

## Cassie & Selwyn Tillett

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Dearest friends

It's been quite a year. For everyone. No comment here about matters global or political: there are millions of words out there from others. We'll stick to our own small efforts and keep beavering away.



At the end of 2018, we'd not long been here in the Norwich parish of St Mary Magdalene. We've continued to love it: the community, the church, the Vicarage, the convenience, the fuel-savings and much more. (One great bonus was the ability to reduce from two cars to one when we sold the little Fiat Panda early in the year.) Our eccentric home is a continuing source of pleasure – with the occasional blip (such as a leak in the roof, which was fixed easily enough, but only once the scaffolders had figured out that they were meant to put up said scaffolding at The Vicarage and not The Old Vicarage next door. They had to take it all down and start again. Stop laughing...) We continue to feel very blessed by the friendship, warmth and inclusivity of the SMM family, and are therefore very happy that Bishop Graham (the new one!) has extended **Selwyn's** initial two-year contract for a further three years, meaning that we'll be here until at least autumn 2023.

In April Cassie returned to the long-ago familiar role of Parish Treasurer (that mantle was last worn in the Beddington parish, which we left in 2005). Within a few weeks there was a new challenge to face in that role: a regular all-day Monday-to-Friday booking in the church hall ended (the nursery school in question closed down), leaving us with a large hole in finances. A recent stewardship (giving) campaign has been very successful and the generosity and hard work of the parishioners is wonderful; and we've been happy to add some of our ideas from past ministries for fundraising activities (or, as one of the PCC put it, "friend-raising", as it's just as important pastorally as financially). This has included **an evening of poetry and prose** (our friends from Beddington will remember those) on an autumn/Harvest theme, and a first-rate Christmas Craft Fair; and plans for a quiz evening, two concerts and a 'Pudding and Plonk' evening in 2020.



Part of the issue with finance was that at almost the same time as we lost that booking, we were also hit with a huge Quinquennial report (for the uninitiated, a five-yearly report on the state of the building and works that should be done before the next one). We thought we had little hope of actioning any but the most desperately urgent; but a few weeks ago the church was stunned to receive an unexpected and very generous legacy from a departed parishioner, almost two years after her passing, which will facilitate far more structural and cosmetic work - hopefully helping with the re-letting of the hall - than we would have imagined possible. Alleluia.

While Selwyn has been beavering away (although on a four-day rather than six-day week, which is great) in the church, Cassie's business has become busier since the move to Norwich; there seem to be many more opportunities in and around the city. Many clients, old and new, have been assisted with regaining control of their homes. In addition, it was a (lovely) shock to realise that November marked the fifteenth



anniversary of the launch of APDO (Association of Professional Declutterers and Organisers), for which Cassie was one of three founder members and the first President. There was a splendid **celebration in London** during the relevant week, and it was a special joy to be reunited with those other two founders – Trudy Kelly and Sue Kay – as well as all other Presidents and many of the membership – now approaching 400 member businesses across the UK.

While all this has been going on, there have been challenging times involving Cassie's mum, Peggy. She had insisted on staying in Winterton after our move, and with a couple of visits each week and support from her lovely cleaning lady, Jeanine, we managed to keep things ticking over. However, in late January mum had a fall which fractured her pelvis. She went into hospital overnight but was quickly moved to a care home which provides "beds with care" – NHS funded places that provide the attention needed when the patient doesn't need to be in hospital. It became clear that she no longer wanted to live independently nor was able to do so; and in March she was moved to Cromwell House, a pleasant care home just south of Norwich and ten minutes' drive from our home.

Mum then had a further fall in July, which broke her hip; the NHS staff were magnificent and her hip was replaced within 48 hours of the fall. She has also been diagnosed with dementia, and as such has no recollection of either hospital stay. She has settled reasonably well, although doesn't engage much with activities or with those around her; she still knows and asks after all the key members of the family and friends and is pleased to see us. We do at least now know that she is well fed, warm and safe, but she is very frail and cannot walk without assistance / walking frame.

The bungalow is being rented out to a lovely couple, and that will keep her fees paid until around the summer of 2021, at which point the property will need to be sold. The bungalow was rented out unfurnished, and Cassie was assisted enormously by friends, colleagues, Selwyn and sister Jenny in moving, sorting, selling and donating items. All very difficult, but both mum and the situation are now, as they say, 'stable'.



It was lovely to welcome cousins Peta and Matthew to see mum just a few days ago during a visit from Jenny, niece Sammy-Jo and her friend Charlotte. During their stay, we also welcomed good friend Kim for a '**mini-Christmas**' - complete, of course, with Secret Santa!

In among all this activity, the theatrical undercurrent has been pretty continuous. Almost immediately after moving house in summer 2018, we started work on directing (Cassie) and stage managing (Selwyn) the Sewell Barn's production of Alan Ayckbourn's *Confusions*. Never was a show more aptly named: twenty-one characters, five actors, five sets, four restaurant place-settings, a working tea-urn, a malfunctioning microphone and a duckpond... what could possibly go wrong?! In the

event, it was magnificent fun and both commercially and artistically very successful. We mustn't forget, either, a highly enjoyable revisit to our friends in Weston Longville to present a Music Hall in March, aided and abetted by many Norwich theatrical friends.

The moment that *Confusions* ended (as in, *The Very Next Day*) our auditions were held for ***Waiting in the Wings*** – Noel Coward's hilarious and moving observation of life in a home for retired actresses. A cast of 18 with a total age well in excess of 1,000 years, seating on stage for 9 at any one time, a modern keyboard superbly converted to look like a 1930s upright piano, an imported member of cast (the amazing Pam Akhurst, from our life in London) who learned lines and moves at long range and attended just twice before the dress rehearsal week (and was a superb member of the team), and all the wit, wisdom, experience and – it has to be said – downright mischief of a cast who were mostly well beyond collecting their pension. We could not have been more delighted with the huge success of the show and with the utterly remarkable family that made it happen; we could write a whole newsletter on that show alone.



