

A funny thing happened on the way to the nursing home

**A DIFFERENT HANDBOOK
FOR CARERS OF DEMENTIA PATIENTS**



JIM CONNOR

A funny thing happened on the way to the nursing home

**A DIFFERENT HANDBOOK
FOR CARERS OF DEMENTIA PATIENTS**

JIM CONNOR



BookboundPublishing

A funny thing happened on the way to the nursing home

Copyright © 1997, 1998, 2010 Jim Connor

First published in December 1997

Second Edition February 1998

Third Edition May 2010

ISBN 978-1-876231-48-4

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted, in any form or by any means without prior written permission from the publisher, nor be otherwise circulated in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

Published in Australia by

BookBound Publishing

FreeCall 1800 628 058

Fax 02 6568 3960

Educational and trade enquiries welcome.

Contents

Acknowledgements	iii
Foreword	v
Preface	vi
Beryl	1
The time clock	3
Tea with the duchess	4
Crises and the carer	7
The policewoman	12
Failure	15
The ladies in black	19
The greenie	23
The counsellor	27
Intimacy	30
Kids and more kids	36
The operation	41
'Yes, matron'	47
The little folk	52
Pretty lady	55
Obstetrics?	61
'You're special'	64
Addendum	69

The policewoman

When I think of it, in those days (and nights) I had an obsession. It was simply to somehow get Norma to sleep at night. But thinking about it a little more deeply brings me to the conclusion that what I really wanted was to be able to get a good night's rest myself.

Norma was showing no ill effects from her lack of sleep, and the activities of the nights were in themselves no great problem. In fact, most of the 'adventures' we pursued were aimed at helping people, which had been our way of life for many years.

This night we had gone through our nightly ritual. I had put her to bed after tea and she had gone to sleep and so had I. The golden rule — she sleeps, I sleep.

An hour's sleep and we were awake. I helped her out of bed, put on her slacks — the night was cool — and her flatties. Off she went and on came the lights. Back to bed for me.

I settled down to hear the by now familiar night sounds of her cleaning up the house. I think I dozed off, because I was now hearing different noises which I associated with walking up and down the hall, and banging noises of doors being opened and closed at frequent intervals.

Realising that something different was afoot, I rolled out of bed and stepped into the hall. There was Norma, with my blue and white Makita cap perched on her head, marching up and down the hall that separated our bedrooms from the adjoined utility rooms. She paused every now and then to open and close one or other of the doors.

I waited for her at the end of the hall and said to her, “What’s with the cap?”

She looked at me somewhat witheringly. “I’m a policewoman” she said.

“Yes,” said I, “But what are you doing here?”

“Well, it’s like this. I have a job with the Baptist church. You can’t trust the young people these days, they keep sneaking into one another’s toilets, and I’m here to see they don’t.”

Now this made some sense to me. Twenty years ago any church worth its salt was running a coffee-shop programme, and ours, the Baptist church, was no exception. Norma and I helped in the kitchen. We made coffee and toasted raisin bread, but as time went by this activity was moved to our garage, which was quite spacious, cosily accommodating forty or more young people who would ‘fellowship’ away until the small hours. During this ‘frolic’ Norma and I would sit in our lounge room above the garage, listening to the ‘Sound of Music’, Bobby Limb, and the band thumping away in the garage below. At bedtime we would have to line up with half a dozen youngsters to take our turn at the toilet, which was approached from the back porch. It certainly could have done with some policing, if only of the traffic kind.

Now although I knew there was some logic from the past to account for her actions, I also knew that this action could go on till she dropped from exhaustion, probably at 3 or 4AM.

I retired again to think this through. No amount of reasoning would bring her to believe that things were other than what she believed them to be.

Then I had a flash of inspiration! If she didn’t know who she was, and thought she was a policewoman, then the chances were she wouldn’t know who I was either.

I rose, put on a shirt and tie, and ventured out to the still active policewoman.

“Mrs Connor,” I said. “I’m the Baptist minister. The deacons have had a meeting and have decided that all activities of the church shall end at midnight and it is now two minutes to midnight. Would you be so kind as to turn out the toilet lights and close the doors. I will get your husband to make you a nice cup of tea and give you some biscuits and then it will be time to go to bed. Thank you for all the help you have given tonight, and we hope to see you back on the job soon.”

She didn’t raise any objections, so I retired to the bedroom and put my pyjamas back on again. Norma closed a door, but of course didn’t switch off any lights. That was too many instructions at once.

