

Chapter 6

Our Coming Together in 1979

Some people believe in destiny and fate and others don't and the 1998 film 'Sliding Doors' with Gwyneth Paltrow and John Hannah has a perspective on this. To some people destiny and fate are just words but to others they can have life changing consequences and so it was for us that destiny and fate took a hand.

Both of us lived in London with Gerry in Bromley in the south and Dave in Tottenham in the north. On Monday 31st May 1976 we were both on the pitch at Charlton Athletic Football Ground for a concert featuring the Sensational Alex Harvey Band and headlined by the Who. We were not that far away from each other on that evening, with our own sets of friends, but we were clearly not meant to meet at that time and place. We always liked to think that destiny and fate had something better in store for us and meeting at the concert may not have brought us together in the same way as 3 years on.

Our coming together was born out of individual disappointments. As you have read from the previous chapter Gerry's partner Ken's attitude to her trying to achieve her academic potential was the catalyst for Gerry saying "sod you" and enrolling on the Arts Foundation Course with the OU. At the same time Dave was working and asked his company if they would support him enrolling locally on a part-time degree in Chemistry. They refused his request of the grounds that they believed his Higher National Diploma (HND) in Analytical Chemistry was sufficient for the work he was doing, so Dave said "sod you" and enrolled in 1978 on the OU Science Foundation Course with a January 1979 start.

Having no higher level qualifications Gerry was obliged to pass 2 foundation course modules for her OU degree so, after passing her Arts Foundation Course, Gerry enrolled on the OU Science Foundation Course with a January 1979 start. So, we were both on the same course, in two different places in

London and with 2 different choices of summer school at either the University of Reading or the University of Scotland. Again, you can see how this could have all gone so wrong and that we would never have met. But this is where fate and destiny took a hand...

Gerry's tutor group was in South London and Dave's in North London but at the time Gerry was temping at a company in the City of London, near London Wall, and one of her work colleagues was a lady named Lena, who it just so happened was in Dave's tutor group in Tottenham. There is an excellent book by Julia Stuart entitled 'The Matchmaker of Perigord' where a barber is forced to give up his business, becomes a matchmaker and, develops an instinct for putting people together who might have seemed unlikely matches.

So it was that Lena, secretary and matchmaker, decided we were an ideal match for each other and was telling Gerry about Dave in work and then telling Dave about Gerry in the tutor group meetings. The next problem was getting us together at the summer school where Lena decided we would meet. It so happened that most of the students in the South of England went north to Stirling in Scotland and students in the North of England travelled south to Reading in Berkshire. Being the perfect matchmaker Lena acted as an intermediary getting information on which week we intended to go and manipulated events so we were both going on the last week of July.

Lena worked assiduously to make sure we both had information and also descriptions of each other and then she promptly told us that, after all this hard work to bring us together, she was having her summer school at the University of Reading. We had both written down her information about each other but neither of us could find it when we boarded the train, on Friday 20th July 1979, at Kings Cross Station in London to travel to Stirling Station in Scotland. We were looking for each other on the journey up to Stirling but obviously were in different carriages, but we both got together with fellow students for the 6 hour journey.

All the students were split into 4 equal sized groups based on the 4 starting practical classes of chemistry, physics, biology and earth sciences and we were not allocated the same starting group together. After fixed sessions of each specialty the groups rotated during the week until all the groups had done and completed each of the specialties. Needless to say, although we were in the same proximity during meal times and practical times we never managed to get together. Until Wednesday afternoon when fate and destiny struck!!

Wednesday afternoon was free time and there was a long walkway between the lecture and practical laboratories and the halls of residence with a bar about half way along. Dave had met a guy from London on the train whose real name is lost in time but on his badge, which every OU student had, was the name Arthur 'Two Sheds' Jackson, which was a famous sketch from Monty Python's Flying Circus. Dave and Arthur were at the bar together having a drink and a good laugh. Outside it was pissing down with rain so heavily it was inconceivable that anyone was going to visit the local sites or do any of the organized outdoor events.

At that moment in time Gerry was walking along the corridor towards the bar with Lorna, who was a girl that Gerry had met on the train from London Kings Cross to Stirling. Lorna happened to be in Dave's practical group and she had said to Gerry that there was a guy from London who had the most amazing laugh. On the way Gerry dropped her glasses and one of the lenses cracked which did nothing for her street cred. However, as they were walking towards the bar Dave was laughing with Arthur and Lorna said "that's him" and Gerry said that she was instantly hooked!!

