



Vertically Challenged Anecdotes

Catholics	1.	Woman taken in adultery
	2.	Bishop's babies
Christmas	3.	Santa's reindeer
Dream	4.	Don Giovanni
Holidays	5.	Salobreña waitresses
	6.	Salobreña complaints
	7.	Salobreña bridge slogan
	8.	Robert in Granada
	9.	At the airport
	10.	Meal in Amsterdam
	11.	Meal in La Coruña
Jokes	12.	Rumpole of the Bailey- 1
	13.	Rumpole of the Bailey- 2
	14.	Ugliest baby
	15.	Priests and shepherds
	16.	Dog in the telegraph office
	17.	Visual jokes
Languages	18.	Cookery ingredients
	19.	Constantly waiting and looking
Medical	20.	Discarding bits
	21.	Coming round from surgery
	22.	Medical query
	23.	Little boy in clinic

Meg and Martin	24.	On the way to Antwerp
	25.	Meg in Torremolinos
	26.	Martin in Cheshire
Neighbours	27.	Rose and the boyfriend
	28.	Rose at the Golf Club
	29.	Next door neighbour's cat
	30.	On the kitchen table
	31.	Fire in Wigston
	32.	Teenagers in Bromsgrove
Politics & Royalty	33.	Eva Peron
	34.	Denis Healey
	35.	George Brown
	36.	French Foreign Minister's cat
	37.	The Queen and her visitor
Shopping	38.	In my shopping bag
Strange yet true	39.	OU Summer School Student
	40.	The Fire extinguisher
	41.	Our attic bedroom
	42.	Tearaway Danny
Students	43.	Practical joke
	44.	Personnel Management
Tradesmen	45.	Blocked drain
Walking	46.	Walking in Leeds
	47.	Walking on Snowdon
Work	48.	University garden party

	49.	Tiffany's
	50.	National Lending Library
	51.	Works football team
	52.	Computer software
	53.	University Validation
	54.	College Photographer
	55.	Sauna
	56.	Reginald
	57.	Double Bed
Yorkshire	58.	Yorkshire Undertaker
	59.	Yorkshire Farmer
	60.	Yorkshire 'Old Girl'

mch/31 July 2019

Preface

Over the years, I seem to have acquired -or more accurately remembered- a series of stories, anecdotes or even just 'occurrences' each of which has a humorous twist to it. So many people have said to me 'Why don't you write them down?' that I thought I would and this is the result...

Why *Vertically Challenged Anecdotes*? Well, the definition of a *tall story* is a 'story or tale that seems highly unlikely or believable' However, each of these anecdotes is firmly rooted in reality (with the exception of the *Jokes* section which are included because I have found them particularly amusing and/or memorable). Hence these are not *tall stories* but the obverse (not quite the opposite) and hence *Vertically Challenged Anecdotes* is a more accurate description.

Where there are references to actual persons, nearly all of these are no longer on this mortal earth so I feel that I can tell the tale with impunity but there are a few disguises in case any distant relative discovers this manuscript and gets offended or upset by it.

My intention is to bring some kind of humour into your life by recounting these stories but if I have failed, then you can always email me and I remove them from

any future editions. In the same spirit, I would be delighted to know which of these anecdotes you find particularly amusing.

I can assure you that each entry is securely rooted in reality apart from the fact that I may have mis-remembered or unintentionally elaborated some details. However, I would want to stress that each of these has actually happened to me or been relayed to me. In many instances, I have gone beyond the immediate anecdote and given some of the context much as if I was in an actual conversation with you.

I do accept that the fact of writing this account is an act of supreme self indulgence - but if it brings a smile or even a tear to your face then I feel I will have succeeded.

It is conventional to say that any reference to any living persons is entirely accidental but, of course, in this case any such reference is entirely deliberate.

If any family members or friends can remember any stories I have told in the past and completely forgotten do let me know so that I can update at an appropriate juncture.