But it didn't stop there. Come the end of July, we thought, great, we've got several months now before any other theatre commitments. Let's have a rest.

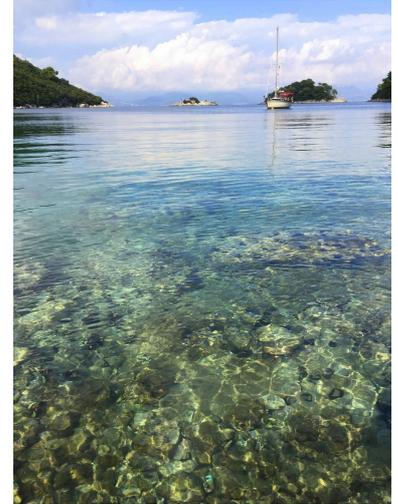


And then another local company (the Great Hall Players) found themselves unexpectedly one performer down for their production of Noel Coward's *Blithe Spirit* in September, and Cassie found herself cast in the role of **Ruth Condomine** with four weeks to learn it, and Selwyn reckoned that if you can't beat 'em, join 'em, and volunteered as Stage Manager... So much for a rest, but it was so much fun! And finally, Selwyn has just started up as stage manager for the February production at the Barn (*The Female of the Species*, which also happens to be the group's 300th production during its 40th year). Meantime, Cassie just needs to think - together with fellow Artistic Director Clare - about assembling the 2020/21 season. And holding auditions in March for her July production of *Under Milk Wood*.

Between the directing and acting, of course, there have been many shows to see. As usual, mostly these have been on the amateur circuit, but with absolutely no difference in the quality. All eight of the shows at the Sewell Barn, of course – and of course we're biased, but we still believe that the consistent high quality and variety produced there is exceptional and we're deeply proud of it. These included Jessica Hutchings' stunning directorial debut of the moving and mesmerising *These Shining Lives* (the Radium Girls - look it up), with more recently excursions to Prospero's island in my colleague Clare Williamson's innovative production of *The Tempest*; and to 1950s Soho for the challenging, energetic and stunning *Mojo*, directed by Nick Meir and featuring six superb young actors. Several visits to our friends at the Maddermarket; especially impressed by a mesmerising studio production of Beckett plays, *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Rockaby* – the former a masterclass performance by our good friend David White; an enchanting evening in *The Secret Garden*, with beautiful puppetry and delightful performances; a very fine *Steel Magnolias* and a first-rate (violent, bloody and powerful) *Boudica*.

We've also recently been introduced to the lovely free Saturday lunchtime concerts that happen at St Peter Mancroft church in Norwich, and were delighted and moved by the most recent, which concluded with Britten's *A Ceremony of Carols* (cue sentimental recollections of the girls' choir at Bretton Hall).

We have been a little more adventurous with our holidays this year, having kept mainly to the UK and France for most of our married life. Our post-Easter break took us to the beauties of Madeira (based in Funchal), and September to Croatia (a week just outside Dubrovnik, a week on the tranquil island of Mljet). Both were memorable and wonderful, and experiences we'd happily repeat. AirBNB came up trumps with lovely, reasonable self-catering apartments on both occasions; the weather was largely very kind; the locals proud of their areas and keen to share. Madeira gave us levadas, waterfalls, a jeep tour, and an introduction to the lethal drink Poncha; Croatia gave us **crystal waters** (Cassie adored snorkelling and kayaking), alarming but deserted roads to tiny coves, island-hopping and insane numbers of stairs to climb; and both gave us stunning views, tropical flowers, lots of walking and many gastronomic delights.



A couple of shorter escapes included an eccentric and beautiful windmill in Suffolk (March); a visit to friends Dorothy & Milton in Bolton (December), dropping in for lunch on the lovely Amanda in Leicestershire on the way back; and a short break in Oxfordshire (May) to finally use Cassie's 2017 Christmas gift of a helicopter flight across the spires of Oxford.

Then, of course, there have been the sad farewells. Our contributions to the All Souls' list at the beautiful Norwich Cathedral service, and our own service here at St Mary Mags, included the amazing David Lloyd (the talented artist who created all the wonderful paintings of each building in which Selwyn has ministered - sadly he never got to complete the set with our current, final home); Thalia Wild, whose husband Jim Wild was responsible for The Bretton Singers and hence much of Cassie's love of choral music; Trevor Markworth and Lizzie Vaughan, both much loved by the Norwich theatrical community and both taken far too soon; Marjorie Holden, a long-standing computer client of Cassie's and an octogenarian inspiration; and two members of the Walthamstow theatre family, Mark Leff and Don Hart. Mark had been responsible for a wonderful reunion of many of the performers in *The Diary of a Nobody* (1980) at a new production in 2019, and tragically passed away just weeks later; Don had been the director of that 1978 show, and was responsible for much of Cassie's earliest theatrical education and inspiration. All such vital pieces in the jigsaws of our lives, and we give grateful thanks for them.

As we look forward into 2020, we approach our own silver wedding anniversary. We plan to celebrate in Norfolk and in London during the week after Easter (we were married on Easter Monday 1995), and will be remembering with love and happiness all those who are no longer with us and those who are still a part of our lives. We are so grateful for all the good things and opportunities that we share, with each other and with our friends, and for this one wild and precious life. We send our love to you all, and wish you a peaceful Christmas and a new year full of wonder.



Cassie Selwyn