

Childhood Memories

signed by Avril Langard-Tang

Translation

My mother has told me so many stories about me and my sister as children and there are some that I'll never forget.

One of these stories happened when I was playing with a wooden shape sorter toy. I remember it was rectangular with three holes in the top, and it had blocks shaped like a triangle, a circle and a square. The idea was to hammer the different shapes in the right hole. On this occasion, I was happily hammering away and my mum went off into the kitchen. My sister Ruth, who had been watching me intently from across the room, marched over to where I was playing and snatched the hammer from my hands. Without any warning she started whacking me on the head with it, I was so shocked I responded by shrieking with pain.

My mum, who is deaf, couldn't hear the screams and carried on cooking in the kitchen, totally oblivious to all the commotion and tears. Eventually, she decided to pop by to check everything was okay, and to her horror she found me purple-faced, with lips a terrifying shade of blue whilst my sister continued hammering the top of my head. She ran into the room, snatched me away from Ruth and the hammer as quickly as she could and told Ruth, "No!"

Ruth immediately sensed that she had done something wrong and looked very shamefaced. So after mum had explained to her that it was dangerous to hit me on that very sensitive part of the head, Ruth came over to say sorry with her bottom lip wobbling, and gave me a big hug.

The next story begins with my mum in the kitchen (the same as before), doing the washing up. From the sink she was able to look out of the window to where my sister Ruth was playing outside in the sandpit. I was there in mum's belly, as I hadn't been born yet.

So after a while, mum glanced out of the window to check what her daughter was doing and found that Ruth was carefully transferring sand into a bucket with a spade. When the bucket was deemed full enough, Ruth would pick it up and carry it across the garden and out of my mum's view. Mum thought nothing of it, and Ruth repeated the process – back and forth, back and forth.

After a while, mum became a little suspicious. She didn't know where Ruth was going with this bucket of sand, or what she was doing with it, so my mum decided to investigate. She went outside, hid behind a wall, and when Ruth set off with the bucket, my mum followed close behind.

Unfortunately, her investigations revealed that my sister's very important work involved taking the bucket of sand to the toilet, pouring it in, flushing the chain and watching the water flood out of the toilet bowl. Of course, when my mum saw this she was absolutely horrified and shouted at my sister to stop. With a resigned sigh she realised that there was nothing she could do but scoop out as much sand as she could with her bare hands and tell her daughter not to do it again.

Honestly, my sister Ruth was such a little troublemaker!

Holiday

signed by Paul Lynch

I'm going to tell you about last year's holiday to Jamaica. It was a completely new experience for me as I had never been there before. Other family members, such as my sister and brother had been a number of times, so considering I only went last year it was quite late in life.

Anyway, just before October 2009 (last year), my mother and sister went into the travel agents, Thomas Cook, to book a holiday to Jamaica for 2 weeks. The agent checked on the internet and found a cheap deal for just over £800.00 for an all inclusive package. My mother and sister thought it was a good deal and so went ahead with the booking. As they were making the booking my mother suddenly thought, "My son, Paul, has never been to Jamaica" and decided on the spur of the moment that I should go with them.

The deposit for the trip was £300 for the three of us, £100 each, so my mother paid for mine and I had no idea. The booking was finalised with dates confirmed for June 2009.

Later that day on arriving home, my sister sent me a text telling me she had put down a £100 deposit for me to go to Jamaica. I couldn't believe it, I was over the moon! I'd always dreamt of going to Jamaica and my dream was about to come true.

So the three of us flew from Manchester to Jamaica, Montego Bay airport. We got off the plane and it was beautiful, the sun was shining, but what really hit me was the heat, it was like opening an oven door/being in an oven. The scenery was breathtaking; I'd never seen anything like it before.

After our lengthy ten hour flight we got on a coach that took us to our all inclusive hotel. Our hotel, the Star Fish looked amazing; it was an impressive 6 storeys high and was laid out in a U shape with a swimming pool in the centre/the rooms overlooking a swimming pool.

There were not only one but three different restaurants on site. The ground floor restaurant was where the all inclusive food was laid out. There was Chinese, American, English, vegetarian, salads, puddings and so much more to choose from. If you got bored with that selection you could always go up to the 1st floor to the Italian restaurant or even make your way to the other side of the complex to the Chinese restaurant. I stuck to the all inclusive selection (where I over indulged) as you had to pay at the other two restaurants, which were also used for special occasions.

Around the swimming pool there were sports activities and the sea was only a 5 minute walk away. The beach was laden with stunning white sand and the crystal blue sea looked amazing I just couldn't believe the beauty of it all. The sea's just not the same in Britain, it always looks grey and murky, so the difference was incredible.

