

Chapter 14 Family

This is a difficult chapter for me because my family record is far from good. Jerry Gates was my motorcycle guru and we arranged to spend an evening together with our respective girlfriends. His was Sheila and mine was Lilian. As the evening progressed it seemed that the girls thought the pairings should be reversed. I thought that Sheila was very attractive and was very happy with the changed circumstances. Sheila was a librarian at Boots of Berkhamsted, not far from Tring, and she lived at Chesham where her father ran Mayo and Hawkes, the cycle shop for the Town. My motorcycle was well versed in the cross-country journey and I made sure never to fall off even though there were steep hills to be negotiated in icy conditions. We married in December 1952 and, within a couple of weeks I was posted to Hongkong for my National Service. Not long after my return, Carole was born, to be followed by Chris. Life was complete: I had a job, a wife, a family and I owned a house. I gave Sheila driving lessons: big mistake. Between us we completely demolished the 13-inch brick gate pier at the front of the house. Carole married Colin but they are now divorced: they have daughters Emma and Katie. Emma has made her mark in the hotel world and, until her daughter Lucy May arrived, was the events organiser at Castle Coombe Manor, putting together some prestigious weddings (Including the marriage of Kevin Pietersen and Jessica Taylor). Katie has always fitted in well wherever she works and now has a children's nursery business whilst also being involved in the beauty business. Carole has always had a keen interest in fast driving. Until becoming injured because of a faulty ambulance, she was a para-medical. Now she is a police driving instructor at the highest level. She instructs officers in chase driving. She tells me she is quite happy to receive three new young men for tuition every couple of weeks. Chris went into the building industry. As a young man he

won the silver trowel for Best English Building Trade Apprentice. He married Shirley, started his own business, built his own house and was just starting out on speculative work when the market collapsed and he was left sorely exposed. Somehow, whilst many of his peers were falling, he fought and worked his way out of the difficulty. Now he is a very successful builder and landlord. Shirley has her own hairdressing business and is keen on animals. She currently has dogs, cats, horses and chickens but I think the sheep and goats have gone now. Their son Curtis has joined the building company and shows great promise. The big test is the chaps on site – they approve of him.

When he was 14, I had a disagreement with Curtis. We were at a performance of Saturday Night Fever and, near the finish, the pace was hot. A lovely young West Indian lady decided to dance in the aisle and I thought she needed a partner. However to get there I had to step past Curtis. Seeing my intent, he forbade the move and put a rugby lock on me (even at 14 you do not get out of that with Curtis). How things have changed – four years later he would get to the lady before me! (On his 16th birthday I gave him a box of a gross of featherlite thinking they would last a while – with hindsight, I would guess he was out of stock in no time – he has much luck!) Bianca was keen to acquire an actor's autograph and I was only too happy to join her at the stage door to get a close up sighting of the top dancing lady. A dusky lass, we had debated which part of Latin America she had come from: answering my question in an East London twang she boarded the bus to her place of birth Peckham! There is, of course, a cataclysmic gap between Curtis's texting skills and mine. There are around seventy-five ladies in his calling library and I noticed that some had stars against their names and some had double stars. Enquiring the difference Curtis advised me that the single star denotation represented a "work in progress".

Curtis's younger sister is Bianca and I recall her actions at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem. Aged six, having posted a note in the female section, Shirley asked her what the note said. "I hope Daddy makes lots of money and spends it all on me!" was the answer. In her eleventh year, Bianca became upset at school. She marched into the changing room with an aerosol of sun cream spray and doused fifteen blazers and fifteen bonnets. Asked why she had done this she replied that her best friend had decided that another girl was now her best friend and this upset her.

In Lucy, Gene, Patrick and Tabatha I am now blessed with four Greats.