Catholics

1. The woman taken in adultery

[This may have originated in a cartoon in a Catholic newspaper but in any case it was told to me by a Catholic colleague]

In the New Testament, there is an account of the punishment about to be meted out to a woman taken in adultery. At the time, I understand, the victim was buried up to their necks and then the local population stoned them to death. Jesus had an observation of incidents of this kind and issued the warning

'Let he who is without sin cast the first stone'

At this point a middle aged woman (dressed perhaps in blue) started to energetically throw stones at the unfortunate victim even though the rest of the population held back. At this point, Jesus turned to the woman and said *'Mother? You know there are times when you really p*ss me off'*

2. Bishop's Babies

This story originates from some of the remarks made at my mother's funeral service which was held in the spring of 2007. I was recalling the fact that my mother used to tell the story to her own school pupils of a little boy who used to walk a mile in the journey home from school in order to shorten the bus journey home from school. Then the (old) penny which had been saved was donated to a collection at the local Catholic primary school to a fund which was called **The Bishops Babies** which was used to help orphaned children in the diocese. [I discovered subsequently that the little boy in the story was actually myself]

In my address to the congregation I could not resist pointing out that in the 1950's the phrase *The Bishop's Babies* was clear and unambiguous but in 2017 mindful of some of the events that occurred in Ireland, we could not be sure that the phrase *The Bishop's Babies* was not literally true!

The priest conducting the funeral stared hard at his feet at this point...

Christmas

3. Santa's reindeer

For many years, I was privileged enough to play the role of Santa Claus at my daughter-in-law's primary school in central Birmingham. We had a well-worked script in which I would ask the children if they had been good boys and girls and how many 'sleep' nights there were until Christmas.

After a few years, I decided to enliven the script a little and this is what emerged...

Now then, boys and girls, I wonder if any of you have eaten a burger - shout YES if you have! And also shout YES if you have a cat or a dog as a family pet....

Now you may be wondering why I am here and my reindeer are not here with me. Well, I have to report to you that Rudolph, my chief reindeer has been set upon by a pack of wild dogs and killed. They tore all of the flesh from his body and then, rather than waste it all, meat from Rudolph's body was stripped off and minced down into fine bits and then put into burgers and tins of dog food and cat food. This was then sold all over Birmingham in the last month or so. So if you are wondering where Rudolph is, I can tell you that you and

your family pets have probably all eaten him up by now...

Now then, boys and girls, there is no need to cry..you probably have all enjoyed eating Rudolph in the first place...

If you are feeling sick, can you make sure you are doing it in a neat pile in front of you and not over the little boy and girl next to you as you don't want to ruin their party clothes, do you?

Also, boys and girls, beware of many false Santa Claus who may impersonate me. You can often see them in department stores like John Lewis and you can tell them apart because they have nicotine stained fingers and smell of gin.

My contract with the school as Santa Claus was abruptly terminated and I was never asked to play Santa Claus ever again- I cannot think why?

[PS The above sequence did not actually happen - it was only a *thought experiment*.]

PPS With acknowledgment to Tom Sharpe's *Wilt* from whom the idea originated.

Dream

4. Don Giovanni

Every so often, one has a particularly vivid dream which seems so real that when one wakes up, it feels as though the events of the dream had actually happened. What follows is an account of a dream which I had when we were visiting Mexico on the occasion of my son's international scholarship to Universidad de las Americas (UDLA) in Puebla in 1986-87. It may have been that in a different society, one's senses were especially heightened and hence this found expression in the vivid dream.

Being avid opera goers, Meg and I were seated in a theatre waiting for the performance to begin at 7.30. The time was actually 7.10 when one of the opera house staff approached me with the news that their principal singer was indisposed and therefore would it be possible for me to play the lead role in the Mozart opera of Don Giovanni. I readily agreed saying that although I was familiar with the score, I might have forgotten some of the words of the libretto - would it be possible to have a few prompts hidden in various places on the set so that I could remind myself of the words to sing. I was assured that this would present no problem and they

would organise it for me. I was escorted to my dressing room where I applied my stage makeup and donned my costume, all the while rehearsing in my head the role I was shortly to perform.

At 7.27, three minutes before 'curtain up' the Assistant Stage Master came to the dressing room and said - 'Right Maestro - are you ready for this and are you sure you can do it?

'Yes, yes' I replied full of confidence - at which point the ASM said to me 'Did we say Don Giovanni - Sorry! It's actually the Count in the Marriage of Figaro!'

At this point I woke up screaming in terror - it was quite evident that I could prepare to sing the whole of an opera at 20 minutes notice but 3 minutes notice was too short, even for me!

[There may have been a psychological component in this as in my professional life, I was sometimes called upon to do something with only about 20 minutes preparation time - but 3 minutes was a step too far!]

Holidays

5. The Salobreña waitresses

Meg and I have often stayed in the Hotel Salobreña, initially when it was a small-ish independent 3-star hotel in Salobreña in the south of Spain. More latterly, it expanded, was taken over by the Best Western group and offered some excellent value Saga holidays.

Some of the guests had stayed at the hotel for the last seventeen years. One of our number pointed out to us the old grandfather whose hotel it had originally been. The question was also posed why so many of the hotel's waitresses looked so alike each other.

