

Glee Club

Assignment

Eve Lennox is my DPCA, (Designated Personal Care Assistant) here in Everglades, located near the village of Luss, on the Bonnie, Bonnie Banks of Loch Lomond. Once upon a time this grand old house was the country retreat of a London stockbroker, then a hotel and now a Christian retirement home run by a trust which I set up when I was finally left to cope on my own.

Like me, all our clients are highly dependent, most of us in wheelchairs, some confined to bed 24/7. At Everglades, our aim is to create a patient-centred 'family' environment. For this reason, we choose our staff with great care, checking every detail of their past before we offer them a position for which we pay top rates and a full benefits package, hoping and praying they will remain with us for the long term.

Eve had a tragic start to her life. She was a child refugee, originally from a remote Kenyan fishing village. Aged five, she witnessed her parents being tortured and killed by Somali pirates high on drugs. With the others from her village, she fled westwards. Her group was harried at every turn. Because they were Christians, no one wanted them. After months of living as nomads they reached a refugee camp run by a Scottish couple called Ewan and Isobel Fallon. After a long wait for papers to be processed, Eve arrived in Glasgow as part of her adoptive family where they were housed in Maryhill. Without any English, she made a slow start at school but as soon as she learned to read and write, she became a model pupil, gaining enough Standard grades to become an SEN (State Enrolled Nurse).

As a result of her upbringing and education, Eve speaks English with a pleasant Glasgow lilt. She is a conscientious worker and a good listener, an attribute which we find is essential for all our staff.

While she attends to my personal care needs, Eve and I often sing along to YouTube. She has a beautiful, low soprano voice and we make a good duo. Singing by ear along with me, she is making steady progress, learning how to breathe for singing so that she can hold a note for the right length.

Naturally, I told her all about my singing career in The Glasgow Glee Club. Over time, this led to me revealing the whole of my story, bit by bit. Then, months later, she asked me if her husband could visit to ask some questions about my life.

Derek drives a delivery van for Amazon Prime. Derek and Eve were in the same class at primary school. They lived in adjacent tower blocks overlooking The Kelvin Dock on the

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Forth and Clyde Canal. When he was younger, Derek was a harum scarum scallywag, often playing truant to spend his time fishing from the canal bank or at the nearby River Kelvin. Later, after they had both left school and while Eve was at college, they became friends. Eve, an evangelical Christian, believed in Derek and encouraged him to go to church with her. Over time, they fell in love.

Since he married Eve, Derek has transformed his life and hopes to become a teacher. With encouragement from Eve, studying at Anniesland College part-time, he gained five Standard grades and four Highers. He is now in second year at the Open University, studying for a degree in Modern History. When Eve got the job here at Everglades, they applied to the local council and now have a flat in Balloch.

Eve asked on Derek's behalf if I would be willing to help him with his assignment entitled "Record the personal history of a friend or relative".

Earlier today, Derek brought his laptop and we sat together as he tapped out my story. Dear Derek, poor lad is not a typist. Truth be told, he is excruciatingly slow. I so wanted to take over and type it in for him, but it is his assignment, not mine and, in the end, we got there together.

He emailed me a copy and, predictably, it was riddled with error, so I set to and revamped it. At least my brain can still make my fingers fly over the keys, well most of the time. Towards the end of this session, I was tiring a little so no doubt a few typos have crept in. It might serve to add to its authenticity? I've put my story on a memory stick for him so he can reformat to the typeface etc which to suit his course submission requirements.

It's not cheating, not really. I'm just helping him along. It's what friends do for one another. We all need friends.

I'll take a little nap before Eve comes back to massage my legs to keep the circulation going.

Praise the Lord!

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Roots

Everyone told me I was singing from the age of three, a precocious bossy boots child who organised 'concerts' at my nursery. When I was five, Mum sent me to tap and modern dance classes. Aged eight, I moved on to stage school where I was encouraged to sing. I tried to learn piano so that I could accompany myself but my recurring problem was reading music, some sort of mental block, so I learned to wing it, singing by ear.

Jimmy Shaw, who lived three doors along from us and sat next to me at school was the only boy in these stage school classes. Our mothers were best friends from their school days and, probably because we were both only children, Jimmy and I became almost like brother and sister. For years we were in and out of each other's homes, staying over, innocently sharing a bed when we were younger, going hand in hand to school every day. Of course, later, when we were older, we were not allowed such free access to each other. When I changed from a girl into a woman, my mother warned me about sex and babies. I expect Jimmy was given a similar warning. Despite this new arrangement, we were still best friends.

The four of us who would become *The Glasgow Glee Club* had been classmates at Knightswood Secondary School. When we were in second year and old enough, you had to be fourteen, together we joined the Knightswood Church of Scotland YF (Youth Fellowship). None of us were from particularly religious families and had never been to Sunday School or Guides or Boys Brigade. To be honest, we joined the YF because of their Saturday night dances. It should be said for the record, these dances and the snogging afterwards were innocent, more or less.

Before I got married, I was Betty Brownlee. Looking back, I can see now that my marriage was a mistake born of ungodly acts. But we all have to learn by our mistakes. It is the way the world works, part of God's plan for us all. He watches and forgives and nudges us to the right path, trying to bring us into His flock of believers. His patience is like His love, infinite.

It was at one of these Saturday night dances I met Archie Wright. He looked like a tall version of Clark Gable and I fancied him rotten. We became an item right from the off. I think it was the difference in height which made him special for me as I was only five foot three to his six foot one. He was older than me, already working which made him seem even more fantastic. Right from our first snogging session, his hands were all over me. No one had ever touched me like that before and I loved it.

On our second date he asked me to marry him. Archie had condoms and I was more than willing. Much later I remembered so clearly what he said that night: "Look, Betty, this is

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the best way, eh? The last thing we want is to have kids, eh? That would just spoil everything". I thought he was right. Getting pregnant was not in my plan, not at that time.

Archie's father had a large garden hut on his allotment where we made love. After the first time, which was horrible, every other time was magical, thrilling. My head was spinning. All day and every day I looked forward to meeting him. Archie Wright was my world. I stopped going to the YF and lost contact with all my friends. Mum was against Archie from the start. She told me over and over all the Wrights were sneaky and selfish, but I did not see that side of him until later.

Our romance lasted two years while we saved up hard. Archie opened a bank account and every spare penny we had was saved. He was studying hard, passing his exams. I could tell he was going places. I was looking forward to living in a really nice house and raising a family of at least two, maybe three kids or even four.

