

JOANNA LUMLEY'S DIARY

Le hot club de Londres

Maxim's opened its London doors with a flourish on a sweltering Tuesday evening. Gareth Hunt and I, the last two Avengers, tricked up to the nines, park without ceremony round the corner and press through the crowds and police on foot.

At the door we are handed buttonholes, teeth flashing, cameras clicking, and we step in. Wham! Denser than a Brazilian jungle, hotter than a Madras vindaloo, darker than a storm: the air conditioning has packed up with first night nerves, and the glamorous glitterati are thrashing about in the most expensive sauna in town. Shoulder to shoulder, our silks and pique with and crease, our newly applied make-up skates down our faces in droplets like butter. More people are pouring in and we are eased further into the scalding interior, where the noise is that of an engine room.

Three people are grouped strangely on the dance floor, eyes closed, a slight breeze playing on their damp skulls: they have found the only air vent in the building and though they sway like reeds in a river, jostled by the dripping and desperate guests, they will not give up their coveted position. As a privileged person, I am allowed upstairs to view the large half-finished private dining-rooms. I have eaten in Paris Maxim's only once, but it appears that this one is an exact copy. On the walls, languid nymphs in white ponds. Moisture is the order of the day.



We have two days to film an interview with Dame Flora Robson in Brighton. (At the station, we give the taxi driver the address: "Oh, you're going to see Dame Flora, do you say? After the first day, I lean on the window sill of my hotel room and look out on the pier, the second of Brighton's great prizes. Two boys are stacking up the green and white striped deckchairs lining the promenade. They are shirles and their backs are a Mediterranean bronze.

They have worked out a foolproof, labour-saving method of collapsing the chairs: kick, split, lift, till they have six, which they pile neatly on to a low wooden platform before going back for the next lot. They are working swiftly from the ends of a long line of chairs, deserted but for the middle two. As they race onwards, two elderly women rise with thinly controlled terror and scramble for safety. By the time they reach the pavement's edge, all the deck-chairs have gone.

Twice to Brighton in one week-how funny. Usually I don't manage to get there more than once in three years. The second time it is a train ride commemorating 50 years of electrification of the Brighton line. We board the train at London Bridge-giant Disney figures, 40 children invited by British Rail and the Variety Club, a happy horde of journalists and a film crew. We leave exactly on time, and arrive in Brighton 41 minutes later, having broken the record for crisp-crating, balloon-bursting and covering the distance.

A brass band is playing on the platform; the Mayor and the Town Crier assist us on to open air buses and we trundle down to the Fun Fair. We have free rides on everything (but I dare to go only on the Big Wheel, and even that knocks me out of me). Then on a tiny train along the sea front to the Aquarium, where three dolphins leap and balance and dive for our entertainment. I am asked to be kissed by a dolphin for a photograph. Having watched carefully, I know how it's done: slap the water to get their attention, kneel leaning over the pool and point to your lips, and

suddenly whoosh! a great shape hurtles out of the deep and gently bumps your mouth with its snout. Then a reward of half a mackerel tossed into the smiling jaws; the big head turns sideways as the wise eye appraises you. We board the open air buses to travel to the Civic Centre

for lunch. Disaster strikes. As we travel round the one-way system past a multi-storey car park, some of the children are hit by eggs thrown from the fifth floor. There is weeping; some of the children are hurt and all are shocked. Looking up, I see three or four boys leaning over the parapet. Now, there are voices who will say that society has compelled these lads to cast eggs from great heights on to unsuspecting children. I am not one of them, and if Marie the photographer and I had been on foot, we should have given chase and given them a bit of thrashing to show them the error of their ways.

The bottom of my last bikini remained floating in the air on the surface of the swimming-pool as I dived neatly into the water and out of sight. Upon inspection, the elastic had perished in the fierce Malindi sun. With Crete beckoning this week, it is time for new togs.