It transpired that the original owner had been very liberal with his favours with several local women. As soon as the illegitimate girls were of working age, they were automatically offered employment in the hotel. So the similarities in the appearances of the waitresses was not a coincidence

After a pleasant evening in the bar, the group of Saga pensioners were fumbling with their room keys and remarking we had not been having a *key-party*. A young Spanish waitress with good English overheard us and then remarked *'Oh, I've been to one of those!'*

6. Salobreña complaints

One of the Saga reps at the hotel told us of a complaint with which she had to deal when she was newly qualified rep at the hotel. Several of the English guests complained that there seemed to be a continuous orgy amongst a group of English residents. The evidence for this was a large number of running up and down corridors late at night, doors being slammed and frequently overheard comments such as *'Oh! I can't possibly have you again tonight because I've already had you as a partner at least once during the day'*

These comments were relayed to the hotel management who seemed very relaxed about the behaviour pattern. *'Ah!'* the manager had said, *'you must be referring to the English residents who are organised into a large **bridge party!**'* - this explains the frequently overheard references to new partners being required!

7. Salobreña bridge slogan

The Salobrena Hotel in which Meg and I had several memorable holidays lies on a headland some 2-3 miles along a main road leading out of Salobreña. However, it is possible to take a short cut from the hotel into the town itself which involved some cross-country traversing. Approaching the town this way, there was an area, perhaps prone to flooding from the sea, in which a long wall ran alongside a type of raised causeway.

On this wall, a presumably irate local villager had painted the message in letters at least one foot high so it could easily be read :

Su muher tiene cara de un insatisfecha

This translates as:

Your wife has the face of a women who can never be satisfied!

The message was prominent for several years and is probably there to this day, being almost impossible to remove. The price of living in a small community?

8. Robert in Granada

As Salobreña is due South of Granada (home to the fabelled Alhambra palace) Meg and I decided to catch a bus and spend a day there with our friends, Robert and Dorothy. After our sightseeing, we arrived at the bus station to catch the coach for the return journey. As we had about 10 minutes before the coach departure, Robert and I thought we had better 'spend a penny' as it was a journey of least one and a half hours back home.

Granada bus station has a long rectangular layout with toilets at each end. When Robert and I arrived at the toilets, the male toilets were out of commission but there was no time to traverse the whole length of the bus station to the other toilets and make it to the bus on time. What to do? After prompting by a local man, we were advised to use the women's toilets. What follows next was almost exactly like a re-run of the scene from *Father Ted* in which a group of Catholic priests get trapped in the female underwear department of a large department store and have to organise their escape one by one.

I waited for the opportunity and then ran as fast as I could to the nearest cubicle, I then opened the door a chink and beckoned Robert to do likewise when the

coast was clear. Having relieved ourselves, we then had to organise the whole episode in reverse - I waited for an opportunity and indicated to Robert 'Go, Robert, Go!' It could only happen to the English!

Another completely unrelated toilet incident occurred when I was waiting for Meg outside the toilets in a converted convent (it might have been Monserrat, but no matter) The gentlemen's toilets had some magnificent tiling (*azulejos*) and after I had waited for Meg for some time, I thought I might be able to run in quickly with my camera at the ready, take a snap of these and then depart.

What happened from the point of view of an Italian tourist who was relieving himself was that a mad Englishman dashed in with his camera at the ready, photographed him when he was no position to extricate himself and then dashed out again. Perhaps he was traumatised for life! I have often wondered whether he told the story to his family and friends when he returned home!

9. At the airport

I am grateful to my daughter-in-law, Mandy, for reminding me of the full details of this incident, which I had completely forgotten about.

Mandy, Martin (our son) Meg and I were spending what turned to be a fairly disastrous Christmas in Barcelona. For a start, one of the guests - an elderly lady accompanied by her sister and two nieces who had been brought to Barcelona for a Christmas treat - dropped down dead in the room next to us. Martin had a terrible episode with a bad back and spent the whole week flat on the floor in his hotel bedroom, only to emerge on the final day to the astonishment of the other guests on the holiday to whom he was a complete stranger.

On the journey home, in the airport at Barcelona. Martin was flat on the floor (again) as was Meg who was also plagued by back problems. The one surviving sister and her nieces were consoling themselves, tearfully, as the coffin of the deceased aunt was being loaded on the plane. At which point, I was said to have remarked '*Well I don't know - the whole place is starting to resemble a morgue with bodies flat out everywhere!*' I don't remember this but Mandy wanted the earth to swallow her up...

