

From Law to Lima, and Life to the Full!!



Hola all,

I have been asked to put together a 'few' lines to say a little about my adventures during the last few years!! How can I say this.....my life has been totally TRANSFORMED!!!!

Some of you may just have a recollection of me as a family solicitor for some 20 years, at Berry & Berry in Walkden. Whilst hectic years, it was made special by the lovely people around me. However, *however*, something *burned* away within me... I felt that life had something more to offer, but how to find it and when would I ever get the chance to explore what this might be. Like so many others, I was tied in to my work and all the commitments that involved.

Never could I have anticipated what lay in store for me....

In September 2005, my Partners gave me the wonderful opportunity to take a six month sabbatical. This seemed a miracle in itself, for which I will always be truly grateful. But oh what this led on to!!!

Some of you may have recently seen the TV series 'The Big Silence', which followed five people on an 8 day silent retreat at St Beuno's, an Ignatian retreat house in the hills of North Wales. Well, at the beginning of my six months, I decided that I had to make the most of this fantastic opportunity, which I saw as the answer to many, many prayers!!! SO, I went on silent retreats to St Beuno's, at the beginning, middle and end of my time, as a means of trying to ensure that I experienced in this very special time, whatever I was meant to. Me..in silence???...Not exactly known as Miss Tranquility!

I could never have dreamt of the radically life changing time this would prove to be.....in the silence..what did I find...the path to a new life..sounds dramatic, but it's true!

There is not the time nor opportunity here to explain how this came about, but came about it did!!!

I did not return to Berry & Berry. I was able to leave on very amicable terms, due to the great understanding of the good Partners I worked with. It could have been a little daunting, how was I going to survive? What was I going to live off?? However, I knew without doubt that I had to seize this amazing opportunity!! Seize it I did, with both hands!

As events transpired, I earned an honest crust, initially in beautiful Devon, working as a locum for a law firm where I encountered much kindness and was given the chance to live by the sea!! Subsequently I worked as a mediator, having experience in the mediation field for around 15 years.

After much travelling, I was still on a voyage of discovery. I was advised to return to St Beuno's, to undergo a three month course, which included 30 days (yes 30 days!) of silence. Never known to go to extremes!! This course was designed for many things and many differing needs, but basically it aimed to help people searching for their true calling and direction in life.

Well, during this silence, there were, I confess, the occasional whisperings, usually around the tea urn. On one such occasion, a lady passed to me the address of the Missionaries of Charity Brothers, in Manchester. I had never heard of the MC Brothers, as they are affectionately known. Their Congregation was established by Mother Teresa of Calcutta.

So, I left St Beuno's to face the world, never thinking that the MC Brothers would have any part in my life ahead. How wrong I was!!! I think Mother Teresa had a different idea.

In April 2007, I visited the Brothers' house for the first time.....immediately I felt at home with what I found!!! Thinking I was going to some sort of vicarage, with priests in long black cassocks and high tea being served from tables with frilly table cloths....I could not have been more wrong. "Can you peel potatoes?? Good, there's a sink full"!! So began my time with the Brothers.

What a wonderfully welcoming and caring environment I had stepped into. This started a very happy time with the Brothers, which continues to date. Along with many other people, I help out, whenever and however possible.

This help takes many simple forms, from transporting the Brothers to visit the poor families in the area, to helping cook for the people who come for meals each week. This may sound drab and may be you're thinking - wow, that's not for me and clearly it's not for everyone, but what's fascinating is that my reaction would have been exactly that. It has to be experienced.

All the Brothers I know are very special people, dedicating their lives to caring for 'the poorest of the poor'.

It has been a transforming time, of opening doors to very different situations and experiences previously not encountered by me. Always positive, happy and stretching, so many new opportunities have come from my time with the Brothers, including and very specially, my time in their home in Lima, Peru.