I also found I had a weakness I did not realise I had. Near the house was The Chequers Inn, which became my local. One of the regulars was Podge Price, an easy-tongued bookmaker, who could pull ladies at the drop of a hat. One evening he arrived with Miss Luton and proceeded to drink so much that he fell asleep in his chair; he certainly could not drive her home. Seeing the lady's dilemma I offered that she could sleep on my put-you-up and she thankfully agreed (no other intent – I promise). Once in the car she suggested we go for a drive: bad news. I think she was also fairly well acquainted with Wasps Rugby Club!

My next relationship was with Jo, a nurse at Stoke Mandeville, who hailed from near Ross-on-Wye. Her father was an optician and her mother Captain of her golf club. Our son St. John is very bright and musically gifted although it took a while to get himself channelled in business. He is now engaged in property development in London and lives in a penthouse to the south of the city centre with an aspect second to none. With its verandas it extends to a tenth of an acre and he lets it out for filming. He has been to India and Africa to teach the playing of bongos. Our neighbour's son has a Harley-Davidson motorcycle – Singe can compete on

his bongos! I remember that, aged less than two, on a ship, he was on the sundeck with a beachball, making a nuisance of himself, but being tolerated because of his youth. You could just sense how he realised he had the attention of the assembled, immobile sunseekers, when he spied this particular lady. She was very large and lying on her stomach. The backside was immense and he stood there poised with the ball savouring the attention being lavished on him – I was certainly not going to stop him. When he knew he could sustain the suspense no longer he applied the ball vigorously to the backside and relished the all round mirth that he created.

Then came Jan who had a flat over shops in Wendover. Jan was extremely fashion conscious and glamorous and had her own Ladies Clothes shop in Aylesbury. Jan's blood includes some French and this certainly enlivened the proceedings. In seconds I could be moved from the palace to the doghouse. At Pound Meadow, Oxford I sat with Jan, in picnic mode, close to a tributary of the Thames. I had not discerned that I had upset her, but when my bunch of keys to everything except the car fell from my pocket she snatched them up and hurled them into the river. Staying very calm I aligned myself to a tree on the far shore and formed an estimate of the distance at which the keys entered the water. It was not long before a rowing four came by and they responded to my hail. There was a reward if they could find them and, indeed, within five minutes they were back in my pocket – on the side facing away from Jan.

It so happened that one evening, when descending the stairs, up came a striking blonde lady, bearing bread sticks, and I certainly did a double take. Margaret was the wife of Andrew and they had just taken a lease of the fashion shop beneath Jan's flat. (Margaret later told me that she would count the plates breaking on the party wall as they were hurled at me). We only met a few times, by chance, in the

next six or seven years. One of these was at The Mansion at RAF Halton where I asked Margaret to dance five times before she called a halt.

Chronologically, although not strictly “family”, Linda appeared. Aged twenty-three, she was the guest of an invitee to one of our famous Christmas Office parties. She was warned about Rogers the womaniser and within five minutes of arriving she required me to sit under the desk, where she would feed me peanuts. Linda led me quite a merry dance. She owned a beauty salon, which I would frequent regularly: a highlight with my regular masseuse was on Christmas Eve. I asked if she could finish five minutes early. Asking why, I said that I thought we should reverse roles, to which she agreed. Much later, Linda had a very premature baby girl, Victoria, by a Greek father. Straight from hospital, Linda and Victoria stayed with Margaret and me for a week.

Talking over my garden fence with Barbara, who taught Margaret’s son Patrick, I learned that Margaret and Andrew were to divorce. Who could possibly let that beautiful lady go? A phone call arranged a luncheon when I would deliver my usual divorce peptalk. Getting back to Margaret’s house I was somewhat disappointed when, looking at her watch, she cried – no time for coffee – school run. Things warmed up between us later but it took a while.

Margaret and I were in the Caribbean when I first proposed to her and she refused me. I had read that a Russian nuclear powered icebreaker was going to the North Pole and proposed that we be the first to marry there. She would have none of it. We eventually celebrated the event at Wheatley Register Office (I was not going to go up the steps at Aylesbury again!) accompanied by Margaret’s parents, her son Patrick and Aunt Ivy. During the ceremony the Registrar broke her glasses and she accepted the offer of the use of mine. The Clerk then handed Margaret a copy of the

Marriage Certificate: I asked where mine was and she replied that only the bride was provided with one; that was the law. I suppose this is so that she can wave the thing saying, "I have got the bastard!" It did not take Margaret long to adopt Football card tactics. In the early days I received a whole crop of red ones but these days there is just the occasional yellow one.

