

## Cassie & Selwyn Tillett

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Dearest friends

Have you noticed the change of address above? Hopefully we didn't miss too many people out of the notifications, but it all happened rather fast. As the joke puts it, "How do you make God laugh? Answer: tell him your plans for the future..." There we were, thinking that Selwyn's ministerial role in Winterton-on-sea and the rest of the Flegg Coastal Group would be his final post before retirement; but God, the Bishop, and Selwyn's health had other ideas.

First, just to reassure you: he's absolutely fine (especially now) and shows every sign of following his father into his octogenarian phase in due course (please God). However, we became aware across the last year or two that his type one diabetes was somewhat less controlled than it had been; he'd had several 'hypos' (sugar imbalance episodes), was getting much more tired and stressed, and the challenges of full-time multi-parish ministry (which are tough enough for a man in his thirties, never mind one in his sixties with nearly forty years of 70-hour-weeks behind him) were starting to tell. And then the Bishop (+Graham of Norwich, who has just himself retired the other day) got in touch ("it felt like being summoned to the headmaster's office") to say that he needed a priest of the Anglo-Catholic tradition, experienced, quite close to retirement, for a specific job and about two years, just one church instead of four, four days per week instead of six (and therefore half-stipend, of course), in Norwich itself. There was no interview process, simply +Graham's appointment. This was April.



By June the announcement was made; at the end of August we moved to **St Mary Magdalene**, and we couldn't be happier with the change in our lives. Our beloved Sewell Barn is just three-quarters of a mile away in one direction, the Cathedral the same in the other; Norwich marketplace (with its real, non-plastic fruit-and-veg stalls) is a mile. While Cassie's mother remains in her bungalow in Winterton, the twice-weekly visits to her are much less stressful than the five (or more) trips in the other direction to clients, theatre, friends and much more – and our car fuel bills have plummeted. The house is wonderful - if a tad eccentric (on a sloping plot, and on five half-floors!), but we love it; new parishioners have been wonderfully welcoming, the worship style (incense, candles) is right up our street, and we feel very blessed. Instead of the beach, Cassie has Mousehold Heath, the riverside walk and Whitlingham Broad, and we'll probably sell one of the cars as we so seldom need them both at once. The church, by the way, is three steps across a covered walkway from the Vicarage 'tradesman's entrance'. It has also been a great joy to us to be able to attend events and services at our beloved Norwich Cathedral - most recently the stunning, atmospheric Advent procession, with their fine choir.

So that process, of course, has taken up quite a bit of the year in planning, time, energy and head-space. It didn't stop us continuing with many of our favourite activities, though! With our move to Norwich and **Selwyn's** new four-day timetable, he has been delighted to join in other theatrical projects, specifically at the Maddermarket. In November he was one of a group of voices that commemorated the Armistice centenary; and this was immediately followed by a manic adaptation of *The Diary of a Nobody* (George & Weedon Grossmith's splendid observations on unremarkable suburban Victorian life), for which he was once more at the piano. Our good friend Trevor Burton was a superb Mr Pooter, and the local press described it as "stupid, absurd and thoroughly enjoyable". We were also thrilled to be treated to a 'curtain-raiser' entertainment on the first night: the musical works of George Grossmith as portrayed by our great friend Leon Berger, accompanied (of course) by you-know-who.



Cassie continues as joint Artistic Director at the Sewell Barn – presently moving into her third season, and about to start planning the fourth – and together with Clare has supervised and helped to facilitate all the amazing shows that happen there, of which we've been very proud. Selwyn is secretary to the committee, pianist and performer, audience and



supporter, and all-round Very Useful Bear. In May, we both found ourselves board-treading in a modern-day production of *Romeo & Juliet*, alongside some stunningly talented youngsters; Selwyn as the Prince (in police uniform, which suited him rather disturbingly well), Cassie as Lady Montague (who spoke the lines attributed to Lord M – do keep up!) who was a rival political candidate to Lord Capulet. A truly lovely production which we were very proud to be in. Once that was over, we moved immediately into directing our own show: *Tomfoolery* (a celebration of the genius of Tom Lehrer, who celebrated his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday earlier in 2018). Selwyn was at the piano (of course) with a further

three men and four girls making up a cast of stunning performers; hugely enthusiastic audience reactions, massive laughter and sharp intakes of breath, and we could not have been more delighted with the results. As this is written, we're drawing breath to start work on Alan Ayckbourn's *Confusions* – five linked short plays – which Cassie & Clare have taken over directing due to unavoidable circumstances for the original director; and with Selwyn as ASM, our joint Barn journey continues. (And the day after *Confusions* finishes, we hold auditions for our July show – Noel Coward's *Waiting in the Wings!* Life is never dull.)



We have seen countless fine productions, at the Barn and elsewhere. Jez Butterworth's *Jerusalem* at the Maddermarket, with our good friend Nick Meir in the leading role, was stunning; as was the Great Hall Theatre's remarkable production of *The Devil at Midnight*. At the professional theatre, Cassie joined fellow AD Clare at the Theatre Royal to see the really rather excellent The Band - huge fun and very likeable. Shedload Theatre (including some Sewell Barn alumni) were a huge success locally with *Just William's Luck*, which they were then highly praised for at the Edinburgh Festival. The splendid MOCO, led by previous AD Michelle Montague, presented a powerful, creative version of the *Frankenstein* story. And a real thrill for Cassie was to attend a fabulous Conversation with **Juliet Stevenson** at the Norwich Cathedral Hostry, and to meet this talented, genuine, delightful lady afterwards.