Later on I spotted a fantastic activity that was free of charge, it was sailing. You could hop on a boat and travel quite far out, let's say about 5 miles. So grabbing the opportunity I got on the boat and was taken aback by the clarity of the deep blue sea. It was so clear I could see a depth of almost 25 feet; I could even make out the sand on the sea bed. However, I couldn't see any fish so I asked the guide where they were. They assured me that there were fish out there but there were none in sight, just the crystal clear waters. Anyway, we carried on sailing and finally made our way back

I thoroughly enjoyed Jamaica, as the weather was fantastic and the heat was so intense for the two weeks I was there. However, I do remember one Wednesday evening when I was out partying. Just as the evening was coming to an end I felt a drop of rain, but I took no notice and carried on regardless, then in a split second the heavens opened and torrential rain followed. I ran for cover and in a mere 5 minutes I was soaked wet through to the skin. We all know that if it rains for 5 minutes in Britain, it's bearable, but this certainly wasn't the case in Jamaica. Other than that downpour we had a scorching two weeks.

When we got back to the UK the worst thing was that after 2 weeks of sun my skin was much darker and it was also very dry. My mother was much the same with itchy dry skin, but she put it down to going in and out of the sea every day.

Overall, I really enjoyed my time there. Another thing we did whilst we were there, was visit my mother's side of the family. We spent 11 days at the hotel and then went to visit the family on the South Coast, Saint Elizabeth. My family grew up a farm where they tended cattle. Whilst we were there we saw that everyone lived in wooden houses. There were many cultures and different foods, and it was very much a community where families mixed and everyone was happy. You could see children running around barefoot, I was shocked.

It seems to me that Jamaican and African cultures are very similar as a result of the movement of people here during the slave trade. Jamaicans have their own culture and everyone gets on with each other - it seems to me that they have similar life experiences. The communities that exist in the north and the south are content with their lives even if they are different as they are wealthier in the north.

Maybe one day you'll go to Jamaica. It's definitely worth a visit as it's such a beautiful place, I'll be heading back there next year!

Giving up Smoking

signed by Tom Johnston

I remember a few years ago I developed a cough, so I made an appointment to go and see my doctor. I met with Dr. Lee and explained that I had been coughing for quite some time, so the doctor asked me to unbutton my shirt. He got his stethoscope out and listened to my chest and then asked me to turn around so he could do the same on my back. By the look on his face he didn't seem to be very happy with what he could hear, so I asked him what was wrong.

"Your chest sounds terrible and your lungs are full of fluid (liquid)." He then paused before asking me if I smoked. I reluctantly told him that I did. "How many do you smoke a day?", to which I answered,

"About twenty to thirty." He looked horrified and asked me how long I'd been smoking that many. I replied, "Thirty years."

"You have to stop smoking", he said. "If you don't stop smoking I won't help you, and I won't prescribe you antibiotics, because your chest is full of smoke (soot)."

The following week I went to see the nurse with my form from the doctor. She asked me a number of questions, performed the usual checks such as blood pressure, and asked me details about my medical history (history of disease).

After all the checks the nurse gave me a batch of nicotine (nicotina) patches explaining that they would help me to give up smoking. She also gave me some nicotine gum that I could also use if I wanted. I sat there nodding my head and feigning interest. Lacking enthusiasm I took the supply of medical paraphernalia/ medical items and headed home.

I stuck the first patch on, but about an hour later I didn't feel right, I started feeling dizzy and sick so I ripped it off realising it was too strong and replaced it with a smaller weaker patch. But this one was no better as I still felt nauseous, so I took that one off too. Determined to succeed on my own, I decided to leave the patches altogether.

On my first non-smoking day I was feeling really positive, but on the second day the cravings started and I was becoming restless and desperate for a cigarette. By the third day I'd had enough. I gave in, went straight to the shops and bought myself a packet.

I tentatively lit up the first cigarette I'd had in three days, but something wasn't right. It just didn't feel the same as before. I was expecting a satisfying relief to my cravings but it didn't happen, so I put it out and threw the packet in the drawer.

On the fourth day I was feeling much the same but I had noticed that when I ate I was able to really taste the food again. I was experiencing the sourness of fruit such as apples and oranges that I'd never tasted before - even the flavour of bananas was new to me.

After rediscovering my taste for food I started to eat more and more and ended up putting on just over a stone in a matter of 2 months. Nevertheless, I didn't reach for a cigarette once.

After having not smoked for 4 months I went back to see the doctor. He carried out the same tests as before and listened to my chest. The doctor then told me that my lungs had cleared up, they sounded much better and that I'd done well over the last 4 months.

I told him that although I'd come this far, I was struggling with the cravings and just couldn't get cigarettes out of my mind. To add to this, I was surrounded by constant reminders such as other people smoking and billboards advertising cigarettes, but the doctor told me to keep up the good work/persevere.

Over the next 6 months I started walking and was surprised at how my fitness levels had improved. Before I gave up smoking I'd be out of breath but now I was able to walk at quite a fast pace, overall I felt much healthier.

My house had also changed for the better because when my friends came round, they noticed that it didn't smell of smoke. It was then that I considered myself to be a non-smoker, and after one year of not smoking I was definitely feeling the benefits.

I remember going to my friend's house one day. I walked into a room of smokers and what really struck me was the stench of cigarettes. When I look back over the past thirty years as a smoker, I had no idea how awful my house must have smelt. I was totally oblivious to it.

I recommend giving up smoking to anyone, just like I have; it's the best thing to do.