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Dear Fiona and Felicity,

A few days ago we arrived back from Uncle Stephen and Auntie Conny's wedding in Düsseldorf. As sadly you couldn't be there and as weddings are such important events I thought I would send you an account of what happened. I am sending a copy to great-grandmother and grandad as well as they too couldn't be there. The wedding was a lovely affair, and unusual in many ways.

A holiday but no Polterabend!

It all started for us two weeks before the wedding day when we drove the 700 km to Düsseldorf to call on Uncle Stephen on our way to our holiday. He and Conny were very excited and busily preparing for everything. They had a lot to do since they have a new house and had lots of work to do in it and necessarily lots of tidying including the very big basement which was full of stuff. They were planning the "Polterabend" which was to take place a week before the wedding. This is a German wedding custom where, for Stephen and Conny, more than 70 people would come to a big party at which there is tradition of smashing crockery (usually old and bought cheaply for the purpose) Stephen was intending to erect a tent in the garden and everyone would stay and celebrate all night.

During the overnight stay, we helped a bit, starting to clear up the basement, and then drove



Picture 1

on another 300 km to Friesland in Holland where we had chartered a large motor boat. We had a lovely holiday exploring at an easy pace the canals, rivers and lakes and also the attractive small towns (see pictures 1 & 2).

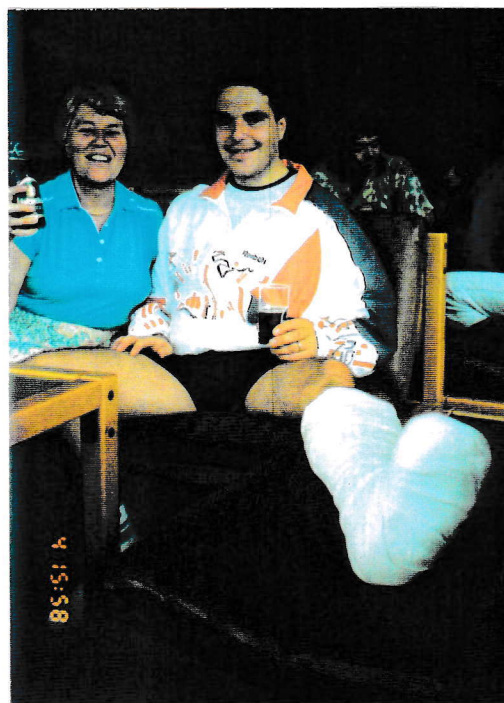


Picture 2

We returned to Düsseldorf the following Saturday expecting to find a tent outside Stephen's and almost everything prepared for the Polterabend but there was nothing! Conny came to the front door and said that Stephen had had an accident and was in hospital! - there would be no Polterabend.

What had happened was that during the previous week Uncle Stephen and Auntie Conny had continued with the clearing of the basement. In sorting out some boxes, a heavy glass double glazing panel which was leaning against the wall fell forward onto Stephen's leg and foot and cut his foot so badly that he had to be rushed to hospital and have a substantial operation to sew it all up. He now had to stay in hospital and keep his foot up.

We went with Auntie Conny to the hospital: Uncle Stephen was in good form (picture 3) although very tired but we were able to wheel him in a wheel chair round the very pleasant hospital garden and sit with him in the hospital café. On that Saturday afternoon several other members of Auntie Conny's family arrived to see Stephen so we bought some Pizza and some champagne and had a little party in the café (picture 4). Auntie Conny's sister and brother-in-law had brought an old cup in a plastic bag together with a hammer to break it with (picture 5) so Stephen and Conny had a tiny Polterabend after all.



Picture 3



Picture 4

The week before the wedding.

The following week was quite different from what we expected. We were going to have a holiday but instead grandmother helped Conny with the washing, cleaning, cooking and preparations for the wedding while I did a bit by finishing the basement tidying, washing up, fetching and carrying for the others, collecting people from the airport and so on. We visited Stephen twice a day and took him for walks round the hospital grounds in his wheel chair. Although in hospital, Uncle Stephen worked hard too: he had a telephone by his bed and made a lot of the necessary arrangements for the wedding by 'phone. Auntie Conny was still working and so had to do lots of jobs in her lunch hour and on the way to and from work in Cologne. Grandmother and I did actually manage a half day cycle visit to the medieval town of Zons which is reached by ferry across the Rhine and is not actually very far from the hospital. There is memorial there which has five



Picture 5

brass pigs standing in front of it (picture 6) which were all warm to sit on in the sunshine. We also had another half day out in Essen to visit the exhibition of impressionist paintings from the Russian collections and a half day shopping in Düsseldorf.

The first wedding at the Standesamt.