When we married in the registrar's office in Martha Street, I was just eighteen and Archie was nearly twenty-two. I asked Maisie to be my Bridesmaid but she refused and Archie's sister Wilma stepped in. His older brother Callum was our Best Man. Mum and Dad refused to come to our wedding or to our reception upstairs in the Curler's pub on Byres Road.

Three months before we got married, we had rented a small one-bedroomed flat in Partick, a room and kitchen with an inside bathroom and we did it up nicely with new everything from our savings. We continued to use condoms to avoid babies because we were saving up to buy a place of our own. Later, because we were married, I got the contraceptive pill free from the marriage guidance clinic.

About a year after we got married, Archie landed a great job as an installation engineer, setting up large computer systems for a firm based in London. At first, he would send me a postcard every day. Sometimes, but only very occasionally, he would call on the telephone at my work.

With each promotion, he spent more and more time travelling. Business was booming for computer systems around the entire country. He travelled to all the towns around London but only as far up as Birmingham. Archie explained his firm had a separate team which did everything from Manchester northwards but that the bigger bonuses were earned out of London, where he was now second-in-charge of his team.

The daily postcards had stopped after the first few months. He said he was too busy, working overnights most weeks to get the projects finished. At first, he came home most weekends but from the middle of his second year he came home less and less until it was down to about once a month. One horrible time he did not come home for three months in a row, just sending a postcard once, explaining he was working round the clock, seven days a week.

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When he did come back to me after that three-months absence, I could tell at once he had changed. He seemed angry, dissatisfied with everything. Even his accent was changing. At every turn, he tried to pick a fight with me even though I tried my best not to annoy him. When I washed his shirts, I could smell perfume. When I found he had a passport, he said he had to get it because he been sent to Paris to do a rush installation system there. Later that night when he was asleep, I checked the stamps on his passport and found he had been to Spain three times, once to Portugal and once to Italy but never to France. This sowed the seed of doubt in my mind and I began to wonder if I wanted to keep waiting for a nice house that might never come. I was getting older and wanted babies and we were drifting apart. Looking back, that was the point when I should have been bolder and called a halt to the sham our marriage had become.

However, the money Archie was earning was good, more than four times what I was earning. Over these early years of our marriage, it had been agreed I would pay the rent and rates and the general upkeep of the flat. So, even though I had what I thought was a good wage, I could not seem to save much. To be honest, I was never good with money, not then anyway. By accident, on one of his rare home visits, I saw his passbook and realised we had more than enough in the bank to buy our little flat outright which would save on rent. Archie would not agree, he wanted a bigger place, maybe in Kelvindale or Jordanhill, a proper house with a garden. I knew with his good job we should be able to get a mortgage but again he refused saying we must wait until we could buy it outright.

I began to think if we had a baby, Archie would relent and make a move and we would get a house or a nicer, bigger flat maybe in Hyndland. So, without telling him, I stopped taking my pills. I thought I would get pregnant right away but it took almost two years for it to happen for us, mainly because we seldom had sex when he came home to me.

As soon as it was obvious I was pregnant, Archie stopped having sex with me and told me he wanted a divorce. There was a shouting match. He called me 'Wee Fat Betty Brownlee' and Frumpy Dumpy'. When I slapped his face, he shoved me about the room. Then, when he hit me in the stomach, I kicked out and caught him in the privates. He stumbled backwards over the coffee table and fell to the floor as I spat at him: "You Archie Wright, are a selfish prat as well as a bully. And you've been cheating on me, haven't you? Eh? Yeah, I can see it written all over your face. You are a stinking, lying rat! I hate you. Get out of my life and never ever come back."

For that outburst he punched me to the floor then kicked me until I was unconscious. I have often wondered if that beating affected my baby too.

When I came around, Archie had packed his bags and left. I changed the locks on the door of the flat. I wanted no more to do with him.

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The plain truth is, I was glad to get rid of him and signed all the divorce forms he pushed in front of me. Then he dropped his bombshell. Archie refused to share the money we had saved. He said he was the one who had done all the hard work to earn it. I am not sure exactly how much we had but I think it was probably over £10,000 which was a lot of money back then, in the sixties. Since the bank account was in his name alone, I got nothing. Perhaps if I had thought to hire a lawyer, I might have got something.

Months later, I met his sister Wilma in town, by accident, and she told me Archie had moved to London full-time where he got married to his long-term girlfriend as soon as he got his divorce papers finalised. Wilma boasted she was recently re-married for the second time, to an older widower. She had only married him because of his money and because he had been snipped. "You see, Betty, the big secret is never tae have any kids, eh?". It was only then I admitted to myself Mum had been correct about Archie and his family.

When my face was healed, I went to see Mum. Since I got married, I had only been out to Knightswood a few times and she had never been to see my flat in Partick. Only then did I discovered Dad was dying. He had suffered from emphysema for years. This led to a lung infection. He had been taken in with double pneumonia, pumped full of drugs and given oxygen. Visiting Dad in hospital every day and worrying about him, Mum was at her wit's end. I was desperate to share my problem with her, but I did not tell her what had happened or even that Archie had left me. I did not want to add to her burden.

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Susie

I had a horrible pregnancy. I was sick all the time but my lovely lady doctor prescribed medication which I took to help me through it. The pills worked like a treat. I did notice my weight was going up but I thought that was natural as I had always had trouble keeping it down. And, to be completely honest, now that my morning sickness had been cured, I took to treating myself with extra snacks which, nowadays, would be called binge eating.

When my baby was born, it was very clear something awful was wrong. They would not let me see her for days and days, telling me they were running tests. They also ran tests on me, taking blood, putting me on machines, inserting probes. During the second week, the head midwife and male doctor, a Professor I had never met before, sat together beside my bed and told me my baby girl had been damaged in the womb. "Of course, Mrs Wright," he said in a very posh voice, "it's a tragedy for you, for baby, for all of us. The only crumb of comfort I can offer you is I don't think baby will be long for this world." I saw the midwife glance at him in astonishment and, to his credit, he blushed at his crass choice of words before powering on, speaking more quickly, as if desperate to get it over with and escape. "This sort of situation you find yourself in is very rare, but it does happen, obviously. Nothing can be done, I'm afraid. It's just one of those things".

I was shattered, speechless, numb. And still yet they would not let me see her. I realise now they were waiting, expecting my baby to die. To spare me the pain of ever seeing her, they were being cruel to be kind.

At that point, consumed by guilt, I became convinced whatever was wrong with my baby was my fault, because of my fight with Archie. And, then a second reason sprang to mind - perhaps my baby had been crushed inside me, because I was so terribly overweight.