We had arranged a "Bad Taste" party to celebrate my birthday some time prior to Margaret being prepared to accept me as her husband: we thought the one party could cover both events. Margaret chose to dress as a tart: the Jamaican Steel Band arrived early and seemed quite surprised that they should be greeted by such a lady in mini-skirt, fishnet tights and plunging front, in the depths of Buckinghamshire. They volunteered to visit the local pub for an hour and I think that, in turn, was a surprise for the publican. I doubt the Toastmaster had introduced guests thus dressed before. Two guests came in the ultimate bad taste dress: they came as me. A highlight for me was the laptop dance performed by Marion. I think she could make good money doing this.

Margaret attended St. Angela's Provident Convent Grammar School. In her peer group was Carole Christopher with whom she became friendly. Mother Superior had lectured the girls that "I will know what you had been up to by looking into your eyes gals". Not long after this Carole became a model for Silhouette swimwear where she was shown in a photograph teasingly fingering the zipper at the top of her costume: this advertisement was displayed all over the London Underground system. Ascending the escalator Margaret, in mini-skirt, ridiculously high heels, and blonde hair (not sticking with the colour God gave her) was guilt ridden to see Mother Mary Agnes glide past on the down side. Oh the depths to which her flock had fallen.

Cliff Richard lived at Cheshunt Council estate and went to the same school as Margaret's first husband, Cheshunt Secondary Modern School. The girls, when thirteen years old, established that Richard's family had moved to an up-market semi-detached house in Winchmore Hill and Carole and Margaret paid a visit one afternoon. During their extended vigil they were able to watch Richard's father cutting the lawn and Carole, in tiny writing with her fountain pen, plighted her troth on the fence. Up a ladder across the road was a man cleaning his windows. He descended and stormed across the road telling the girls off. Next on the scene was a policeman on a scooter issuing instructions that the girls should move on.

Close to home there was the Empire Variety Theatre (ATV Studios) In the early 1960's television was live and studio audiences were needed: Margaret attended regularly to see performances by the likes of Shirley Bassey, Russ Conway, Mike and Bernie Winters and Anthony Newley (Newley told Margaret that she was wearing a very pretty frock – she new what he meant by this!). Diana Dors would arrive in her white Cadillac with three or four poodles in the back. Many years later Margaret was talking with Bernard Cribbens when she told him that she had appeared on stage with him as a dancer in the Tommy Steele Spectacular. Filmed at the ATV studios when she was twelve years old: the local dancing school had been asked to provide extras. Her tally of dancing trophies amounts to over 150 cups and medals. She wanted to go on the stage, but thank goodness her father forbade this for she would not be my wife now.

Following us getting together, I can now start to write with a clearer conscience. Margaret is a dream to live with and I like to think I played quite a part in her son Patrick's life. He was good-looking, a mimic and could carry off a very presentable Michael Jackson dance routine at the age of just twelve. At sixteen, he showed promise at cricket and was

just starting to give me a hard time on the tennis court when he fell ill with cancer. For twelve months all those who knew him admired his courage and bravery in coming to terms with his situation and his calm acceptance of the pain and the many changes to which his body was subjected – partly by his illness and partly by the treatment. During this time Patrick was always optimistic, forward looking and determined to get better. Asked how he was I never heard him give any answer but “Fine”. Patrick was a very happy person who loved life and had no time for cynicism or intolerance. He had a mischievous sense of humour and enjoyed jokes at other people’s expense as well as jokes against himself. His humour was always gentle and without malice. He died a year after falling ill. This experience shared between us, has created an unbreakable bond. However can a mother cope with the loss of a child, sprung from her body?