In the large department store where I nosed about for a while, I found I had to try them on hurriedly in a large crowded chamber. The first was just a sort of coloured strings and eye-patches; the second grasped my chest like a deadly black tourniquet, rendering my torso breathless and unappealing. I have now borrowed Sarah's instead.

By 10.30 am, at Guildhall, fantastically decorated Sunshine Coaches stand around the forecourt, clowns and roller-skates gambol, small children in wigs and false noses, like escapees from an overstuffed circus, line the route to the date where the Prince and Princess of Wales will give out prizes. Inside, the effigies of Gog and Magog, like sheep in wolves' clothing, stand down as the 700 place settings are arranged and rearranged in the cool dim hall. In the sunny courtyard, the soldiers of the Scots Guards prepare bangers, beans and marsh on trestle tables for 300 children. A thousand silent, silent questions will they talk to me? Eyes shaded, peering for the royal car - have they arrived yet? and



what will the princess wear? The hand pages on, the excitement grows. Children in wheelchairs are propped up, costumes adjusted, hats clamped on firmly; the press photographers check their cameras, organizers check their lists, women check their make-up ("what if I had lipstick on my teeth and they stopped to talk to me?"). We strike up nonchalant conversations, eyes darting like minnows to the gateway. Inside, 600 people have been sifted according to their invitations for pre-lunch drinks: extremely grand to the crypt, and pretty grand, but with less chance of bumping into them, in the library. Wrist watches are shaken and examined: it is 11.30 am. Suddenly, the royal car sweeps in and the great day begins.

Rusheen Wynne-Jones was once described as 'A bunch of flowers on top of a volcano'. She talks to Pennyerrick

Pennyerrick

The lady is a champ

Rusheen, Lady Wynne-Jones's first name, lends itself to some gasty puns - 'loos, Rusheen!', always Rusheen about - that sort of thing. In fact, Rusheen is the anglicised version of Resulka, the Russian word for water nymph. And since, as a result of Rusheen treading where angels fear to, London's waterside is in much better shape than it would otherwise have been, she is perfectly named.

On the back of the lavatory door of her Chelsea flat is a drawing of the Green Giant, the appalling office block that would now be blotting out the sunset at Vauxhall had Rusheen not put a stop to it. This was perhaps her greatest riverside victory for the Green Giant project

was organized on the sly, the public enquiry held at Brixton Town Hall over the Christmas recess. Rusheen heard about it only because, as a law student, she had helped people with eviction problems and some of the Vauxhall tenants appealed to her. "They kept on talking about something called the Green Giant and I thought they must be drunk because I didn't know what they were talking about." Once she found out what was going on, she swept into the inquiry, a wondrous sight with her shaggy blonde hair wound about with a thick plaig and her lovely pink and white complexion.

Against her was George Dobry, QC, a brilliant lawyer who Rusheen the law student despised. This was the Margyn battle. This, who, nonetheless, she insulted so roundly that the inquiry had, on occasion, to be adjourned for lunch. By chance, at a party, Rusheen heard that the Green Giant was going to be given the go-ahead. She leaked the news to The Times, which, she thinks, made Michael Heseltine, then Minister for the Environment, so cross that he reversed the decision.

It was after the Green Giant triumph that her late husband, Lord Wynne-Jones, said, "Rusheen, that's

Lady Wynne-Jones against her least favourite building the Chelsea Reach Tower estate on Chelsea Embankment.



enough, you've got to have a qualification." They had married in 1972 when Rusheen was 24 and her husband over 70.

"My flat had just burned down and I thought it might be someone out to get me because I'd done a lot of work helping political prisoners. My husband, who was the kindest man in the world, married me to keep me out of harm's way. He thought his wife would give me protection."

Knowing that she would eventually have to fend for herself he was anxious for her to qualify as a lawyer. Nothing would have pleased Rusheen more. She has wanted to be a barrister since the age of 15 but other things got in her way. Even so, she managed to pass two A-levels with A grades in six months and hopes to take her Bar finals next year.