One Brother I knew from Manchester, Brother Ruben, was transferred to their home in Lima and this provided me with the chance to visit for a period of around 6 weeks in 2009/2010. I went to Guatemala to learn Spanish (to-date many more lessons still needed!). I lived with the local families for around 7 weeks, then on to Colombia to visit the Brothers home there and finally, to Lima. In the Lima home there are 29 disabled young men (the "boys") and much of the time, only 5 Brothers and a few staff and helpers, to care for them.

Whatever was I going to do there?? I had spent my adult life advising on divorce and separation and enjoying the finer things in life. NEVER had I been drawn to work with the disabled, quite the opposite if truth be told. All the more amazing, the absolute joy I experienced there, with all the boys, but for now there is only chance to tell you about one boy in particular.....enter Ricardito!!!!



Ricardito and me in the patio of the Brothers home

His favourite toy!!





Ricarditos' morning greeting!!



He, like most of the boys, was found many years ago walking the streets, probably abandoned by his family. The first time I met him, he was a restless bundle of frustration, crying and often throwing any object he could grab hold of. He would make no eye contact whatsoever. Now, he has blossomed into a bundle of utter delight and laughter. For me, he is a total joy to be around. This transformation is due to the love, affection and hours of patient time spent with him by one person in particular, Brother Ruben. He has been helped and inspired by, Marie-a, a very gifted teacher from England who has visited the home.



Happy lunchtime!



Ricardito is still very hard work. He is doubly incontinent and he does not speak (although he makes many amazing noises!!) He, like many of the boys, needs much help with his feeding and general care. However, he is so mischievous and has SUCH a personality. Sometimes, it's hard to remember that he is so called, 'disabled'.

There is such a light in his very brown Peruvian eyes; it seems to me, that he is more filled with life, than many of us in the 'normal' world. He is untouched by the worries of day to day life, how to pay the mortgage, how to earn a living, rushing from one job to the next, stuck in endless traffic every day.... He has no technology to entertain him, no mobile phone, no ipod. None of this is in his world and whilst there are undoubtedly many wonderful things that he cannot experience, he is seemingly filled with endless fun and games and joy!! He is a pure gift in my life and how much I treasure my time with him!!!

I have had the privilege of visiting the Lima home twice now and I am due to return in January 2011.

I spend my days, getting up around 5.15am (!!) helping to care for the boy's needs, feeding them, changing their nappies, dancing, singing, massaging their hands and ...painting!! There was a huge outdoor patio in the home, very grey and drab, and Brother Ruben had the bright idea that I might paint it!!! Well paint it I did (and much of myself in the process!)

I'm no artist but somehow my paintings were better than I ever thought possible. I think it must be divine inspiration. I could hear my old art teacher saying to me many years earlier, "Be bold Colette, be bold..." Bold I certainly was!!

I also visit the juvenile prison where some of the Brothers work. Brother Ruben is a talented mime artist, and clown and has used these talents to train some of the boys in the prison. They now have a successful group of performers giving shows to locally, including recently, a show to the judiciary. It gives these boys a chance to live a more fruitful life when they leave prison. As a result of the Brothers links, I have been able to visit the prison and have given art classes there on a couple of occasions. The boys are very talented and responsive. They are also wonderful musicians, but that is another story!!



On the job!!!



Part of the patio area viewed from the roof of the home.



Singing in the garden.



Some of the Brothers in Lima.



The boys in the juvenile prison with their works of art.

AND so..... I am now VERY excited, as soon I will return to the Brothers in Lima and all the boys and of course, to Ricardito.

I left Berry & Berry in 2005, in search of life, life to the full.....whatever God had in store for me....never could I have anticipated that I would find it thousands of miles away, in a very poor part of Lima, and more particularly, in a so called 'profoundly disabled' boyRicardito, my boy wonder!!!!!!

I have to thank God, because....it's a wonderful life!!!!!!



Brother Ruben with Ricardito.



Happy days!!!