Learning of Patrick’s illness Tottenham Football Club invited Patrick to the changing room on a match day to meet the players. Further; the Secretary sent Patrick regular updates about the Club as they happened. To this day I still support Tottenham.

Margaret lost her parents after sixty years of idyllic marriage. Roy was a superb gardener and fuchsia specialist: so much so that in the winter the house was enveloped in the wretched plants but Kath put up only modest resistance. In the war Roy was a Lieutenant on a coastal anti-submarine vessel operating out of the Forth. Re-commissioning after some work, and unarmed, they came across a U-boat in poor visibility. He did not know who was most scared. His Captain steered the ship away at 180 degrees and the U-boat dived. Admitted to hospital terminally ill, Kath told the young ambulance men “I will let you know whether it is twins or triplets!”

Returning to Linda, she was to marry James at Penn Parish church and, since she had fallen out with her father who divorced mother and married Miss Malaya, she asked if I would give her away. Enquiring of Margaret whether this was in order, she wanted to know when it would be. Learning it was to be in October she said the weather would be very unpredictable then: I could do it for two outfits. She had me yo-yoing between Harrods and HarveyNicks hat here - dress there – all day long. What she had not allowed for was that, as wife of the man giving away the bride, she would emerge from the vestry on the arm of the father of the bridegroom, as if she was mother-in-law.

Margaret's brother John and his wife Lynne have grown up children Jemma and Mark. Jemma is carving quite a place in the employment business from her City office. She is also a "looker" and was asked to enter the Miss England Beauty Queen contest. She is quite happy to "strut her stuff". She is also a "stirrer". With Margaret, we went to the Tutankhamun Exhibition at the O2 building. I just had to buy one of the headpieces and Margaret instructed me that on no account was I to wear it on the tube. After a couple of stops a strapping fellow took the seat opposite with an adoring daughter of around five. I think the girls liked the look of the man and Jemma would not find it a problem to be in conversation with him. She therefore prompted me to wear the headpiece for the daughter. Rebellious, I did this, and found the whole carriage fell about bar two people. Predictably Margaret wore a stern expression but so too did the little girl: you could see the word "plonker" forming in her mind.

Mark works very long hours as a site agent in a construction company at the upper end of the scale. In sport he excels at cricket and has long stormed past his father's talent for the game.

I have three surviving cousins: Clive, Janet and Geoffrey. Of these, Geoffrey would probably be considered the most “colourful”. He is a leading light in the village of Wingrave where he organises festivities and rings church bells. As far as I know he is the only relation to have been investigated by MI5. During the War, the Czech Government was exiled at Wingrave and Geoff has become the link man between the village and the Czech Embassy.

It was in 1994 that Geoff, having been elected Chairman of the Victory in Europe Committee, first made contact with the Czech Embassy, which culminated in their Ambassador coming to Wingrave’s 50th Anniversary of VE day the following year. Three years later, quietly in his office, Geoff took a call from the Foreign Office – President Havel was to visit the UK and would be going to Buckingham Palace, Mansion House, 10 Downing Street and Wingrave. Would Geoff organise the event in his village? It was at this stage that Special Branch ran their rule over “The Chestnuts”, where Geoff and Hilary live. Subsequently they have entertained at home various Ambassadors from Both Czech and Slovak Embassies and have been invited to private functions in Ambassadors’ homes including a Diplomatic Dog Party! In 2005, Geoff was summoned to the Czech Embassy and presented with a specially struck medal for the services he had rendered in cementing ties between the Czech Republic and Wingrave. The Minister of Defence presented this to him.

Geoff and Hilary were invited to Prague to the Cernin Palace for a Reception attended by all the worldwide Czech Ambassadors and other dignitaries for the 5th Anniversary of the Czech Republic joining NATO. The following morning they were picked up by two uniformed officers and taken to a suburb of Prague, Rostoky, where they were honoured at a civic reception and taken on a tour of the area, visiting the school, museum and finally (and Geoff and

Hilary understand how the Queen must feel) a visit to the brand new Sewage works.