A few days after the Professor's visit, I was discharged from hospital, sent home to grieve alone. They had not asked about Archie and I had not told them he had left me. I telephoned the midwife team every day to be told, "Sorry, Mrs Wright, no change, baby is stable. We'll let you know as soon as it's over."

It was weeks before they let me see her. Only then did they admit the damage was due to thalidomide.

I have relived that day over and over. The junior nurse, a lovely Irish girl called Mairead, took me to see my daughter in the special baby care unit. Even though she had tiny, deformed limbs, she was beautiful. With Archie's startling blue eyes watching me, I like to think she was smiling at me. They had dressed her in a lovely frilly pink dress. To see

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her at last, with all the tubes and wires connected to her, so helpless and needy with nothing I could do for her, well, it broke my heart.

They left me with her, just the two of us, behind the screens. I wept for hours and hours until I had no tears left. A different, older nurse led me away and offered me pills to help me sleep. I stormed past the reception area then turned back and dropped the package into the wastebasket. Then I let myself down badly, screaming, "After what your other pills have done to me and my baby, do you expect me to take even more of your death pills? You must be joking!".

I called my beautiful, innocent girl Susie, after my Gran Susie, Dad's mother. I did not ever meet my other grandparents. Mum's mother and father were killed in the Clydebank Blitz.

On my next visit, the usual lady doctor confided that the specialists thought Susie would die within a few weeks. However, my wee darling clung to life like a limpet. At six months old she was transferred to *East Park Home* as a permanent resident, still connected to feeding tubes and supported by oxygen. I visited her every day and stared at her while mumbling incoherent prayers, asking for forgiveness for me and for Archie and for my GP who had given me the thalidomide pills which had caused Susie's abnormalities.

Susie died when she was a few days short of three years, a record for a child so badly damaged by that awful drug.

Alone, grieving for Susie even before she died, I turned to drink. Once I started, I could not stop. Within a few months of living alone, hiding my secret from everyone, I was a mess, an emotional train wreck. What amazes me still, something I later learned from AA sessions, is that I was still able to function adequately in my job. It turns out this is common among alcoholics, even doctors, surgeons, dentists, and even truck drivers, train drivers and pilots. I also realise now that I was luckier than most. When I was able to divert myself with work, I could resist the urge to drink. It was only when I was alone with my guilt and self-loathing that I needed alcohol.

At this point, I realise I should explain my employment situation. When Archie left me, I was thirty-two, working as a PA for Jack Strang who ran *Strang's Recruitment*, recruiting secretarial and admin staff for local councils and health boards and technical personnel for the construction industry. I had been with Jack since leaving Anniesland College with my shorthand-typing certificate, aged sixteen.

The next five years was a dark time in my life, best left untold.

Without Jack and his wife Peggy, I would have floundered entirely.

Gradually, with their support, I fought back and when I was wholly well again, I hit the restart button and became a proper Christian, rejoining my home church in Knightswood

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where Jimmy was now Captain of the Boys' Brigade. In my second year back from the brink, I began helping Maisie Semple with the Life Boys and the three of us renewed our friendship after a gap of too, too many years.

In case you are wondering, our threesome enjoyed an entirely platonic relationship.

By this stage, Jimmy was well-married to Irene who kept very close tabs on him. Through the grapevine, I learned that Irene had suffered four miscarriages, poor woman. Despite these disappointments, Jimmy seemed like his self of old, happy, polite, his cheeky grin and always full of little quips which kept everyone smiling along. Such a lovely, lovely man. I thought back to our schooldays and to the early days at the YF and wondered many times what might have happened if I had not become infatuated with Archie. Perhaps back then, we had both missed a good opportunity.

Like Susie, Dad lingered in hospital for many years. When he died, and now I was sober and 'normal' again, I moved in with Mum and started to save for a place of my own. Mum began nagging at me, saying I was far too young not to look for another husband. I told her I could not imagine ever going through the pain of having a child and losing her, not again, adding, "Anyhow, Mum, after what I've been through, I no longer have the slightest interest in sex.". At this she just smiled. But it was true, I really did not want to risk sex again, just in case it led to another betrayal.

However, a few months after this long heart to heart chat, I began to dream, to hope that someday, somehow, I might meet someone who might want to marry me, perhaps a kind, quiet, older man who did not want a family either. Since everyone at *Strang's Recruitment* still thought of me as Betty Brownlee, I decided to change my name back and dropped the 'Mrs.' title and began calling myself, 'Miss'. Just that simple act seemed to make me feel so much younger.

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The Glasgow Glee Club

Now it is all history, I can see it was almost inevitable the four of us would get together and form *The Glasgow Glee Club*. In the beginning it was my idea. We would sing for donations to raise money for *East Park Home*, in memory of Susie.

Everyone in the church choir said I had a lovely voice and sounded like Kathy Kay. However, from the minute I saw Barbra Streisand in *Funny Girl*, she was my icon, the person I would have loved to sing like. Of course, as Maisie was quick to point out, Miss Streisand has a full three octave range while I am a middle to high soprano with almost no lower notes.

Jimmy Greenshaw was our tenor-baritone. Maisie always insisted that Jimmy sang like Bing Crosby but I think he sounded more like Perry Como, crooning easily with the same relaxed style. I asked Jimmy first, before Maise or Harry because he was the only one of us who had a car, a big swish car provided by his firm. He was a technical sales rep for a firm which sold pumps and pressurising systems for buildings, a firm owned by his father-in-law.

Maisie Semple was our pianist who also sang alto cum tenor to harmonise, when appropriate. Maisie never married and half-joking and in whole earnest, she told everyone she was waiting for someone like Jimmy. We all knew she had a life-long crush on Jimmy but aged nineteen, in his first real job after school while he was still an apprentice, he was snapped up by Irene Mackenzie, the owner's daughter.

At the time, Irene was twenty-five and must have been thinking she was going to be left on the shelf. I only met her later, after we started *The Glasgow Glee Club* when she was in her mid-forties. In height, Irene was even smaller than me and painfully thin with a long narrow face and small brown teeth set in large pink gums, not an oil painting. She was a heavy smoker, addicted, engulfed powerful floral scent and sucking on peppermints which she used to cover the smell of nicotine on her breathe.

Although Maisie kept trying quite openly for Jimmy at every opportunity, unlike Archie, Jimmy was not the philandering type. He was just a kind, soft man who tried to do his best for everyone, a true Christian, charming, thoughtful, polite, perfect. All the women who met Jimmy came to love him. And, because he was not a show-off even though he was good-looking in a shorter version of Fred Astaire sort of way, most men like him too, laughing at his quips and silly jokes, all good clean fun, never smutty.