There were a number of other students drinking at the bar but when they realised that there was chemistry (excuse the pun) between us they all lied through their teeth and said they were off to explore the sites. One couple said they were off to play tennis even though it was still raining stair rods

outside. This was a very nice, but obvious, ruse for them to leave and give us time together on our own.

We finished our drinks and then we all braved the pissing rain to get to our accommodation block and Gerry said she was off for a bath. Gerry at that time was wearing a very short dress and had legs up to her armpits and you can imagine the visions that Dave had!! Gerry gave Dave her room number and told him to wake her up at 6pm as she was a very heavy sleeper. As you can imagine, given the circumstances, 'Mister Punctuality' arrived outside Gerry's room at 6pm and banged on the door. Around 15 minutes later he got Lorna and Arthur to help because Gerry couldn't be roused and we all thought she was dead. A very bleary eyed and apologetic Gerry eventually opened the door and asked us for time to get ready.

Giving Gerry time to dress, and look her best, we all headed off for the corridor bar because the evening disco was in the area opposite. We met more fellow students out for a good time, from all places around the UK, and we sat, drank and chatted together. Then, at that fateful moment, over the speakers came one of Dave's all-time favourite songs 'Hit Me with Your Rhythm Stick' by Ian Dury and the Blockheads. Seizing the moment Dave asked Gerry up to dance and this, in many ways, was the defining moment of our relationship because after that we talked, drank and danced together into the early hours of the morning, and those around us became totally oblivious, and we became just completely inseparable.

What happened between us after practical classes and before the end of the summer school was not intimate but more an exploration of our mental and physical beings. We left the University of Stirling on Friday afternoon and we waited at the station, all students together, for the train back to Kings Cross. Due to bad weather the train was delayed so we all had more time together. Many people had formed relationships from different parts of the country but we were lucky that we were both from London.



End of OU Course Friday 27th July 1979 Waiting for the Train from Stirling to Kings Cross with Dave and Gerry Together and Lorna Flat Out on the Platform

The train eventually arrived but it was a long and torturous journey home because, it transpired, there was a landslide on the main line track and the train was diverted via Oban. Arriving at Kings Cross station we kissed and said goodbye and Gerry went over to her parents who were waiting for her. Gerry said that the only thing she could point out to them of me was the back of my head and hair disappearing down the top of the escalator.

Gerry didn't know whether she would ever see Dave again because we left each other without contact details but she simply got on with her life in her own very inimitable way. This is where things got very difficult for Dave as he was in a full time relationship with Sue, a lovely lady of a similar age, from Upshire in Essex, and close to Waltham Abbey where she worked. Dave and Sue had met around 4 years earlier at a club in Tottenham and were engaged to be married and had bought a house in Monkswood Avenue in Waltham Abbey.

After coming back from summer school and meeting Gerry there was, as you can imagine, a dilemma for Dave as to whether 2 days of a romance at an OU summer school could undo 4 years of a constant relationship. A couple of weeks passed when Dave and Sue were together but there was an angel on one of Dave's shoulders saying that he should go ahead and marry Sue and a devil on the other saying that it's not really what you want and you should go and find Gerry. Again fate took a hand because one evening before a tutor group class Dave found the information from Lena with a telephone number. This was the turning point...

Dave was working at the time for Thorn Brimar in Brimsdown, Enfield, as an analytical chemist and he phoned the number and Gerry was still working at the same company near London Wall. Dave told Gerry a massive fib and said that he had a meeting near to where she was working and could they meet for lunch? Gerry said yes and we arranged to meet, somewhere of Gerry's choice, outside Moorgate tube station for lunch the following day. Gerry said that the phone call was so unexpected because she never thought she would here from me again.

Gerry apparently took a change of clothes into work for our meeting and before we met all the secretaries bundled Gerry into the ladies toilet and got her dressed and did her makeup to ensure that when we met she looked like a million dollars, which of course she did. We had a lovely lunch together and this meeting, away from Stirling and the OU, made Dave realise what he would lose if he let Gerry go!! We met again a few days later and this time there was a very frank and serious discussion about our personal lives and Gerry made it quite clear that Dave would have to choose between her and Sue if he wanted to continue any sort of relationship with her. Gerry never felt threatened by Sue but, as a woman, she had an empathy with her because of what was happening during this difficult time between us and how Gerry's gain was Sue's loss.

This was a very difficult and heart wrenching time for Dave because Sue was a lovely lady and we had a comfortable life together but there was a spark about Gerry that Dave realised couldn't be ignored. Maybe the one thing that was to override everything was that Sue was centred with her family, and her horse Bruce, around Waltham Abbey and Upshire and Gerry had a free spirit. After some agonizing Dave bought a 4 pack of beers and sat down at the table in the dining room with his dad Sid and told him the full story.