Along the way, she failed the Revenue Law examinations because it coincided with what's become known as the Margyn battle. This concerned the college of St Mark and St John, rich in historical and literary associations and straddling a pretty stretch of grassland between the King's and Fulham roads. This too was designated for office building until Rusheen, in her role

as honorary secretary of the Friends of Chelsea took up permanent camp outside Michael Heseltine's door, taking as her role model the important widow in the Bible who got what she wanted as a result of pestering.

The fact that the Pheasantry is still standing on its King's Road site is her work, too. "The plans to knock it down had all been passed and, as a last ditch effort, I took the developers to lunch. Sometimes, I believe I lead a charmed life for some instinct made me invite Margot Fonteyn along too. The developers turned out not only to be charming men but mad about the ballet and they tore up the plans there and then before our eyes. Without our association, I am convinced that Chelsea would now be a six-lane motorway, Croydon-type skyscraper suburb."

Her latest cause is to stop the destruction of Southwark, the London borough where Shakespeare wrote his greatest plays and which is now the proposed site for a huge Kuwaiti financed mirror-fronted office development. In its stead, she would like to see a permanent Shakespeare festival, providing jobs, profits and a source of pride for the people of London.

COMMENT

We must stop this madness

'You would have a different attitude if you know your own child's life could be saved by a painful experiment on a living animal.' So goes the taunt. My answer is that if my own child's life could be saved by slowly torturing my best friend, I might well tell them to go ahead. In other words, I would not be the right person to ask, in those circumstances, what is, or is not, legitimate practice in saving a human life. My judgment would be impaired.

Since happily I am not in that position, it is disgusting to me that animals are caged and then subjected to painful or frightening procedures so that humans may live longer, be more beautiful, smoke more safely or buy more convenient detergents. I have no objection to experiments which do not worry the animals - or even to those which end in humanely inflicted death.

Everyone knows the arguments for and against vivisection. In general, so I won't remind them. But there is one class of experiment which is different from the rest that it cries out for a specific and relentless campaign until it is ended. These are ones associated with psychological stress. For a number of reasons they are especially awful.

First, these experiments are premeditated to inflict pain and then examine, psychological processes like fear, anxiety, isolation, withdrawal, and the ingredients of distress is not a by-product of the experiments, not simply a regrettable but unavoidable feature, it is integral to its purpose. Healthy animals are subjected to such processes as removal when very young from their mother, being kept in solitary confinement, being given electric shocks, being kept awake, being left in water from which they cannot escape, having their brains surgically removed, being tortured by extremes of temperatures.

That year in Britain, more than 25,000 animals were given aversion stimuli, including electric shocks, to help, quickly they learnt to avoid them. Some, of course, never did - and so went painfully mad.

Since these experiments are distressing to animals, it is not surprising that some kind of anaesthesia is out of the question.

Sinister illnesses and neuroses associated with stress, parental deprivation and so on are on the increase among humans, we can expect that this will be an expanding field for the behavioural scientists who use animals. Already they are breeding - in necessary breeding - millions of animals specifically for such experiments. If we put a stop to these, we would be forcing them to devise research which uses humans - the proper material for the study of human psychology and cannot therefore involve cruelty. There is already a huge vested interest in this industry; we should seek to diminish it.

The animals most in demand for psychological research are those with highly developed nervous systems and thought processes. In practice this means dogs, cats and, especially monkeys. The demand for these is based precisely on their capacity to feel a similar range of emotions to those of humans. Surely it is intolerable that we should subject them to distress on the grounds that their reactions are so like ours.

As a result of recent publicity starting with the "smoking beagles", there is at least a groundswell of public indignation about animal experiments. It is no longer focused only on painful physical experiments. Psychological experiments are a growing proportion of the total. The present Government should stop procrastinating about new legislation over the medical use of animals. The rest of us should make it clear that we regard experiments inflicting psychological stress - supposed to be in our own interests - as morally intolerable, empirically useless and wholly unacceptable.