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Harry Traynor sang bass-baritone and strummed along with his guitar. Back in the YF days, I had been to the pictures with Harry once or twice and afterwards we had kissed but somehow, we just did not click. I think it was because he was a slow thinker, always miles behind any conversation. In singing style, I thought of him as Harry Belafonte and at least on this Masie and I agreed.

Only Maisie could read music fluently, taught by her mother who had taken pupils for music lessons from her front room, piano, song and guitar. Harry had attended these classes with Mrs Semple for about three years until he gave up. To be fair to Maisie, she was a far better teacher than her mother had been and she rose to the challenge with Harry and eventually, with extra free lessons from Maisie, Harry had around twenty songs he could play solo parts for as a lead-in until Masie came in on her piano or portable keyboard to lead us as we started to sing, after which Harry reverted to strumming his basic chords while concentrating on singing.

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Setting Out

I had been 'dry' for over three years when we got together to discuss my idea.

To be fair, I was vague, unsure if the others would accept my suggestion. From the outset it was Maisie who was the driving force, 'the organiser', our secretary/treasurer/general factotum, and, if it is not too grand a title, our musical director, the one who had the final word on what songs we would sing at each venue. To be fair, Maisie was very good, making sure what we gave them were what the audiences wanted to hear, songs from the shows and other standards from the thirties, forties, fifties and sixties spiced with singalong versions of the early Beatles songs, the catchy ones which we rolled into a medley.

Let me rewind first.

Knowing Maisie from schooldays, from the YF and now from the Life Boys, I had been expecting this takeover and so let it pass. In her schoolteacher persona, Maisie was now the rather imposing figure known to her colleagues and pupils as 'Ms. Margaret Semple'. By dint of hard work, dedication and ability, Maisie had risen to the dizzy height of Head of Music at a well-known fee-paying school nearby where she nurtured a reputation as a curmudgeonly tyrant, a strident woman determined to have her own way in everything. To us, she was more of a mother figure or a big sister.

Now I was back on the straight and narrow, Mum and I were on good terms again. I was still saving for my own flat but Mum was failing, and I kept deferring my planned move. When I issued the invitations to our first meeting, to discuss my idea of forming a quartet, Maisie insisted we meet at her new home in the heart of Glasgow's West End.

I had expected this, she had always been a show-off, dismissing my offer with:

"After all, Betty, how could we rehearse without a *proper* piano? Anyway, the neighbours would object, wouldn't they? And then there is your poor dear deaf mother with her TV turned up to full volume and her commode stinking the place out."

Like Jimmy and I, Maisie was also an only child who had been brought up in Knightswood, in a two-bedroomed council flat identical to mine, two streets away. Her new home had been inherited a few years earlier from her Aunt Veronica, her mother's elder sister who had married her boss, Niall McGoldrick, a successful solicitor who made his pile from lucrative fees working for property developers. When Veronica was left on her own - McGoldrick had died on the golf course of a heart attack - Maisie had immediately moved in with her aunt, to make sure of her inheritance.

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I arrived at the sandstone fronted town house in Rosslyn Terrace just ahead of Jimmy and was taken by Maisie to sit in the first floor Withdrawing Room which she grandly now called 'The Music Studio', a vast, old-fashioned, high-ceiling room dominated by a Steinway grand sitting in the bay window. By my side, on a silver coaster resting on a small highly polished occasional table, sat a tiny crystal glass containing sweet sherry, a drink which I had refused but which Maisie had poured very deliberately ignoring my request for a soft drink. She well knew that I was a member of Alcoholics Anonymous, clinging to total sobriety after several false starts.

From below, I could hear Maisie greeting Jimmy in the wide hallway. Gone was her Knightswood accent; now she was pure Kelvinside.

'So, there you are at long, long last. Dear, dear Jimmy, how nice to see you. And here you are in my new home at last, you beautiful man. Please, don't be a stranger. Drop by anytime. Let me take your coat. Such a disappointing wet night after such a nice spell, is it not? Well, look at you! Is that suit new, just for me? Oh, do give me a cuddle! Mmm, what lovely aftershave. Do you know, Jimmy, you look as suave and debonair as ever? How did you ever manage to escape from me? You know I always wanted you, don't you? We would have made a great couple, still could, if you want to give it a whirl. And is that another new car? *And blue*, my very most favourite colour. And how is business in the rather prosaic world of pressurising pumps?'

As they entered the room, Jimmy replied, 'Yes, I'm fine, thanks, Maisie. Irene sends her regards. She is visiting her sister Miriam, just along the road in Novar Drive. I've due to collect her at half-past nine. On the dot. Three-line whip! My, my, my, Betty Brownlee, you are looking well tonight. How are you keeping? Are you still singing at the *Phoenix* with Peter Mooney? I hear there is a new record coming out.'

'Yes. In fact, that's really what gave me the idea for our little song group. Quite a few from the choir are already . . .'

'*Jimmy*, over here, beside me. A whisky and soda?'

'No, thanks, *Maisie*, I'm driving, so no alcohol. Anyway, my tummy is acting up so I'm more or less on the wagon nowadays. I'll have the soda on its own, though, thanks.'

The door chime sounded, long, loud and continuous, resounding up from the entrance hallway below.

'Ah, Harry, at last. Now, you two, behave while I fetch him before he burns out the circuit.'

Maisie bustled off, leaving me alone with Jimmy who beamed across then rose and moved to sit nearer me.

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'So, Betty, you are over it all now? Good for you. You've had a time of it but yes, this quartet notion of yours seems like a very good idea. And you managed to find Harry too. You know, I haven't seen him in years.'

The door flew open. Arm in arm, Maisie marched Harry to the centre of the room.

'Look who the cat dragged in!'

Harry beamed his familiar droll smile and made a little bow. Jimmy was on his feet again to cross the room. The two men shook hands warmly.

'Harry, and not a day older. Marriage suits you well. How many kids is it you have now?'

'Just the three. Jean is ten, Marilyn is eight and Felicity is six. Patricia says we're finished and made me get the snip. Oh, and we're not actually married, not yet. I have asked her dozens of times but she just smiles and says, "No, Harry, not yet. Maybe next time you ask you might get lucky, catch me in a moment of weakness, eh? Unless of course Pat Boone gets his offer in first."'

'Why on earth would she refuse you?' asked Maisie. 'If you asked me, I would say yes in a flash.'