At the Sewell Barn, of course, we might be accused of bias: but we were deeply proud of every one of the productions. We were especially proud of the dark, challenging *Dinner*, which proved conclusively with high attendance rates that Barn audiences not only can take the less 'cosy' shows, but positively relish them; and *The Killing of Sister George*, which suffered sadly by losing three performances to the ghastly February weather. More recently, *Handbagged* (two Margaret Thatchers, two Queen Elizabeth IIs, and two male actors playing everybody else) was a glorious if somewhat disturbing triumph ("I never thought I'd hear that voice again"); and *Not About Heroes*, a powerful two-hander about Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon, sent audiences away full of equal parts joy and tears.

We've needed our holidays. The January break was somewhat more eccentric (and lest restful) than most, consisting as it did of two days' travelling and eight days spent decluttering and clearing a huge Georgian house in Northern Ireland (sans heating). This was the house of our friend Michael Walters, who had passed away in 2017, and for whom Selwyn was executor; so we spent a challenging, sometimes uncomfortable, but ultimately very satisfying time, **on the coast at Portrush** in deepest winter, complete with snow and sheet ice! Happily we were staying in a very agreeable (warm) self-catering cottage, and it was a race for first into the bath after each day's work... Our Easter break therefore needed to be a real holiday, and we spent a truly sensational week in the



beautiful city of Prague. Full of glorious walks, restaurants, shops and architecture, we'd highly recommend it to anyone. Finally, we took time out just before our move to Norwich in August: a few days borrowing our friend Ruth's house in Devon, followed by a week in the beautiful Brecon Beacons, which allowed Cassie some training time in the mountains for... a week's hiking in the Pyrenees.



Ah, yes – the fitness trail. It's still a-winding! The Pyrenean trip was made with the mad Mother Nature's Diet crew, including friend Kim; Cassie managed only two of the five mountains climbed by the group during the week, but was proud of achieving one tough climb of around 3,000 feet, another of around 2,300 feet, and being rewarded with some of the most stunning scenery imaginable. In preparation for this, she had also managed 3,300 feet up Pen y Fan (in ghastly weather), over 2,000 around the beautiful Horseshoe Pass (in beautiful weather), and three days in the Peak District (including a two-mile scramble up **Grindsbrook Clough**, of which she's very proud). Since then, she's also been delighted to conquer Ingleborough (Yorkshire Peaks). Not bad for an old (Norfolk) broad of 55.

On top of that, there was a hilarious first attempt at ice-skating; a try at the Norwich dry-ski-slope (yes, really), which Kim arranged, and the latter was rewarded by seeing Cassie look more terrified than she'd ever seen her; circus aerial hooping is still much enjoyed; and a magnificent snowy 15 mile walk with the redoubtable Frances Mills, who is walking/running the whole of the coast of these islands across three winters, and who we accommodated and fed during the Beast from the East onslaught. Said Frances, incidentally, took a couple of days off with us as the weather was so bad, but then got back on track by walking from Winterton to Sheringham in heavy snow – 11 hours in one day. It's thirty miles. Now that's fit.

Oh, and there was also **Nuclear Rush** (basically an assault course through mud), which was unbelievably tough but a lot more fun than it sounds!

Friends will remember that we finished 2017 with Cassie's father's funeral, after losing him to acute senile dementia more than four years previously. There were many other sad losses in 2018, which we commemorated by attending the Norwich Cathedral All Souls service and including their names in the list that was read out on that occasion. We especially give thanks, among others, for the lives of Cassie's aunt, Marie Skingley; Jack Osborne, father of Selwyn's long-term musical friend and colleague Bob from Cambridge days; Edward Jeffroy and Michael Green (the latter of Coarse Acting fame), both long term and delightful stalwarts of our days at Richmond Shakespeare Society; Penny Fenn-Clark, a great friend of many years, who preached the most delightful and memorable sermon at our wedding; Martyn Noble, taken much too soon, a dear friend of Cassie's from her life in 1980s south London; Mike Ford, a beloved friend and golfing colleague of Cassie's father; and the wonderful Mike Beavis, long time supporter and the perfect 'techie' at the Sewell Barn Theatre, after a long illness. May they all rest in peace and rise in glory.



We feel tremendously blessed to live where we do, to have such wonderful people in our lives, and to have the wit and health to continue to enjoy those places, people and activities, and the love and companionship of each other. In March 2019 we'll celebrate 25 years since we became a 'couple', which is hard to believe - we're not sure whether it feels much longer than that or much less! God grant us - and all of you - many more.

For all our friends and family, no matter how frequently or not we meet, we give thanks for your part in the jigsaw of our lives; and send our love and every good wish for a happy, fulfilling and life-filled 2019 and beyond.



Cassie Selwyn