Geoff is a member of “Wingrave Steamers” a group of traction engine enthusiasts who assist with the maintenance and running of a steam traction engine owned by Alan Frost in the village. In 2008 the engine was 100 years old and Geoff was selected to crew the engine across London – his leg on 22nd June was from Kew Gardens to St Paul’s Cathedral. The route took him around Hyde Park Corner, which was quite interesting maintaining a steady 5 MPH in the middle lane with double decker buses sweeping by on both sides. Then on to Buckingham Palace where the Police stopped them. Commercial vehicles were not permitted to drive down the Mall but Geoff won them over. Parliament Square, Embankment, Fleet Street and Old Bailey. After The City the engine crossed on the Woolwich Free Ferry and then, by low loader, down to Speldhurst in Kent. Geoff steamed in to open the village fete, doffing his bowler as if a Royal.

I was surprised to see Geoff being feted on television when he became “Bus Champion” by completing a 750 miles tour of Northern England in five days using his bus pass.

Margaret Rogers nee Copleston My cousin Peter started some genealogy research: quite rapidly I concluded that I was not keen on the direction it took and have not asked to be updated. In contrast Margaret’s ancestry is illustrious and I attach a chart of her forbears. The Copleston name has been most thoroughly researched back to the year 974 by a relation, Muriel Coriolanus Reson (amazingly she did this in 1983 prior to the availability of the Internet!), with information from 23 sources such as, Somerset House, Papal Letters, State Papers, Inquisitions Post Mortem, County and City archivists, and the British Library to name just a few. The complete report runs to many pages and I have extracted a few sections which might be of general interest:-

“Very close to its original position, where meet the parishes of Crediton, Colebrooke and Down St. Mary, stands a menhir or long stone now known as Coplestone Cross. It was mentioned in a charter of Edgar in 974 when he granted three hides of land to his then AElfhere Nymed. Half a mile south is Coplestone House built on the site of the ancient chapel and incorporating in its front wall the chapel entrance. (The family name is derived from the Coplestone or Copelanstan or Copulastan)

The earliest mention of the Coplestons is in Curia Regis Rolls, Essoins Hilary 1200, when Richard Copleston appears. John Copleston was MP for Launceston in 1364-5 and for Dartmouth, Totnes and Barnstaple from 1366 till 1380. In 1411 a pardon was given to Thomas Jul for the death of William Copleston at Henforth, Cornwall although the circumstances of his passing are not known.

John Copleston the younger, was buried at Colebrook in 1457, having been MP for Devon in 1421, 1435 and 1439. He was also steward for the Duchy of Cornwall and had the task in 1415 of taking to London the sum of £573-6s-8d for Henry 5th, borrowed from the Dean and Chapter of Exeter Cathedral, the Abbot of Tavistock, the Prior of Launceston, the Abbot of Buckfast and John. John returned to Devon with a tent of silver, embroidered with gold and precious stones, once owned by the Duke of Burgundy, as a pledge from Henry for the loan. (The loan was needed for the invasion of France and was later redeemed)

Philip Copleston was Sheriff of Devon and in 1463 sent forty “ryotous and mys governed people” to the church in Spreyton where William Powlesland was hearing Mass. The mob dragged William from the church to Philip at Copleston where he was made upon his knees to swear to be Philip’s man.

Ralph Copleston’s inquisition post mortem shows large land holdings in Devon and Cornwall, which is probably the reason for his first son being known as “The Great

Copleston". He dissolved the chantry in the parish church of Colebrook in 1545 "wtowt the kynges maiesties lycence by them first obteyned or hadd". Christopher lived in exciting times and moved to Tamerton Foliot. He must have been a man of quick temper for one Sunday morning in May 1592 he murdered his Godson (family legend has it a bastard son) Christopher Mons beneath the Copleston Oak outside Tamerton Foliot church. Queen Elizabeth's pardon tells that an argument "with abusive language and taunts" took place between the two and that Christopher Copleston violently, "with a certain small weapon known as a dagger", worth four shillings, struck Mons below his left shoulder blade from which wound he instantly died. Thirteen Cornish Manors and goods had been forfeited but Queen Elizabeth returned them all. Since the usual procedure was that goods could be purchased back there must have been good friends at Court.