10. Meal in Amsterdam

Meg and I were on honeymoon in Amsterdam in 1968 when the following incident occurred which sticks in our memory. We decided to eat in a good restaurant attached to the central railway station in Amsterdam. What follows next is an account in which you have to visualise the evident sequence of events...

In the centre of the restaurant were a German couple. The female member of the couple was well-built and in an extremely low-cut dress. The waiter advanced slowly towards her balancing a whole tureen of hot tomato soup on a tray. As he approached, the tureen performed a perfect trajectory through the air and deposited the whole of its contents completely on the most sensitive parts of the woman's body... her screams rang round the restaurant and are remembered to this day. To make matters worse (if they could be) the waiter grabbed a napkin but was immediately faced with a dilemma - to dab or not to dab the woman's breasts directly. Eventually through screams and sobs she was led away into the kitchen where no doubt they could apply some Acriflavine or other suitable remedy. The remainder of the guests in the restaurant concluded their meal in a subdued silence, wondering if they could translate the German imprecations that had been uttered...

11. Meal in La Coruna

Mike was in one of our favourite restaurants, part of the Hotel Maria Pita in La Coruña - Meg was unfortunately at home in Bromsgrove assailed by a migraine. We were assembled to have a pre-party to celebrate 50 years of marriage attended by close friends and relatives. The restaurant had a little private meeting area which we colonised to show wedding photographs, play our original wedding music and drink a toast. I had tipped off the hotel staff who really entered into the spirit of the occasion and ordered as much Cava (champagne) as we needed - the instruction to the waitresses was to just fetch another bottle when the preceding one had run out. In attendance were two blonde waitresses (quite unusual for Spain) and the restaurant manageress, also herself a blonde. As is customary on such occasions and full of bonhomie, there was lots of kissing of the waitresses who helped us all to celebrate.

Eventually, one of our closest friends, Dan, exclaimed *'Mike! I think this whole fiesta is just a subterfuge to kiss as many Spanish women as you can!'*

Of course, Dan was not absolutely wrong but it is fair to say that Spanish culture is much more tactile than English culture and there was a lot of champagne around...

Jokes

12. Rumpole of the Bailey [1]

[This story and the next were told on BBC Radio 4 early in the morning so they must be in reasonable taste..]

Rumpole of the Bailey was a character invented by John Mortimer and the subject of several anecdotes and books - I think he was played by Leo McKern in a TV series decades ago. Anyway, here goes...

Rumpole came home from the court and announced to his wife:

Hilda! You will never guess what? I have just got Bessie, who runs the brothel down in the town, off a charge of living off immoral earnings. She was so delighted that that she has given me a little 'chitty' so that I can have a free session in her establishment!

Hilda replied *'Now, now Rumpole don't get too excited. I would sit down and have your tea and then why not go down into town and visit Bessie's establishment where you can disappoint another woman for a change!*

13. Rumpole of the Bailey [2]

The elderly but kindly judge was trying a case of alleged sexual assault. When the victim came herself to give evidence, the judge asked her to repeat the exact words that her assailant had used. The victim replied *'I am sorry, m'Lud, but the words were so obscene that I could not possibly bring myself to repeat them.'* The judge, sympathetic to the victim informed her *'That's quite all right - you can, if you wish, write down the words that were used'* Whereupon the victim wrote on the piece of paper provided the words *'Do you fancy a f*ck?'* and then promptly handed it to the judge. Having read the note, the judge handed to the jury so that they could all read it as well. The note was read and passed down the line and eventually arrived at the eleventh jury member, a buxom young blonde who then tried to pass it on to a dozing elderly male juror member. On receiving the note, he nodded enthusiastically and popped the note into his top pocket. The judge observed this happening and directed *'Jury man No. 12 - Can you bring me that note immediately'* whereupon the elderly gentleman replied *'But it's nothing to do with you, m'lud- it's a totally private arrangement between this young lady and myself!'*

14. Ugliest baby

A young woman got on a bus with an infant child. As she was paying her fare, the bus driver commented *'My God! That is the ugliest, ugliest baby I have ever seen!'* The woman was evidently distressed by this and started crying as she carried her infant down the bus looking to find a seat at the rear of the bus.