'Thanks Maisie but Patricia is the one and only for me. I'll keep asking and I suppose, when she's ready, we'll tie the knot.'

Jimmy asked, 'And how is it going in the world of printing?'

'Good, thanks. I'm out of the *Daily Record* now, working for Glasgow Corporation at their printing works near the Plaza at Eglinton Toll. I've been there for about three years and I'm an under-chargehand now. Patricia's father works there, he got me in. He's in the Masons with the general manager. I had to join the Masons too, to keep them happy but I don't attend. It's all mumbo jumbo so far as I can tell. Anyway, it means I don't have to work nights now. Normal hours for the first time in my life.'

'Harry, would you like a drink? Whisky and soda? Rum and Coke? Brandy and Babycham?'

'Thanks, but no thanks. I'm on my motorbike. Anyway, I've given up drinking. We're sending the girls to music lessons. Patricia too, she's always wanted to play the piano. Her mother has bought us a good second-hand one. But piano's not for me though, I'll stick to my guitar.'

'Oh, well. It's just me and Betty hitting the sauce, is it?'

Maisie drained her G&T and set about mixing another one. I saw Jimmy and Harry glance across at me and I shook my head. Unasked, Maisie delivered another glass with a G&T in it and placed it on a second silver coaster beside the undrunk sherry.

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'Right, let's make a start. Here, take this music. I've made it into a booklet. We will rehearse until we don't need music. You can take them away but please don't let them out of your personal possession. I have a blanket licence for a certain school which shall remain nameless. For our present purpose, you are temporary pupils. The booklet contains our first twenty songs but I expect we might need another ten or so to complete our repertoire and after that we can add other songs as we go along. I think we should aim at two forty-minute sessions separated by a tea interval. I think it best . . .'

I glanced through the list and saw two of my favourites: *Shenandoah* and *Beautiful Dreamer*. Then further on, a few others including *Song of the Clyde* and *Westering Home*.

Maisie was speaking again.

'Jimmy, I suggest you might like to lead on *The Eriskay Love Lilt* with me harmonizing. Harry, would you lead on *Some Enchanted Evening* with Betty in support? And of course, Harry, you must sing *Hole in the Bucket*, you as Belafonte and me as Odetta and then you'll solo with *Island in the Sun* with Betty to follow with her rendering of *Beautiful Dreamer*. Jimmy, will you lead on *The Hippopotamus Song* to end the first half? And to end the second half I suggest we do a Harry Lauder medley and finish with *Keep Right on to the End of the Road*. Then, for our encore, we'll sing them a medley of Scottish songs, probably *Bonnie Bonnie Banks* then *A Man's a Man*, finishing with *Scots Wa' Hae*. What do you say?'

'Maisie, that looks tremendous, said Jimmy. 'Well done! Are we all agreed?'

Maisie was pleased and ploughed on: 'Good, let's do a first sing through and get warmed-up, shall we? Our first outing is in the middle of next month, at a golf club ladies' social in Newton Mearns. They want us to start at seven o'clock sharp and have offered to feed us with a high tea beforehand and provide us with tea and scones at the interval. They agreed to a suggested donation of £30 plus £5 for travelling expenses . Actually, they agreed without haggling. Maybe I should have suggested a higher amount?'

'Maisie,' I said. 'Are we calling ourselves *The Truth Seekers*?'

'No, Betty. I suggest we call ourselves *The Glee Club*.'

Jimmy said, 'There's a *Glee Club* in Falkirk, I think.'

'Okay, let's call ourselves *The Glasgow Glee Club*,' said Maisie.

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Golden Years

That first concert at Newton Mearns was a wonderful success. Our 'fame' spread by word of mouth. Requests started with a trickle then became a flood. Maisie did all the telephoning, gently uncovering what songs might best suit our audiences and writing to confirm arrangements. As with everything she did, she was meticulous.

Our quartet rolled on for almost eleven seasons, singing from early October to the end of May, usually twice a month, performing for women's guilds, men's fellowships, bowling clubs and the like, usually on Thursday nights but occasionally on Saturday evenings or Sunday afternoons at old folks' homes. As our reputation grew, we had to ration our services. On the runup to Christmas we could have been out singing almost every night.

However, all around us things were changing. Towards the end of our time in the spotlight of popularity, older people, who were our main audience, were becoming less involved in clubs and church groups, preferring to stay at home to watch TV programs. Singing to reduced audiences, we soldiered on, mainly because we all loved to sing and make music.

In our personal lives, time was moving on for us too. When Mum died, I moved in with Maisie. I resisted initially but I could see she needed help to cope with the rheumatoid arthritis which had flared up with her menopause. Her reduced mobility forced her to resign from her post at her posh school, but thankfully she was still able to give personal piano and singing lessons from her home. Because of her medication, Maisie was now teetotal like me and, like many reformed heavier drinkers, she became very anti-drink.

At my office, Jack and Peggy Strang decided it was time to sell their business and retire to Portugal where they had built a new villa. The new owner was a London based recruitment firm with ambitions to create a string of offices throughout the whole of Britain. The new Glasgow manager was a lovely young woman, Loise Kellerman, who had been promoted from their Birmingham office. Loise was a force of nature, a techie guru who was keen I should stay on and help integrate our simple computer database with their rather frightening all singing and dancing countrywide network of linked computers and remote servers. Although I liked and respected Loise, I sensed quickly I would be immediately out of my depth.

Anyway, without Jack and Peggy it would all be different, less intimate. I was ready for a change, looked around and, through an agency very much like *Strang's Recruitment*, I landed a good steady job at Glasgow University, in the Bursar's office as a secretarial assistant, working flexible hours to suit their needs. This quickly settled to four mornings a week plus additional hours covering illnesses and holidays of full timers. At the end of

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my six-month contract, they offered me a permanent position with full benefits and a good pension.

I felt this arrangement would allow me more time and energy to help Maisie. As a parting gesture, Jack, from his proceeds, arranged for my pension to be fully paid up and placed with *Standard Life*, a 'safe-hands' pension investment mutual company tasked with growing my nest egg until I chose to retire.

This all happened during our golden years. Jimmy, with his firm's car, always a new, bigger and better one each year, continued to provide us with transport, dropping Maisie and I off after each outing but never coming in for a cuppa, under strict instructions to get home to Irene. Harry, would arrive by motorbike with his guitar in a hard case, strapped to his back.

