

Chapter 5

The Years Between 1973 - 1979

This will not be a long chapter as exact dates can't be put on the events that happened during this time as these were some of the unhappiest years for Gerry for 3 reasons; she suffered badly with Amoebic Dysentery, her mum Alice's heart problems were getting worse and she ended up, before we met, in a very difficult relationship with a man whose families had known each other through Saint Barnabus church since both of them were young but their coming together was, with hindsight not a meeting of like minds.

Arriving back from Australia Gerry was very ill and it took the doctors some time to get her health issues brought onto an even keel. Gerry had recurring problems all her life which, as one does, she learnt to cope and deal with, in the same way as her dad Fred who was in Sierra Leone during WW2 and came back to the UK with malaria which affected him, on a recurring basis, for all his life until he died in 1979.



Gerry in 1973 after Arriving Back in England from Australia

Arriving back from Australia Gerry eventually got a job as a secretary in the registry at Saint Bartholomew's (Barts) Hospital in London and after a few months decided she would apply to become a nurse. With nothing more than 'O' level qualifications, but working at the hospital, they put Gerry through the entrance examinations which she passed with ease and was accepted onto the next student nurse entry.

Gerry thoroughly enjoyed her time at Barts even though the nursing regime was very strict because they were one of the premier teaching hospitals in London. Uniforms had to be perfect and hats had to be handmade and Gerry said that she became an ace at making them around metal cooking pots. Any blemishes on the nurse's uniforms and the ward sister sent them off duty to change. They worked hard and played hard and Gerry said that the one benefit was that the London Taxi drivers never charged them a fare when they were out on the town and taken back to the nurse's quarters. Hearts of gold...

As student nurses they were expected to perform any tasks given to them on the wards in the hospital but Gerry always had a thing about eyes. Fortunately for Gerry one of her fellow student nurses didn't have a problem with eyes and would even take out men's glass eyes and wash them. Gerry's favourite ward she always said was Men's Surgical and she loved dealing with the patients, whatever they were suffering from and however it affected them.

The nurses were tested on a regular basis and if they didn't score very highly in the tests they were not allowed to continue the course. In this way Barts clearly built up a reputation for the very high calibre of the nurses that passed out from their student years. Much to Gerry's chagrin this was not to be for her and she regretted this for the rest of her life as she had no choice as to what happened next...

Gerry's mum Alice had severe angina problems in her late 50's and into her early 60's and due to her health and weight issues her doctors sent her to a dietician to lose weight and told not to do anything around the house which involved moving or lifting and not to put anything on shelves which involved putting her hands and arms above her head. Gerry's elder brother Laurie had died of cancer around 1968, Nick was not living at home at the time and Gerry's dad Fred was working to keep the family going.

So, the onus fell on Gerry to give up her nursing studies after six very successful months and care for her mum Alice at home until her health issues were stabilised. Although never said explicitly by Gerry it seemed that at this time she was at a very low ebb in her life and then she took up with Ken. From that moment onward things then started to go downhill.

Through various functions at Saint Barnabus church Gerry and Ken struck up a relationship because their families had known each other for so many years but Gerry never really explained why it was that the two of them got together as, given the way they separated, they seemed two mentally disparate people. Ken was a teacher at a local school and after striking up a relationship they bought a house together in Selhurst, which is a suburban area in the Borough of Croydon near to Crystal Palace Football Ground (Selhurst Park).

As if by premonition, because Gerry's mum Alice was a bit fey, she counselled Gerry to move in with Ken to see how things went, and not to get married until they were sure of what they were doing. Gerry did all the work to get the house and she said that initially things seemed to work out fine, but Ken was apparently quite introverted and Gerry quite outgoing and chalk and cheese work in some situations but not all. You know where we're going.

Ken was teaching in a local school and Gerry was doing temporary work in London but when they got home Gerry wanted to talk about her day but Ken was unresponsive and Gerry found this a very difficult situation.

As time went on this didn't improve and Ken had some strange ideas and wouldn't let Gerry buy a wardrobe for her clothes so her dad Fred got a large clothes hanger from the warehouse where he worked for a company of furriers and brought it around to the house. Gerry also wasn't allowed a television so she went out and bought one. Before she could even get her father to come around and put a plug on it the TV Licensing people arrived around the door and the only people that knew she had a TV was her parents and Ken.

Things then got more difficult because it transpired that one of Ken's fifteen year old female pupils had a crush on him and was writing sexual fantasies in a note book. She tried to come on to Ken but he would have nothing of it, so she went to her parents and claimed they were having a relationship together. When it all came to a head Gerry supported Ken one hundred per cent because she knew that some of the dates and times they were actually together and Ken could not have been with this girl. Case dismissed and life got back to some sort of normality until...

Gerry and Ken had a major disagreement over something that I can't recall but the outcome was that Ken refused to speak to Gerry. After a few days of not having any conversation at all Gerry was at work and talking to a young girl in the office who was very down to earth. Gerry said to her that her partner wasn't speaking to her and she said that happens. When Gerry said how many days they hadn't conversed she basically told Gerry she thought she was mad staying with someone like that.

Ken was a teacher and qualified with a Cert. Ed and Gerry always talked with him about her disappointment that she couldn't do her 'A' levels and apply for

a place at university. Ken was totally disinterested and unsupportive and this was in 1977. Totally pissed off with his uncaring attitude Gerry applied for, and was accepted, for a place on the Open University (OU) Arts Foundation course which started in January 1978. Ken then felt threatened because he thought that his future wife was going to be more academically qualified than him.

Xmas 1977 Gerry said that Ken's attitude towards her seemed to change and she prepared and they enjoyed a lovely festive season together. When Gerry thanked him for a good Xmas together he said that he didn't really care one way or the other but had just done it for her. This was the straw that broke the camel's back!! Simultaneously with starting her OU course in January 1978 Gerry went out and put the house on the market with a number of local estate agents.

It just happened and the details are lost in time but either a friend of a relative or friend of a friend was looking for a house in the area of Selhurst. Gerry did the deal and told Ken what was happening, that they personally were finished and the house was being sold. Gerry said that Ken's only response was nothing to do with their relationship but only "where am I going to live". Within a week Gerry had found him a flat, over a fish and chip shop, locally to the school at which he taught and that was that.

Gerry cleared her possessions from the house in Selhurst and moved back into the house with her parents at 66 Riverpark Gardens in Bromley and slowly got her life back together. She had an OU Arts summer school in 1978 at the University of Norwich in East Anglia and passed the end of year exams. We then tip into 1979 when, readers, things start to get interesting as this is the year we met. Read on...