the auction. The hammer fell on my bid, the year was 1981, now the work really started.

Again my family and friends were all behind me. We cleared the land, Tom again came to my rescue and let me take 4 horses, "pay me when you can" he said. Now that's true

friendship. I put in planning for a mobile home. Which I got, some feat as it was greenbelt. I had no electricity, a little water from a well and no phone. I can't pretend it was pleasant. One winter a snow plough got stuck on the lane, a violent storm blew the roof off the caravan . I never want to be that cold again! I lived for 11 years in the caravan, building the business was my priority. I did anything to earn a living from selling manure and top soil by the trailer load working for my dad's grocery business rearing pigs and calves and of course teaching riding and keeping horses at livery to name but a few. People would often tell me how lucky I was to own the land and stables. They were partly correct, I was lucky to be here however the finance company really owned it. My agreement was that I had the loan for 10 years, I paid it off in I think it was 6. Now I felt free and no one could ever take it away from me.

During the time in the caravan my father developed Parkinson's disease my mother crashed her car leaving her reliant on a wheelchair. She also lost her sight. The role of carers changed. Life would never be the same again. In 1987 I got planning permission to build a house. In 1992 I eventually moved in with my now partner Michael. During this time I developed a back problem and stopped the farming side of my business.

I started another business I could manage alongside the stables with a company called Forever Living Products. I developed an income which helped me pay off the mortgage. My house "Witsend" was not finished, it did not matter that it was full of other people's furniture and bits and pieces, because again I felt a sense of relief, that that the bank could never foreclose on me.

In 2004 I started to convert 10 stables to holiday cottages specifically designed for the disabled visitor. It's a wonderful business, I get a huge amount of pleasure seeing others come and enjoy Petasfield. I have made many new friends on the way, but will always be grateful and never forget everyone who believed in me, worked hard for nothing, and helped me to get

up again on the numerous occasions I was knocked down. I would not be here without them.

What about now. Well I was born in 54, am now 55 and at last recently bought my very first chair of my choice to sit in. Was it worth it, oh yes? Would I do it all again? Oh yes.

Now press on its winter again, so much to do.