Everything began to get very exciting on Thursday, the day before the first wedding. The doctors found that Stephen was progressing very well and put a new plaster on his foot. I fetched him from the hospital while Auntie Conny and Grandmother were engaged in cleaning, gardening, tidying and shopping. As our room was to be used for a number of other guests, Grandmother and I moved out of the house into the lovely hotel which was to be used for the wedding. Then I chauffeured Stephen to a haircut and then to the middle of Düsseldorf (about 15 km) to collect Godfrey, the best man, and his girlfriend, Jasmine. Meanwhile Uncle Michael and Auntie Nicola with your cousins, William and James, had arrived after a fast drive from Paris. A number of other friends and relations had also come and in the evening Auntie Conny provided a big "Chilli" supper for the ever increasing hoard. I fetched more people from the airport including Bruce Mortimer, and finally got back to the hotel after midnight. Although weary I was so excited that I don't think I slept at all.



Picture 6

We then got up at six o'clock so as to get to the Standesamt (the Registry Office) for the civil ceremony which was to take place at eight. In Germany and most continental countries you have to get married at the Registry Office, whether or not you are going to get married in church. We took Auntie Conny's mother with us and arrived in good time at 7.35 just before Auntie Conny, Uncle Stephen and all the people who had stayed at the house got there. Our party was not the first! Weddings go on all day from about seven in the morning and we must have seen four or five wedding groups while we were there.



Picture 7



Picture 8

Auntie Conny was wearing a lovely red cashmere suit; unfortunately in the confusion of getting herself ready and the eleven guests out of the

house she had forgotten her bouquet but she was looking so nice that she needed no embellishment. Uncle Stephen despite the foot, crutches and some discomfort was his usual cheerful, handsome self (picture 7). He was very pleased to be able to wear his new suit intact for at one point in the week we all thought that grandmother would have to open the leg of the suit in order to accommodate the plaster.



Picture 9

in the restaurant and made friends with a waitress who brought them a variety of biscuits and sweets to eat.

At the end of the morning, Grandmother and I went home to the hotel and retreated to bed. We got up in the afternoon to go swimming in the hotel pool with Auntie Nicola, Uncle Michael William and James which was great fun. Then off we went to the airport again to fetch Melanie who had flown in from a meeting in Ely, back to the hotel with her and then to Stephen and Conny's who were serving about thirty people with sausages and salad.

We were going to go home early but we first drove several of the young men to Düsseldorf. They were accompanying Stephen to a hotel because it is the tradition in Germany that the bridegroom cannot stay in the same house as the bride before the church wedding. Stephen went to bed reasonably early as he was suffering a bit with his foot but Uncle Michael told me that he came back with the others at about three in the morning!

The wedding day

When we woke up, it was a dismal morning, pouring with rain, but as the day went on the weather improved so that there was some sunshine for the wedding itself. In the morning we went shopping with Melanie to buy button hole flowers and white ribbon for the cars. Then Auntie Nicola, Uncle Michael, William and James arrived in the hotel where they were to stay overnight. We all had a lunch together of champagne and sandwiches in our room together with Melanie and Bruce. Stephen, Godfrey and Jasmine arrived in the middle as well.

The ceremony took place upstairs in an distinguished panelled room of an older building and was conducted by a young lady registrar (picture 8). Stephen and Conny were very happy (picture 9).

Then we all drove to a small town on the north side of Düsseldorf for a wedding breakfast at nine o'clock. It was Uncle Michael's birthday (picture 10) so he too was even more cheerful than usual. William and James played



Picture 10

Then we changed into our best clothes and set off to the church. Grandmother (picture 11) looked splendid in her frock and jacket which she had made from two pieces of silk which Uncle Stephen had brought back for her from Thailand. The hat was bought in Peterborough and was also decorated with some of the silk. Even I felt rather splendid in a new suit which is in the Bavarian style with reverses but no collar.

The modern church was quite hard to find in the middle of a large new estate of shops and houses. We were welcomed by the catholic priest (picture 12), a young, friendly and enthusiastic man whose preaching attracts a lot of people, as we had found the previous Sunday when we went to church and



Picture 12

had to stand.

Conny's family were all there: her mother, her oldest

sister, Britte, and her husband, Menem, with their four children, one of whom was in the middle of a fortnight's holiday in London and who had flown back specially for the weekend, her next sister, Annetta with her husband, Josef, and son Christoph, and her brother, Marcus, with his wife, Cornelia, and their three daughters. There were lots of friends of both Conny and Stephen with a large English contingent. Joe Bluem, Uncle Stephen's boss also came.



Picture 11

When all the guests were assembled the procession, consisting of the Priest, the servers, Auntie Conny and Uncle Stephen, Godfrey and Christiana who was the bridesmaid, came into the church. I think it is true to say that everyone's breath was taken away by Auntie Conny's radiance; she and Uncle Stephen were clearly supremely happy. Auntie Conny wore a full length dress with puff sleeves in very pale pink. She looked very beautiful.