John Stowele of Cothelstone killed Hugh Copleston near Ludgate in self-defence on the 7thn February 1573. A monument at Tamerton Foliot remembers John Stowele his wife Susan and eight children.

John Copleston, born in 1622 was Provost of King's College, Cambridge from 1681 and Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge the following year. In 1683 Charles 11 gave him a grace cup after he had preached a sermon in Exeter cathedral fulsome in its praise of the monarch. This cup is at Goldsmith's Hall in the City of London.

John Copleston was knighted by Oliver Cromwell at Whitehall in 1655. John married Mercy Hole and there is much on his career in the State Papers. He was accused by three widows of "packing the jury" when their husbands were tried for treason and be-headed. These ladies naturally wanted to see him excepted out of the Act of General Pardon and Oblivion. He was not, however, and lived a comfortable life at Charing Cross where he was a victim of a robbery therefrom of £800 worth of jewels in 1658.

Christopher Lancelot, 7 x grandfather of the researcher Muriel Coriolanus Reson, had five children to whom they gave the names Coriolanus, Abdolominus, Caesar, Panthea, and Wilmott! Christopher's brother George was a master in the Newfoundland trade with his 70 ton Sarah, named for Sarah Prust whom he married in Littleham in 1722

Three Bishops came from the family. John Bradford, son of Margaret Copleston was Provost of Oriel College, Oxford 1814-28 and Bishop of Llandaff and Dean of St. Paul's from 1828 until his death in 1849. He was also Professor of Poetry at the University of Oxford in 1802.

Josiah was a wood engraver who in 1850 married Ellen King daughter of a land surveyor in Leeds but he is not apparent in the census of the following year. Indeed he is "missing" until emerging at Greenwich in 1859 to marry Elizabeth Galloway declaring himself a "bachelor". Since Ellen died aged 73 and no annulment or divorce was found it would appear that this marriage was bigamous"

In 2015 a family member carried out research concerning Margaret's Great Aunt Mamie Odonoghue who arrived in America from Ireland as a very young girl; Margaret knew that she had prospered in America in that on her death a lawyer representing her came over to the UK seeking relatives (he was accompanied by Nancy Reagan) resulting in her parents receiving a legacy. Amongst the newly unveiled facts are these:

1908 Mamie was mascot to Macord's Regiment.

1913 She owned a half share in Gold Egg Mine, Sonora.

1915 12th Infantry presented her with a Loving Cup.

1916 She purchased the extensive Jas Breen property.

1916 She was described as being "immensely wealthy".

1916 She made a \$60,000 loss to the Levi Bros.

1919 She married Jack Lyons.

1921 Jack Lyons dies.

1922 Buys 1024 North Oregon Street, El Paso for \$64,000.

1936 Acquires Cafeteria in Los Angeles.

1976 Dies aged 103

2007 Margaret mistakenly throws her bequest from Mamie of a pearl necklace into the Panama Canal.

For his school, Margaret's Godson, Oliver, quickly produced a poem about F1 racing that I think shows immense promise. It reads:-

F1 Racing

The crowd cheering
The cars roaring
The petrol guzzling

The cars getting new shoes
The cars getting a drink
The heart of the car has changed

The oil on the track getting cleared up
The crashed wreck getting towed away
The tension in the room growing

The dangerous game played by the daring
The big price if you crash
The lovely fortune if you win

I want to be a racer
I want to challenge death,
I want to win the glorious fortune

The cars so light, they could take off
The engine so powerful it could run the world
The ride so thrilling, it is so much fun

Oliver Clarke (10)

Musbury Primary School, Axminster