The other passengers heard this transaction and immediately tried to console the woman by saying *'The driver had no right to talk to you like that! Go and complain to him and tell him that his behaviour is totally unacceptable!'*

The young woman was not inclined to go and argue but her fellow passengers encouraged her by saying *'Go and complain to him right now! We will hold your monkey for you whilst you do so!'*

15. Priests and Shepherds

In a television quiz show, the two contestants (the priests and the shepherds) scored an equal number of points. The tie-breaker was to set the two teams to compose any limerick ending in the word *Timbuktoo* and so the two teams set to work. Here is the effort of the priests:

*I've been a priest all my life
Got no children, got no wife
I read my bible through and through
And journeyed on to Timbuktoo*

Meanwhile, here was the effort of the shepherds

*Aargh, Tim and I to Paris went
Met three women - cheap to rent
They were three but we were two
So I booked one and Tim Booked Two!*

The Shepherds were adjudged the winners!

16. Dog in the telegraph office

In the days when the telegraph was the quickest mode of communication in the United States, a dog responded to the sign which read:

'Telegrams - send ten words for one dollar'

The dog walked in and announced he would like to send a telegram. The telegraph clerk replied *'Certainly sir - would you like to dictate it for me now?'*

The dog dictated as follows:

Wuff, wuff, wuff
Wuff, wuff, wuff
Wuff, wuff, wuff.

The clerk having written down the message to be sent in the telegram indicated to the dog *'Well, sir, you can send ten words for a dollar but you have only indicated nine. So shall I add an extra 'Wuff' on the end?'*

The dog's reply:

'Certainly not - that wouldn't make any sense at all!'

17. Visual jokes

Two entirely visual jokes now, the first of which was in a little booklet on baptism we acquired about the time of our son's christening in 1968.

The scene is the back of a church with a priest or vicar about to perform a baptism. He has his sleeves rolled up with his arms up his elbows in the water and is fishing about in the font.

The caption is: *'Slippery little blighter, isn't he?'*

--oo00oo--

The second illustration comes from a cover of the satirical magazine *Private Eye* after the recent scandals of paedophilia in the Catholic Church. Two cardinals are chatting, in a contemplative mood, on the steps of St, Peter's in Rome. One is saying to the other:

'I remember the days when boys used to enter the priesthood, not the other way around!'

Languages

18. Cookery ingredients

One of the pitfalls of acquiring a competence in a second language is that as one becomes somewhat more fluent, one often has to make an educated guess at a word you don't know or cannot remember.

This happened to me whilst we were chatting with some old friends in a restaurant in Madrid. The subject has turned to cooking and I was trying to convey the fact that I enjoyed using garlic and occasionally used garlic 'pearls' I thought that I had better translate *pearl* as a *tablet* in this instance and I was vaguely aware that the word for a tablet was derived from a word which something compressed (i.e. a powder that forms the tablet) So I blithely said (in Spanish)

'Me gusta mucho cocinar con compresas de ajo' which translates as *'I much enjoy cooking with garlic tablets'* Unfortunately, the word *compresa* does not mean tablet - what I finish up saying (in English) was *'I much enjoy cooking with sanitary towels made of garlic!'* Our friends kept saying 'No!' but I persisted in saying what I was saying, blithely ignorant that a *compresa* is a sanitary towel (from the days when they used to be made from compressed cotton wool?) instead of the correct word that I should have used which is *comprimido*.

19. Constantly waiting and looking

The Spanish have a wonderful verb *esperar* which means *to wait* or *to hope*. So far, so good- but you can be waiting for something but not hoping for it (death?) Anyway, I only know six words of Spanish which I use constantly *'Estoy esperando à mi mujer'* [I am waiting for my wife] which is highly useful when you are hanging around the entrance of a lady's loo and the local police are starting to view you suspiciously. I one occasion after a good meal and bottle of wine I was waiting for Meg and two young waitresses were evidently coming off shift. Somehow, we got into conversation and I (perhaps deliberately) shifted from *Estoy esperando à mi mujer* to *Estoy esperando à un mujer'* which doesn't sound very different but actually means that I am looking **for** a wife. I said also *'Hay muchos por aqui?'* [Are there many around here] and the reply was *'Si Señor!, hay muchos y estan libres'* [Yes, Sir, and they are uncommitted as well] This led to you *'Are you free?'* *'Yes. I'm free'* and her mate said *'Me as well!'* *'Es posible hacer dos por el precio de uno?'* [Is it possible to have two for the price of one? to which the reply was *'Porque no?'* [Why not?] At this point, Meg appeared so I kissed the two waitresses goodbye (see No. 11] and Meg asked *'What was all that about then?'* *'Ah',* I said, *'it's a bit too complicated to explain...'*

Medical

20. Discarding bits

So there I was, minutes before I was due to undergo surgery for bowel cancer in June, 2018. My (Asian) surgeon asked me if there any questions I would like to ask before the surgery commenced.