Margaret Legum

My GP found it difficult to tell the truth

FIRST PERSON

By Gillian Thomas

In my job I have to tell lies. I heard a doctor say on the radio the other day, I wonder what effect these lies have on the patients to whom they're told? My GP told me the truth and it completely altered my life.

For the past 13 years I have suffered from inflammatory bowel disease. I have never been free of symptoms for more than a few months during these years. Attacks flare up frequently and unexpectedly in spite of the best specialist care and consequently quite a lot of my life is spent feeling well.

When a gastro-entologist made the initial diagnosis he told me I would have attacks followed by remissions. He emphasized the remissions. He also told me that I must not dwell on my symptoms because that would make it worse. After a year of treatment I clearly wasn't progressing well, but the specialist was still insistent about this

remissions. He made it obvious that he felt my problem was due to an over-anxious attitude and that in his opinion my symptoms were not all that bad. I was so confused by the discrepancy between what he was telling me and what was happening that I seriously began to wonder if I hadn't actually had a remission and somehow not recognized it. He almost managed to persuade me that it was all my fault. (I now know from other sufferers that this impression is frequently given to patients with intractable inflammatory bowel disease.) Nevertheless I wanted a second opinion. Encouraged by my doctor I presented myself at a specialist London hospital. To my great relief, their attitude was entirely different. They stabilized my condition and reassured me that I was not bringing it upon myself. I have remained in their enlightened care ever since.

Although I had two children in the next few years I still felt held back by my disease. I believed that the illness was a temporary interruption and that normal health would soon be resumed.

The crisis came after my second child was born. My disease had flared up during the pregnancy and I

caught mumps three weeks after the birth. That, combined with a difficult colicky baby, caused the worst incidence yet. At that time I was being cared for by a trainee GP who became determined to cure me. Although he tried and I tried, our joint heroic efforts failed. For his sake I attempted to believe that I was getting better and better. The mental strain of trying to live up to his hopes began to tell.

At this point my doctor stepped in. He realized what was happening and that it had to stop. A large dose of undiluted truth had to be administered. He came to see me at home and sat down at the end of my bed.

"Look", he said, "As far as I can tell you're not going to get better. You've got to think of this disease as going on into the foreseeable future."

After the initial shock I felt profound relief. I was being allowed to be ill. I had been given permission to see myself that way. I was no longer a healthy person who always felt ill, but an ill person who quite often felt well. From that moment on the focus of my life shifted. I began to value what I could do, not what I could not do.

Before he died last year, Lord Wynne-Jones introduced a Bill in the House of Lords to make the heart of the capital a special conservation area. There would be an environment council to regulate new developments along the Thames. That precious but unprotected lung of London.

Watching the Thames run sweetly by Rusheen's sitting room windows on a Saturday morning, we decided that London was so neglected and harmed by its administrators because so few, unlike out two selves, were real Londoners.

Come Friday evening, most leading politicians and top civil servants head for their country cottages. They have no love or appreciation for the quiet, beautiful city of Chaucer, Shakespeare and Dickens, the secret London known only to those of us who live as well as work here, seven days a week.

Knowing little and caring less, no wonder they allow developers to do their worst. Rusheen's solution is for the chairman of the GLC to become Mayor of London and to oversee the special environment council which her husband envisaged. More immediately, she is preparing one of her one-woman appeals.

I was free too to deal with some of the anger I felt inside. Anger with myself for having the disease and anger with the doctors for not curing me. I have finally found to see my situation as just plain bad luck and I am trying to make the best of it.

My GP told me later that he had found it difficult to tell me the truth, but it was in perfect accord with my own perceptions and he hated to deliver it to someone he had known for so long (but I had appreciated having a friend to tell me such news). Also, he said, speaking as a doctor it was an admission of failure on his part. (A failure to cure may be, but not a failure to care.)

Mine is a story where the most effective treatment was truth. I believe that lies are easier, sometimes for the patient, sometimes for the doctor. Luckily for me, my truth may be painful to prescribe and difficult to administer, but it has given me hope and healing.

Gillian R. Thomas

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