

# Blue Sky Thinking

## Chapter Four

### July 04

During the early part of July, the wet, cold weather meant that various odd jobs were done. The freezer room for my beef enterprise was cleared out, repaired and painted a pristine white. However, towards the end of the month, the weather finally settled down and harvest has begun at last. Alas, my white room remains completely empty, as everyone is too busy to finish the plumbing and electrical fittings! Meanwhile, on the advice of our local council, I went off for the day to undertake the mandatory food hygiene course. This proved to be an interesting and informative experience, as well as an opportunity to promote our new beef enterprise to representatives of various other local food businesses. It culminated in a brief examination - for me, these days it is a rare experience to sit in a silent room as someone says, "You may turn your paper over now". However, all went well and I am now the proud possessor of a 'Foundation Certificate in Food Hygiene'. My brother remarked, rather witheringly, that it qualifies me to wipe the tables at MacDonald's!

For some time now, the cattle have all been required to have a 'passport' and all movements on and off the farm must be diligently recorded. I was vaguely aware of plans to extend this regime to other animals and sure enough, a letter came from the local Horse Rescue Centre, from which I loan Paddy, the donkey. They asked me to record all of his distinguishing features on a diagram and photograph him from both sides. He will then be issued with a passport to ensure that if he is ever eaten, his origins and movements can be traced! This is one of those EU regulations which somehow seems more applicable in certain other European countries - I might have trouble marketing donkey steak locally!

England, however, has its own quirks where living things are concerned. The TV news recently featured an enchanting story about a man in the South of England who has put his life savings into a project to reintroduce the great bustard back into the wild. Young birds are being bred in captivity with the intention of releasing them later. To ensure that they do not grow to trust humans, they are fed by a man dressed up in a bird costume! As foxes will be a hazard to them, a fox on a leash is taken daily into their cage. If the birds do not run, they are squirted with water pistols! Only in England...

Timmy, our 9 year old son, attends the local village school and is a member of the Horsted Players, the school drama group. During July they put on a performance of '*Shockwaves - gel is the word*' - a sort of primary school version of '*Grease*'. The show was performed on a large stage at the local secondary school, in a huge hall, to an audience of hundreds. The children rose to the occasion magnificently - their singing and dancing was superb and they were obviously enjoying themselves hugely. I never

## Blue Sky Thinking

had the chance to do anything like it when I was at school. Little Horsted school has only 100 children, but the range of activities on offer should silence those who argue that small village schools do not offer sufficient opportunities.

Sports Day is also an important occasion in the school's social calendar. The children are formed into teams, with one child from each year making up a team. They then rotate around the school field, performing 8 activities, whilst parents and helpers attempt to score their efforts. At the end of the afternoon, the scores are read out for each team. This system is much criticised by those nostalgic for the competitive sports days of old. However, this way the children all support and encourage each other, no-one is always 'last' and the children are busy all the time, not hanging around waiting to race. It seems to me to have a lot to recommend it.

During July, I finally reached the grand old age of 40, so we threw a party in the barn to celebrate. All the locals turned up, as well as several of my colleagues from the NHS. They were all entranced by the farm, the animals and the pig roast. We did manage to provide an alternative for the vegetarians (a common trait in public sector employees!). They all declared the accompanying roast potatoes the best they had ever tasted and we wisely neglected to mention that they were roasted under the pig, in the dripping fat!