“I have only question”, I replied to my surgeon. “When eventually you are holding me in one hand and the diseased portion of my bowel in the other, can you make sure you throw away the right bit!”

‘I’m sorry’ my surgeon said to me ‘but I don’t understand the question you asked me?’

[I apologised immediately for telling crap jokes minutes before bowel surgery]

21. Coming round from surgery

In 1973, I was involved in a bizarre accident on the campus of Leicester Polytechnic where I then worked. Briefly, a driver fainted at a T-junction on the university campus (which was split over several main roads) and I was hit at 40mph by a Hillman Imp, severely damaging both knees. Eventually I was admitted for surgery (it was the time of the ancillaries dispute and on the day of the accident I was sent home with completely severed leg muscles and told to take an aspirin for the pain). I was told they did not know exactly what surgery they were going to perform until they got me onto the operating table and they could properly assess the damage.

When I came from the operation, I peeped under the sheet to see how many legs I was left with (two as it happened) but I had been plastered from ankle to groin on both legs - as you might imagine, there must have plaster flying everywhere. To my dismay, I discovered that there was masses of plaster all around my penis which which still warm but hardening rapidly (the plaster that it).

I rang the bell and with as much authority as I could muster asked the the assistance of a **male** nurse - I

assure you when you are severe pain, sex is the last thing on your mind attractive though the nurse was.

I was cleaned up by the male nurse but word had spread rapidly around the ward. I was in a small private amenity room but there a cluster of female nurses had gathered outside the door, eager to know from their male colleague what he had been asked to do.

Ah, the power of mental images! When he told them what had happened to me in the plaster room, you could hear the peals of laughter resounding down the ward (it was a long old-fashioned 'Nightingale' ward)

[Just a short postscript of how things have changed in the NHS. After enduring three hours of the most severe pain, I have ever experienced, a nurse came along to check on me and said '*Let's just check what pain relief you are on. Oh dear, we've forgotten to give you any!*' Needless to say, I was angry - one expects to suffer pain but not needlessly because someone had forgotten. By contrast, after my more recent surgery *Tramadol* was shoved down my throat by the bucketload and I was never in any real pain during the whole of my stay.]

22. A medical query

There are many hospital stories I could tell but one particularly sticks in my memory. The old boy in the bed next to me was becoming increasingly agitated and kept on asking the nursing assistants the same question: '*Can you tell me - are my testicles black?*' The nursing assistants would reply that it was not their job to know that but eventually the request was transmitted up the chain of authority until a nursing Sister took control. '*Well, she said we will try and find out if you like*' and then proceeded with intimate examinations that including holding various body parts at various angles. Eventually, the Sister opined '*No, they are fine*' But the old man eventually complained '*What was all that about then?*' The Sister replied to him '*Well, you kept on asking 'Are my testicles black?'*' Eventually the old boy whipped off his oxygen mask and said '**But all I wanted to know was - are my test results back**'

23. Little boy in clinic

As part of my Ph.D. research into *'Waiting Times in NHS Outpatient Clinics'*, I was attending a child health clinic in a community centre in Leicestershire. The system was that the consultants came out of their hospitals and into the community to work in some very deprived parts of the community who find a visit to the city centre hospital particularly difficult.

Each child was weighed and had their height measured each time they attended the clinic and details recorded in a little 'Red Book'. On this particular occasion, the nurse held out her hand to a little boy to take him away for his measurement - the little boy had evidently had a lot of contact with nurses before and you could almost see the 'bubble coming out of his head' as he wondered what to do. Without a moment's hesitation he took both his hands and immediately pushed his trousers down to the floor! The clinic who had observed this dissolved into laughter.

I speculated whether he would persist in this behaviour pattern whenever he met a nurse when he reached the age of 18+ - the consensus view was that he probably would!

24. Meg

One of the advantages of living in the South of England when we moved to Hampshire was that Eurostar was quite accessible (then running out of Waterloo) and offered frequent upgrades to first class for minimal extra outlay. When you arrived in the Netherlands as well, the fare included onward transport to any other train station in Belgium or the Netherlands.

Meg and I were on our way to Antwerp for a conference that Mike was attending there. We negotiated Schiphol railway station to find the correct platform for the train to Antwerp and then the train arrived, got onto it noting that it had a huge '1' painted on the side. Naturally, we assumed that our first class tickets on Eurostar transferred to the rest of the system.

In due course, our tickets were inspected by a ticket inspector who was in a resplendent uniform with lots of braid as I remember it. The ticket inspector addressed Meg in a very polite way saying *'Unfortunately, Madam, your tickets although valid for first class on Eurostar are not valid for first class travel throughout Belgium - so you have the option of either moving to a different carriage or else paying the extra fare.'*

Meg stared at the ticket inspector and in now famous words declared:

'What? A modern progressive, democratic and classless society like Belgium - I thought you have abolished all these kind of class distinctions years ago!'