In general, we declined singing at wedding receptions, mainly because of the likelihood of drunkenness. Those we did sing at we did without payment, usually second marriages for personal friends. On a few occasions we were asked to sing and lead at wakes or informal memorial services but Maisie was very strict on that and always refused. Again, the likely consumption of alcohol was the reasoning here and to avoid becoming involved in drunken karaoke sessions.

Under Maisie, we operated in a friendly but professional manner and never shared the stage or allowed others to sing solo from the floor.

As our reputation spread, from time to time we were asked to sing at quite prestigious venues and for exalted company. In our final year, on an August weekend, we were invited sing a 'requested medley' of Scottish Songs for Prince Charles. This took place after a special ceremony at Mount Stuart House on the Isle of Bute. The donation we received was our highest ever, a cheque signed "John Bute" aka Johnny Dumfries, (The Marquis of Bute).

However, the excitement and splendour of this occasion was marred by Irene's sudden death, news which we learned late on the Friday evening when we returned to our hotel in Rothesay. At first it was thought Irene had overdosed accidentally but a subsequent inquiry revealed she had committed suicide. It seems, like many similar suicides, Irene had been saving her warfarin heart pills until she had enough to kill herself with a massive overdose which caused internal bleeding, flooding her damaged lungs, suffocating her.

Jimmy was devastated. At the delayed funeral, Maisie excelled herself, delivering a beautiful speech describing Irene as a loving, caring and devoted wife. With Jimmy to my right and Harry to my left, we stood slightly to one side of Maisie on the podium at Partick Burgh Halls. Despite Jimmy's strong church connections, Irene had left a note stipulating that as an atheist, she did not want her funeral to be marred by any sort of religious mumbo jumbo.

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Most of the people attending were from Jimmy's office plus his many friends from his business life and the remnant of his small family. There was a full contingent of BB officers, past and present and a huge number from the congregation of Knightswood church. As Maisie powered through her delivery, describing a fiction of the 'wonderful' and 'amazing' life and times of "Irene Shaw nee Mackenzie", I watched the faces of the listeners and saw disbelief and puzzlement.

Then, as a final tribute, at Irene's sister Miriam's special request and in defiance of Irene's last wishes, Maisie played her keyboard in church organ mode while our quartet led the attendees in a full rendering of *How Great Thou Art*, one of my all-time favourite hymns.

During the teetotal sit-down meal of steak pie, new potatoes, carrots and peas and the subsequent milling around as old friends caught up on their news, I discovered the reality of Irene's life. From dark mutterings, I learned she was a very lonely woman. Jimmy had been the centre of her personal universe. She had coveted him so much, in her fierce jealousy, she had attempted to dominate him, smother him, trying to control his every move, his every contact with those outside their small family group. Without Jimmy, she probably would have had no friends at all. I also learned Irene had vehemently resented his involvement with *The Glasgow Glee Club*. It is a credit to Jimmy that while never complaining, he maintained his contact with us despite this horrible opposition.

In the weeks which followed the internment, as we prepared for the forthcoming *Glee Club* season ahead, Maisie and I tried to keep Jimmy under our wings, telephoning him each night, inviting him to Rosslyn Terrace for meals, including him in our outings to orchestral concerts, plays and shows, even taking him away for a long weekend to Crieff Hydro. At first, it seemed to be working and, after a fashion Jimmy gradually returned to a semblance of his old self. Like many who have been bereaved by suicide, he threw himself into work and put extra time into his activities with the Boys Brigade. He also took up golf, playing with Eric Laidlaw, Irene's sister's husband and although he was far from proficient, he seemed to be enjoying his newfound freedom.

Six months after Irene's death, in the run up to Christmas, tragedy struck again.

We had been expecting him to collect us from Rosslyn Terrace to take us to a show in Edinburgh. Jimmy was always punctual, often early, never late. When he did not arrive and did not answer his telephone, we took a taxi to his house in Lenzie. Jimmy had suffered a stroke, at home, alone. Later, we worked out he had probably been in a coma for around fifteen hours, unattended, in his pyjamas, lying on the floor of his en suite bathroom, a few feet from the spot where Irene had died.

Naturally, we had to suspend our planned *Glee Club* performances, initially cancelling our outings until the end of January. During February, when we knew Jimmy was on the mend,

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the three of us had a go on our own but it was just not the same without him and Maisie decided to 'suspend operations' for the rest of the season until we hoped Jimmy would return. She wrote to all our many friends explaining and cancelling their bookings, inviting them to give her dates they wished for the follow-on season. In return she received a deluge of 'Get Well Soon' cards and heartfelt letters. It was very moving to be loved by so many nice people.

After three weeks in intensive care and six weeks in a recovery ward, he was ready to leave hospital and Maisie and I persuaded him to come to live with us at Rosslyn Terrace.

Gradually, one slow success at a time, with the help of many physios, a brilliant speech therapist called May Burns and other helpers, we managed to 'recover' him and after nine months in our care, he was able to walk, talk and even drive again. However, he was left with a palsy on his left side and a slight slur which made him sound as if he was tipsy drunk. He returned to work but two years on from his stroke, he decided he was becoming a burden to the firm and resigned on good terms with a large *ex gratia* goodwill payment, a very adequate pension and a huge new Jaguar which the firm provided as a retirement gift.

It was Maisie who persuaded him to come and live with us full-time.

Although his house was sound and in a prime location, handy for schools and the railway station, it had become tired under Irene's reclusive lifestyle - she would not allow 'strange tradesmen' to cross her doorstep. Jimmy employed an Architect friend Ian Barry who remodelled and refurbish it, landscaped the large garden, turning the property into one of the most desirable in the area. It was a successful move and the house sold at well over the asking price, in only two weeks.

In our new arrangement at Rosslyn Terrace, we all had our own rooms and lived harmoniously. I was cast in the role of head cook and bottlwasher, but the heavy work was done by a wonderful woman called Allison Denholm who came in every weekday morning from nine o'clock to noon. She lived in Old Kilpatrick with Martin, her train driver husband which meant she got free travel to Hyndland station then walked the half mile or so to our house. On wet days, Jimmy would collect her and drop her off at Hyndland.

Allison became one of our 'family'. Over time, we met her beautiful and clever daughter and her good looking and equally bright son. Emily and Thomas were like the children or grandchildren whom Maisie, Jimmy and I had never had. It was as if God was compensating us, we thought, we put Allison and her family at the top of our prayer list prayed for the Denholm family each night before we retired to our separate rooms.

Both children went on to study at Glasgow University, Emily becoming a GP and Thomas a Solicitor. During their time at university, we supported the with informal grants. When

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Thomas graduated, following a suggestion from Maisie, he specialised in property and soon became a rising star in the world of Property Development.

