

Surviving the pre-Christmas period

This whole Christmas thing started off in a very humble way when a mother about to give birth could not find a space in an Inn so was eventually accommodated as an act of compassion by the inn-keeper in a stable. How times have changed. From looking at people in the shops and stores you might think that this Christmas is some sort of bacchanalian event involving the laying in of food and drink for a siege. It takes quite a lot of doing to accumulate a £100 bill in a supermarket but it can be done as I saw more than once yesterday.

I spoke to a friend today that I had known for 55 years. Actually apart from my family the person who I've known the longest. We met when we were both temporary employees at a Post Office sorting office in December 1964. We have been in touch on and off ever since. He and his partner have decided to have an 'un-Christmas' Christmas. No celebration no presents no going out just doing nothing. However, he has a fondness for lamb, and he told me about a firm in Scotland that delivers highest quality meat, 'Donald Russell Scotland's finest butcher' no less. My friend loves lamb so has ordered lots of it.

Knowing him I can see how well suited he would be to this but of course for some people, particularly the elderly, this is what they do anyway but not through choice. I don't know what it must be like, especially if you have lost your husband recently, to be without relatives to just sit down on Christmas morning watching the TV, somehow preparing for lunch, and ending the day with a huge amount of meaningless visual data in your brain and that only that which you could recall when you were not dozing off.

I think we can do better as a society. I don't think we can

expect the government to provide for all our needs. After all, they spent a lot of money on our education and our health. So surely it behooves us to be proactive and not just sit there like birds with open mouths expecting to be fed by its parents. I coming to any reasonable amount of money I would certainly create an organisation to help further improve the sense of community and caring which in certain areas of the country makes such a change to the way people think and behave. My theme to more difficult places would be "better a good conversation than an antidepressant pill".

If I was in full-time work, had a couple of screaming children to look after, had to care for the in laws which need to be picked up from the other side of the country then I can see how Christmas would be stressful. In addition, this year, the weather is far from perfect, causing floods in many places, not just the usual places like Gloucester but many places in the Midlands that are not used to floods.

I find that the whole environmental vibe becomes more happy and relaxed around this time of year. I'm sure it correlates with the fact that people are not working and instead getting together with their families. It is a type of answer to prayer that they congregate. Talking of praying, I sent off a prayer request today about my stomach to a group based in Spain and after doing so felt strangely different and enlightened.

This morning for the first time I've tried cider vinegar which evidently stimulates the stomach to receive food and although it may sound contradictory it relieves the feeling of assiduity. The trouble is, the stomach can produce either too much or too little acid and only tests can tell. Obviously you do different treatments for different conditions but my policy at the moment is to have less food, more chewing, and let the meal settle for some time. It seems to be working though these are early days.

Last night we saw a lovely film on the life of Freddie

Mercury, the lead in Queen. It was very nostalgic. I do miss him, Kenny Everett, Michael Jackson, Prince, and all those wonderful people. I miss them in a different way to for example Morecambe and Wise, Tommy Cooper. I find Tommy Cooper's humour does not age but Morecambe and Wise's humour possibly does age. I lament the fact that much comedy of the present era relies on sexual innuendo, bad language and I don't find the style the slightest bit funny.

This evening I went along to my local minor injuries clinic midway between Midsomer Norton and Paulton check. I had scraped some skin off the back of my hand and it was not healing. I was the only patient waiting so was seen immediately by a very cheerful nurse who expertly put some stitches on my hand, covered it up copiously, and gave me a spare bandaging in case the first one fell off. I was told to come back in case there was any swelling, redness, or pain.

I do give thanks for the NHS and hope that the recent campaign by nurses in Ireland, but been severely neglected is resolved. There is no effective government in Northern Ireland at the moment which makes passing the buck easier to do; the nurses think their pay has effectively slipped 15% in the last 10 years or so.