The ticket inspector looked pained and (almost) clicked his heels before replying *'Unfortunately not, madam - that is not the case.'* We then took ourselves to the appropriate class of carriage (which seemed to us identical to the first class carriage in any case) and carried on with journey to Antwerp without further ado.

25. Meg in Torremolinos

We had a particularly stressful time one summer (Meg's mother becoming terminally ill, Martin our on leaving us to spend a year in Mexico, we were moving house and our place of work was shifting from one university campus to another) As soon as we could, we bought the first cheap flight we could (pre-internet days!) and journeyed to Torremolinos, one of the cheaper resorts on the Costa del Sol in Spain.

There was evidently a terrible bug going round the hotel because people tended to collapse with sickness and diarrhoea within 2-3 days of arriving. This happened to Meg and, as we waiting for our key from the reception staff, Meg promptly collapsed on the hotel floor in front of them [I might point out that Meg collapsing in a variety of locations is not an unheard-of phenomenon]

'What has happened?' the hotel staff said to which I replied *'This is what happens when you have to wait too long for your key!'*

Whilst on the subject of collapses in hotels, it was not unknown in the large 425 bedded hotel in Harrogate for the occasional guest to die. The typical solution was to bundle the corpse up inside a carpet and bring them down in the service lift - after all, nobody looks twice!

26. Martin in Cheshire

I was driving in Alderley Edge in Cheshire with my wife and son (aged 4) down a long, slow winding hill marked with double white lines (i.e. no overtaking) The old boy in front of me was going at about 20mph and was evidently looking for an address but causing absolute mayhem behind him. Eventually, in sure exasperation I overtook him, illegally, only to be immediately flagged down by a patrolling policeman on a motorbike. Martin just about knew at his age what a policeman was - his little face puckered up and he starting crying *'Don't send my Daddy to gaol!'* How the policeman kept a straight face, I do not know but after a suitable admonishment, the policeman left me go on my way [He did later pull up the errant elderly motorist, presumably to warn him of the havoc he was causing] Later, when it was Martin's fifth birthday, he was bobbling about near our front gate and chatted with our next door neighbour *'Oh, it's my Daddy's birthday today'* The neighbour enquired of Martin *'So how old is your Daddy today?'* Martin thought about this for a moment and replied *'Well, there's a 2 and an 8 in it so he's either 28 or 82, I don't know which!'* [both large numbers when you are 5] Now a senior manager in our National Health Service, I sometimes tease Martin whether he still confuses a 2 and an 8 - £28m? £82 million? Martin is not amused

Neighbours

27. Rose and the boyfriend

Meg and I have generally been blessed with very good neighbours with one exception who, for the sake of anonymity, I shall call 'Rose' who was a next door neighbour but one.

In Leicestershire, the house next door was occupied by an old man who died and the house was sold on to a couple in their 40's who had a teenage daughter aged about 18. On the day that they moved in, the daughter came along with her boyfriend and they had a 'kiss and a cuddle' in the car before the daughter let herself into the house. All of this had been minutely observed by Rose who decided it was time for action. On the second day, the new girl neighbour and her boyfriend arrived in the car and started to have a good night kiss. At this point, Rose tapped on the window and the boyfriend wound down the window. Rose then seized hold of her bucket of cold water and threw it all over the young couple with the words *'It's just that sort of disgusting behaviour that lowers the tone of the neighbourhood'*

The young girl immediately fled and never came home again, preferring to live in the nurses hostel to which she was entitled!

28. Rose at the Golf Club

Rose's husband, who I shall call Adrian, led a demanding life - he was made to Hoover every room and clean the windows of each room *every day!* His hearing had been badly effected by falling off the roof of his house after Rose demanded that the TV ariel be tweaked. On another occasion, our son had to rescue him whilst he was attempting to move a glass greenhouse one foot to the left and he had become trapped by the feet.

Alan was the Treasurer of his local Golf Club but this did not always accord with Rose's domestic plans. When we was in a committee meeting one day, the door were flung wide open and Rose declared *'Adrian! You should be at home cooking my tea! Immediately!'* [The Gold Club terminated his membership immediately]

If there had been a report in the local newspaper that *'Local man run beserk - beheads wife with axe'*, we would have said to each other *'That must be Adrian!'*

We subsequently met him on holiday when he informed us that Rose had died - and he grinned from ear to ear! For her funeral, Rose wanted a glass fronted coffin drawn by a bevy of black horses preceded by a New Orleans jazz band. Adrian and the local vicar put a stop to the jazz band but her other wishes were fulfilled.