I should add that during this period of our lives, Harry and his wife Patricia became frequent visitors at Rosslyn Terrace, arriving on Harry's motorbike and joining in with all our birthday and other special celebrations. Patricia had become proficient on the piano and, on occasion, spelled Maisie whose playing endurance was increasingly limited by her arthritis.

From Portugal, we received monthly epistles from Jack and Peggy Strang and always phoned on their birthdays and at Christmas, New Year and Easter to have a long natter. Maisie and Jimmy were not willing to travel to see them, on health grounds, but I made a few trips to their villa, usually in February or March to grab some winter's sun.

On the run up to the Millennium, Peggy developed heart arrhythmia and had to have a pacemaker fitted. Then, sadly, a few months after her operation, she suffered a relapse and died in her sleep, peacefully. Jack, now a keen golfer and bowler, soldiered on alone, but his letters became less frequent. Instead, we developed a new routine and telephoned from Rosslyn Terrace most Sunday afternoons, exchanging news and trying to cheer him up. But we could tell Jack was not the man he had been, his spark was gone.

Shortly after Peggy died, Maisie caught a 'mystery' viral infection which laid her low over a two-year period until the medics found a treatment which recovered her to her former self. I had hoped to pay a visit to Portugal, but I was unable to leave her alone with Jimmy who was also becoming frailer.

When we called Jack on his eighty-ninth birthday, he said to me, "Betty, I've had a good life. In fact, I've had a great life but now, without Peggy, I just don't want to go on. I'm ready to catch the final bus and I hope she will be waiting for me when I arrive."

Despite this oft repeated message, he muddled on alone for a further three years.

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Everglades

In 2002, to celebrate the year of our sixtieth birthdays, the three of us decided to open our pension 'pots' and splash out on a six-month round-the-world cruise, from Southampton.

Until that point, I had not paid much attention to the complicated statements which *Standard Life* had been sending me twice a year. But now, when I met my personal advisor, she explained what they meant and I learned my pension was worth just over £400,000. I was flabbergasted.

Then to add to my surprise, I received a letter from the solicitor handling the estate of Jack Strang advising that I was his sole beneficiary and would soon receive a cheque for £785,000 or thereby. Combined with my pension pot, I was now a millionaire!

I asked myself why God had blessed me so richly. I suppose the answer came slowly over the next few months.

On the second week of our cruise, after a visit to Malta, we were struck by a sickness and diarrhoea virus which swept through the ship. Jimmy was the first person on board to die and two days later Maisie succumbed.

In Cairo, we were quarantined in port for several weeks, mostly confined to our cabins with medical teams visiting and checking on us daily. With the help of the ship's purser, a wonderful man called Adrian Little, I eventually managed to sort out the nightmare of paperwork and fly back to London then onwards to Glasgow with both of my friends in the hold.

In a tripartite arrangement organised by Maisie and Thomas Denholm, we were each named as the main beneficiary in our Wills. When the dust settled a year later, I was now worth just short of £5 million plus Maisie's house in Rosslyn Terrace valued at a further £650,000.

Until then, I had not realised just how successful Maisie's uncle Niall McGoldrick had been. Nor did I realise that, like me, Jimmy was also a millionaire. Perhaps Maisie and Jimmy had shared their financial status with each other. If they did, I think they must have agreed not to mention their good fortune to me, believing I was the poor relation.

Cleverly, these monies had been shielded by Thomas in a charitable trust invested in properties which helped it to grow, safely and steadily. In this arrangement, as the sole survivor, although I would never be poor, I could not spend this great wealth willy-nilly, not that I had any such plans.

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Praise the Lord!

During that first year of grief and loneliness, while the legal processes ground slowly to a conclusion, I could feel that my body was not what it had been. At first, I put it down to a hangover from the shipboard virus combined with the stress of the double loss of my closest friends. I accept we can never know for certain, but I believe our mental and physical health are strongly linked and believe this is as God intended. A healthy mind and heart in a healthy body, during our short time here in Earth. Others say these ailments are implanted in our genes from inception and cannot be avoided, only mitigated.

After a series of tests and two MRI scans, I was diagnosed with cancer of the lower spine, judged to be inoperable.

The treatment was brutal, six months of chemo followed by weeks of daily radiotherapy. When it was over, I weighed only six stones and was 'frozen' from the waist downwards, confined to a motorised wheelchair and dependent on 24-hour nursing care.

But I was alive, and after all these years, I am still in remission, held tenderly and securely in His safe hands.

Praise the Lord!

Following advice from Thomas and Emily with input from my financial advisor, I found a newly opened care home in Bearsden which was willing to take me. Although everyone on the staff was very professional and caring, I found I could not settle. I was in an email group with my AA friends and shared my dark thoughts. A kindly man called Brian Keenan and his wife Martha called to see me and we prayed together, asking for guidance. At that time Brian and Martha were managing a boutique hotel near Luss.

A few months into these weekly visits, out of the blue the Keenans learned their hotel was to be offered for sale as a going concern. As it had been operating profitably under their control for around five years, they hoped their jobs would be safe. We prayed together for their future and a few days later, without prompting, they received a letter of comfort from the attorney acting for the inheritors. This letter, which they showed me, gave an assurance that the selection of the new owners would not be rushed and that the sale would be resolved amicably, without detriment to their conditions of employment.

The American owner, a man whom the Keenans had never met, had made his billions from pharmaceuticals. Slowly the story unfurled. With his death, his family were keen to ingather the wealth from his scatter of global investments to repurpose the money for their family charity. This charity, the *Everglades Christian Trust Inc.* (ECT), is an organisation with strong religious and financial links to the Southern Baptist Convention, the second largest Christian denomination in the USA after the Roman Catholic Church.

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Behind the scenes, Thomas and his colleagues entered into dialogue with the ECT attorneys and did some calculations before suggesting I might use my new wealth to buy the hotel and convert it to what is now *Everglades*.

Before we made the move, we organised a prayer seminar at the hotel, meeting in the conservatory which gave us superb views across the Loch to Ben Lomond. Our prayer circle comprised Brian, Martha, Emily and Thomas and me. For hours we prayed and listened quietly while God spoke to our hearts through His Holy Spirit.

Almost at once I was convinced this is what God wanted me to do.

We closed our meeting and agreed to meet again for a further prayer session on the following weekend.