It was an interesting well organised service in which a lot of us took part. After the opening prayers and a hymn I read a piece, chosen by Auntie Conny, from the fairy tale "The Little Prince" by Antoine de St. Exupéry. The Priest then gave a nice sermon based on the bible story where Jesus heals the blind man. He made it very appropriate both to the start of a marriage and to all our lives. Auntie Conny's brother-in-law and Sister-in-law lead the prayers for Stephen and Conny, a friend gave a spirited statement on how this marriage between two people from different nationalities was an example to us all and Auntie



Picture 13

Conny and Uncle Stephen read two of the key prayers (picture 13). At the exchange of rings everybody was invited to form into a circle round the Priest and Auntie Conny and Uncle Stephen so that we should all feel part of one family.



Picture 14



Picture 15

After the service there were photographs (picture 14) outside, we threw rice (picture 15) and then we all drove off to the hotel for the reception. Auntie Conny and Uncle Stephen's car was decorated (picture 16) with a splendid garland of flowers.

The remaining twenty or so vehicles each had some white ribbon attached to the aerials. It is the custom here that all the wedding cars hoot as they drive in procession and all the other cars on the road answer them. This was great fun particularly when we hooted under the bridges with the roof open!



Picture 16

After more photographs (picture 17) we drank champagne and then sat down to an super meal, which however was served slowly so that one did not get too full. People sat at tables of eight or ten and a nice thing was that all the children sat together. Cousin William seemed to get on very well with Conny's nieces and nephews despite them not having a language in common.

After each course someone made a speech; Godfrey as best man gave a very amusing account of Stephen's life. However an interesting custom here is that throughout the evening different individuals give a little turn in honour of the bride and groom. Auntie Conny's Uncle and Aunt sang a little song about her as a young girl and produced a home made book with early photographs of her. Auntie Conny's brother had composed a splendid "Rapper" song about Conny and her various boyfriends finishing of course with Stephen. And, very late in the evening, Christiana organised a game in which Auntie Conny had to feed Uncle Stephen with jelly; this was not so easy as Conny was



Picture 17

The cake was cut later in the evening. It was a "Baumkuchen", a tree cake", which must have been nearly five feet tall. You can just see in picture 18 that Auntie Conny and Uncle Stephen (crutches as well) had to stand on a chair in order to cut it.

All the children except James were up very late and William seemed to have a splendid time; it was amusing to see him going regularly back to his place to get one of the many sweets which he had been given and had hidden away there.

There was a good band and most people danced, even Uncle Stephen (picture 19) who managed a bit on his crutches! It went on very late with Irish stew being served at midnight; it was delicious! Grandmother and I went to bed at about two and I believe Uncle Michael and Bruce were the last to leave at four. Auntie Conny and Uncle Stephen stayed in the same hotel (there is no "going away" in Germany) so some of Stephen's friends made them an apple pie bed but not many tricks were played as everyone realised that Uncle Stephen was just out of hospital and needed some rest.

The next day: Sunday

We got up late but not too late to go swimming again with Uncle Michael and family. William is just getting out of his water wings and can just about swim a length now. James just splashes about at the moment but is very keen. Then we had "brunch" (breakfast+lunch) which Uncle Stephen and Auntie Conny had organised. While everyone was rather tired it was just like a continuation of the party since many people had stayed in the hotel and a number came back again.

Then, rather sadly, we got our things together and prepared to leave. We took Melanie on a outing across the ferry to Zons in the bright sunshine for

behind Stephen, had her arms under his and could not see what was happening! They managed very well. Conny's nieces also did a nice piece based on Stephen's world travels.



Picture 18



Picture 19

an hour or so and put her on the train to the airport. Then we called at Uncle Stephen and Auntie Conny's house to say goodbye. They were there surrounded by their wedding presents, totally happy but sad to see everyone go. We drove a couple of hundred kilometers, found a small hotel to stay in overnight and discovered that grandmother had left her handbag and purse at Stephen's.

We arrived home in the middle of the next day very happy with all that happened; I doubt if we have ever had such an exciting week.

One last thing: I am writing this about a week later; yesterday we were at the German-American shooting festival here in Garmisch and grandmother, obviously taking after great-granddad, won a prize for the accuracy of her shooting; she got 33 out of a possible 36 and then in the final obtained a very respectable position, behind all the people who shoot often but in front of the amateurs. I am very proud of her. As she pointed out to the American commander, while she is neither German or American, her son is an American citizen and just last week he had married a German girl: that is quite a contribution to German-American friendship!

This has turned out to be much longer than I expected but I do hope you have found it interesting to read.

With lots of love.

Granddad