29. Next door neighbour's cat

From a very early age, I had harboured an ambition to become a surgeon - so much so that after our GCSE 'O'-levels when we could research and present a topic to the rest of the class, my chosen topic was *Reconstructive Breast Surgery*. My ambitions for a medical career were dealt a savage blow when I unexpectedly failed my 'O'-level Physics despite having a good mark in the mock examinations (and subsequently passing it a year later with minimal revision)

At the height of my medical ambitions (aged 15) I offered to perform an ovariectomy (spaying) of the next door neighbour's cat. As I announced to them *'The operation is technically very easy as both the ovaries lie on one side of the cat's body, you know'* *'Oh, yes'* they said. *'And which side is that then?'*

At this stage, my theoretical knowledge ran out but undeterred, I replied *'Well it doesn't really matter which side you start from - if you don't get it right at first, you just flip the cat over and start from the other side'*

My neighbours refused me permission to operate on their cat and for the life of me, I cannot see why!

30. On the kitchen table

At one time, one of our neighbours was a formidable Belgian widow who I shall call Mrs Cleverly. She was very friendly and chatty and in no time was helping us to move in by putting up curtains and the like.

The Belgian's (and other Flemish, like the Dutch) have a reputation for direct and forthright speaking and Mrs. Cleverly was no exception. As she explained to us *'My husband's foreskin was too long and he was no use to me like that. So with the aid of the local doctor we got a carving knife out of the drawer and cut off the relevant bit ourselves on the kitchen table - my husband was fine after that!'*

Mrs Cleverly was an inveterate smoker of menthol cigarettes which she smoked continuously letting the ash drop everywhere - including the gooseberry wine she donated to us.

We were always amused by her two adult children (the operation on her husband had evidently worked) Her two children would always talk to each other in extremely loud voices when they were assisting her in the garden- her son had an incredibly high, almost falsetto speaking voice whilst her daughter had a really deep voice which seemed to emulate a Russian bass!

31. Fire in Wigston

When our son was about 5 or 6, he came bursting into our bedroom saying *'Mummy! Daddy! There's a fire engine outside our house!'* *'Well, it's nothing to do with us'* I said and opened the bedroom curtain windows only to see the flames from an old garden shed shooting at least 30-40 feet in the air and even visible over the trees in our orchard [I ought to explain at this point that our garden was at least 100 yds long and although we didn't know anything about the fire, our neighbours at the back certainly did as their garage was threatened']

I raced to get dressed absolutely as quickly as I could and raced down to the bottom of the garden only to see two firemen wielding a huge pressured fire hose [it took two of them to hold the hose with the force of the water]. They are being supervised by a fire chief who was leaning on his fire rake.

It just so happened that a few days before I had laid a long hose pipe all the way to the end of the garden to give me a water supply for my vegetables. So I raced to use the hose to assist the firemen but so much water was being drawn from the main water supply that I could manage a dribble of an inch or so. The fire chief observed this with an air of amused detachment and

indicated *'I think you had better leave this to the professionals, sir!'*

My next door neighbour told me afterwards that he had never seen anything so funny in his life - but it was in an era before mobile phones and video cameras were expensive so none of this was caught on film.

Evidently, fires have to have causes but the explanation which satisfied the fire authorities was 'Exploding old paint tins stored in the garage' So it was absolutely nothing to do with (a) my next door neighbour habit of flicking lit ends-of-cigarettes (dog ends) onto the garden or even (b) a bonfire lit at the bottom of the garden, near to the old shed, which had not been properly extinguished!

32. Teenagers in Bromsgrove

My neighbours in Bromsgrove refuse to accept the veracity of the following story but it only happened a year or so. A group of teenagers emerged from the local park in an air of high excitement - whether it was just adolescent high spirits or a combination of alcohol and drugs, I cannot say.

One of the boldest of the girls approached me with a half-opened condom in its foil packet which she showed to me and enquired *'I understand you are still sexually active - could you make use of one of these?'*

Entering into the spirit of things I replied *'That would be of no use to me at all - I would need at least five or six for an evening'*. The girl shrieked in disbelief and immediately ran off with her companions...

One of my friends cannot believe this actually happened and I have invented the whole story. To which I can only say that jealousy is one of the most destructive of human emotions...

Politics

I quite like good political jokes and although they are not original, they are very memorable.

33. Eva Peron