My family all loved Sue because she was so easy going and amenable. Dave's dad Sid was Welsh and had a very, very, difficult childhood and so he had a way of cutting the most difficult of problems straight to the bone. Over a couple of beers, and after hearing and considering everything, he simply said "go with your heart son and do what it tells you to do". At that point it was clear that dad only wanted the best for me and he would accept any decision about life that I made. That was enough to know exactly what to do.

Going to see your fiancée and telling her that your relationship is over and that you wanted to make a life with someone else is not the easiest thing to do and it could be so easy to back out of because of the extreme emotional stress and, readers, you can imagine the meeting Sue and I had together wasn't at all easy. However, there was such a feeling that Gerry was the one and only Dave made it clear that there was no future for the two of us together. Dave found out in later life that Sue married and had a child and was very happy which was a lovely outcome for her and perhaps she found a soul mate.

The relationship was unwound and then there was the problem with the house but Sue's sister and husband lived in Monkswood Avenue, and were starting a family, so they wanted a larger house. A deal was done to sell the house to them and there was an amicable but unhappy separation, between Sue and Dave, which was entirely Dave's fault but can you really live your life full of "what if" and "if only". I seriously don't think you can because these questions

will haunt you all your life if you don't have the courage to take the difficult path in life over the easy one.

We were in touch during this time and Dave called Gerry to say that things with Sue had been unwound and Gerry said that he should come over for the weekend. Dave arrived on a Friday night and we went out for a drink together at the local pub The Garden Gate. We went out around Bromley during the day on Saturday and Gerry seduced Dave that evening when her parents were out at a get together at the church hall. We had a lovely Sunday together with Alice cooking a roast dinner and then Dave drove back to his parent's house in Tottenham.

Over the next couple of months Dave drove over to be with Gerry in Bromley and Gerry travelled over to be with Dave in Tottenham. We were getting on like a house on fire and then tragedy struck Gerry's family. The 3rd November 1979 and Gerry's dad Fred was 64 and looking forward to retiring because he had a number of gardens locally that he had arranged to look after. Fred and Alice were out on a Saturday shopping trip into Bromley when Fred popped into Woolworths to check the price of paint, as he was going to redecorate the inside of the house when he retired. Inside the store he had a heart attack and was dead before he hit the floor. Alice was waiting outside and she said that when the commotion started she instinctively knew that it was her husband. The family joke was that the cardiac arrest was brought on by the price of the paint.

Gerry was at Dave's mum and dad's house in Tottenham in the morning when the phone rang. Sid answered the phone and said "there's no one here of that name' and put the phone down. What we didn't know was that Gerry's Aunt Sheila was trying to contact Gerry and was going through the phone book and calling every Court in London. Knowing Sid was Welsh she phoned back and asked to speak to Dave. Dad passed the phone over and, although we had never met, talking to Sheila was like family. She said what had happened and

asked to speak to Gerry and afterwards we got straight in the car and drove to Bromley to be with Alice and the family.

Dave had barely known Fred because with Alice they had a good social life and we were together only at weekends at that time, but Fred said to Gerry that when he saw us together he was very happy for her and that she had met someone that he knew really loved her. The funeral was towards the end of November and Dave didn't go to the mass in the church but was at the house afterwards to help with the food and drink for family and friends. Gerry and Fred adored each other and Alice and Fred had been an item from their mid-teens so this was, as you can imagine, an extremely difficult time for everyone.

We had Xmas at my mum and dad's house in Tottenham and then I went over for New Year with Gerry, Alice and her family. It is a tradition in East London, and Alice was a true Cockney, that on New Year's Eve at midnight you have 'first footing' where a dark male goes around the houses with coal and whiskey to ensure good luck for the coming year. Unfortunately for Dave it transpired that Gerry's Cousin Ralph, who had black hair and was usually there for New Year, couldn't be with the family, so guess what...

Alice found a black wig from one of the themed evenings at the church hall and Dave was adorned with the wig, given a scuttle of coal and a bottle of scotch and sent off around the other houses in the close to knock on their doors and to offer them a piece of coal and a drink to bring them good luck for the year. Dave knew nobody but of course the word had got around and maybe it was being prepared to do this that helped to cement our relationship and confirm to Gerry and Alice that we were right for each other.

So 1979 ended with New Year and the story continues into 1980 with Alice chucking Gerry out the house and telling us to live together, our marriage in 1981 and buying our first house together in 1982...