By the next meeting, Thomas and Brian had worked in more detail on the numbers and had employed an Architect to make outline sketches. We poured over this new information then launched ourselves into a "bright ideas" session led by Martha, who had been a business management consultant and trainer in a previous career before meeting Brian at AA where they had hit the restart button together.

By the end of this first planning meeting, our group consensus was the *Everglades Project* was 'doable although the viability depended on what we would have to pay out to ECT.

However, there was still a mountain of work to be done. Each Saturday for weeks and weeks, we regrouped and continued with our planning while Thomas opened negotiations with the ECT attorneys over our plan to convert the hotel into a nursing care home operating under a Christian ethos.

The miracle I had been praying for happened.

Praise the Lord!

The Board of ECT endorsed Thomas's proposal and agreed to rent us the entire property and its grounds on a rolling lease for a nominal annual payment of \$100, this arrangement to run in perpetuity provided the care home continued to support itself and operate to an agreed code, founded on Biblical teachings, a quasi-legal document based on the Beatitudes of Jesus at the Sermon on the Mount.

Now everyone else shared my conviction that what we were planning was indeed God's Hand at work in our lives and that we *would not, could not* fail.

On a personal level, as I began to see and understand what His plan was for what remained of my life, I became convinced God had made me rich while at the same time He had laid me low, paralysed, totally reliant on the friendship and support of others. In my experience, this is how God works, through others. Mostly these are friends, good people but sometimes they are lost souls, like Archie and his sister Wilma.

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Praise the Lord!

To facilitate the project, we formed the *Everglades Trust*.

It took nearly two years to complete the conversion of the building and recruit and train the staff we needed to make it work.

We have places for sixteen residents, most of whom are classified as terminally ill. This means we have a steady turnover.

We take whoever God sends us, regardless of their ability to pay for their care. In other words, we Live by Faith. Those who come do not need to be professed Christians, but we do give preference to those who are. We do not allow alcohol, smoking, vaping or any form of recreational drug use. Only prescribed medications.

Each year we receive donations from families and friends of the residents and so far, fifteen years on, we are surviving quite well.

Praise the Lord!

I am glad to be able to say God has continued to lead us onwards into new areas of service, challenging us according to His plan.

For example, we have extensive grounds which are costly to maintain in good condition. After much prayer, we formed a 'daughter' organisation - the *Everglades Horticultural Trust* (EHT) - which takes men and women from all age groups and backgrounds on a residential course which provides them with accredited training in return for two years of committed service. We were fortunate to attract some TV interest in our scheme and have as a result received some government funding. For the EHT we apply the same rules for candidate selection, no alcohol, smoking etc. Happily, we have a long waiting list for the twelve places, with six new starts each year in August. The scheme is fully self-funding and the financial surplus contributes to the running of the care home. In a further initiative, our students also operate the greenhouses and polytunnels which provide us with high quality fruit and vegetables and bedding plants for sale.

In the second year of operation of the care home, Allison Denholm became a resident and we placed her in the room next to me which has a pass door which we kept open so that we could chat and pray together, day and night. Her husband Martin had died a few months earlier. His death came upon us all so very, very suddenly, three months after the first signs of Motor Neurone Disease. On her first Christmas alone, Allison had been determined to decorate their Christmas tree by herself. The ladder wobble and she crashed down, breaking her neck and is now a quadriplegic. Naturally, she was accepted into the Everglades community at the first opportunity. Sadly, my dear, dear friend she lasted less than a year. When she died, we decided to form a further daughter

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organisation, the *Everglades Memorial Garden Trust (EMGT)*. This has proved to be a boon, attracting regular visitors and bonding families to our care home enterprise.

Arising from this endeavour, we have since built a fifty-seater café cum restaurant serving vegan and vegetarian food. Attached is a deli cum gift shop where we sell a range of upmarket *Fairtrade* food from around the world and a selection of award-winning artwork and handmade items such as jewellery, tapestry items and paintings.

The Work of The Lord goes on.

Praise the Lord!

It is now time to bring this account of my life to a close. But just before I conclude, I want to tell you something wonderful. During these last few months, it has become evident that I am fading away. To counter the pain, they have increased my morphine. Then, as an extra comfort, God has sent me a constant helper, a beautiful Angel. Have you guessed? Yes, my Susie! She sings to me in a low Soprano voice, rich, sweet and perfectly centred on each note.

Last week Susie came in company with Jimmy and Maisie and Harry. Together they sang through every song in our *Glee Club* repertoire. I tried to sing my parts but then I give up and Susie sang on my behalf, changing up to a higher voice again each note perfectly centred, reminding me of Barbra Streisand.

I hope it will not be too long now until God calls me to Him as I am looking forward to singing with them in Heaven where I hope we will be booked out solid as *the Glasgow Glee Club*.

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Friendship

I do hope my life story has proved of interest to all, particularly to those of my own generation who are facing loneliness and the worries of diminishing health, living each day in fear and trepidation.

My advice to every single one of you is to reach out to your friends, share your worries. Please remember, God works through others. You are not here on Earth alone.

If you are not yet a Christian, I suggest you try to attend an *Alpha Course*. If you cannot attend in person, you should be able to find a group online.

If you need a Bible, one will be provided.

I urge you to read the entire New Testament slowly and prayerfully, preferably at a single sitting.

Then, please return to the Sermon on the Mount.

Open your heart to The Holy Spirit and allow Him to lead your heart and mind. As you feel Him knocking at the door of your heart, throw it wide open and accept the unfathomable gift of the Holy Spirit who will at once come to live within you. From that instant you will be a Christian. From that moment you will experience the comfort of deep, deep peace which comes with the forgiveness of sins.

This is not a gift like any other. It is a gift which will last you through this mortal life and on into Eternity.

In your new life as a Christian, pray at all times directly to Our Heavenly Father and, as Jesus told us to do, recite the Lord's Prayer each time you feel the urge to pray. Be particularly obedient in this duty. Obedience will bring its rewards.

At all times thank God the Father for sending Jesus the Christ who is His Only Begotten Son, who died to save us and is now resurrected and will call us to Him when it is our due time.

When we pass to Glory, we will live with Him in His glorious mansion, which the Bible tells us has many rooms.

And, best of all, we shall all of us sing with the Angels in that Heavenly Choir, giving praise and glory to our Triune God.

Here is a starting hymn which I commend to you.

Look it up on YouTube (see my hyperlink below) and sing along with a childlike heart.

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Dear Friends of my Future, I look forward to meeting you in heaven when I will give my full attention to *your stories*, every single one.

Praise the Lord!

<https://youtu.be/ezG3A9mvJtY>