I made the Horlicks, prepared the biscuits, and we had our midnight feast. I took her to the toilet, removed the police cap and as we settled down comfortably together I said, “Did you have a good time at the church tonight, dear?”

And in a moment of lucidity she said to me, “Do you think I will still be able to play the organ?”

I choked up but managed to reply, “We’ll have a go in the morning, love.”

She had been church organist for many, many years.

Failure

I have mentioned before that no carer is perfect, and neither was I. Failure is inevitable, and something to learn from. Why I failed, how I failed and what I failed at, I leave you to work out for yourself.

I had established a routine, something very necessary when dealing with dementia. Approaching dark (dementia knows nothing about daylight saving), I would prepare the evening meal, put it on to cook, then take Norma into the bedroom to put on her nightie and dressing gown. Then we would eat.

Sometimes this went well and sometimes it took quite a while, especially if she became agitated, as she often did at this time of the evening. Following the meal it was time for bed.

This night all went well. I had perfected a method of actually putting Norma into bed without wrecking my back. After turning the bedclothes back I would seat Norma on the edge of the bed, put my arms under her legs and pivot her over into bed. If I had calculated right her head usually ended up in the right position on the pillow.

We got as far into the ritual as Norma sitting on the bed. Then she said, “And what do you think you’re doing?”

I said, “I’m putting you into bed.”

“Oh no, you’re not,” she said. “My husband wouldn’t like that.”

“But I am your husband. I’m Jim.” This was expressed in aggrieved and bewildered tones.

“Fat chance!” was her reply to that outrageous idea. “And where do you think you might be going to sleep?”

“Alongside you, on my side of the bed.”

“Well, I’m not getting into that bed with you. I’m not a girl like that.”

Here was a problem for which I had no problem-solving techniques, so, seeing she was already sitting on the bed, I just put the pivoting motion into force, lifted her legs and into bed she went. I quickly pulled the covers over her, but it was no good. She struggled as fiercely as she could, so I let her up again because I could see this was not going to get her to sleep.

“Look,” I said, “You go to bed and I’ll sleep in the next room.” She looked at me scornfully and said, “Not likely.”

An idea came to me. If I could get Ann, our daughter, to talk to her on the phone, she might be able to reassure her. Ann and Norma had a great rapport. I left Norma sitting on the bed, went to the phone, rang Ann, told her the problem and asked her to talk to Norma and tell her I really was her husband. I then went back to the bedroom and told Norma that Ann was on the phone and would like to speak to her. Ann spoke in her warm and daughterly fashion, telling Norma who I really was, and how lucky she was to have me looking after her and putting her to bed. It was very much a one-sided conversation, with Norma keeping her eyes on the door as if expecting Ann to appear at any moment. Ann offered to come over, but I said I thought we would be able to manage the situation, and we said our goodbyes.

Norma and I went back into the bedroom.

“Well, dear,” I said, “Are you happy now that I am your husband?”

The clouds of doubt were still there. “How can I be sure that we are really married?” she asked.

I seated her on the chair we had in the bedroom, and I sat on the bed.

“Listen now to me, and I will tell you things that only you and I know about our married life.

“We met at a family camp at Stuart Park in Wollongong, and that’s where we fell in love. Your father Harry was a mine deputy at Stockton Borehole colliery. We courted for three years. Then the war came. I enlisted and we were married on my final leave. Your Uncle Dave married us at Boolaroo Church, and we spent our six-day honeymoon at my grandma’s house at Marrickville.

“I sailed away the next week and went to Malaya. When the Japs came into the war I was taken prisoner in the fighting and you received word that I was missing, believed killed. You were working at Peake Freens biscuit factory. A year later you received word that I was a prisoner of war.

“I survived the prison camps and came home to you. We went to Ettalong to be by ourselves to get to know each other again, and for you to love me back to health.”

As I was delivering this monologue I was conscious that her attention span was not very long. Surprisingly though, she kept her attention fixed on me, so I continued on.

“We lived with your mum and dad, and your sister Malvie, until I built a house for us at Speers Point. Ann and Garry were born at Wallsend, and David at Waratah, and we went to live with your dad after your mum died of a stroke. Then we moved to Wamberal to try our hand at farming. We had a market garden and grew beans and peas and tomatoes, and although we had a good lifestyle we didn’t make much money. So I went back to bricklaying, which was my trade, and we shifted to Bateau Bay and built this house where we are living now. The church asked us to take over the ministry, and we did. You played the organ and I did Pastoral work. We were a good team. We retired when I was sixty and qualified for the burnt-

out pension. After buying a Kombi-van we set off to journey round Australia.

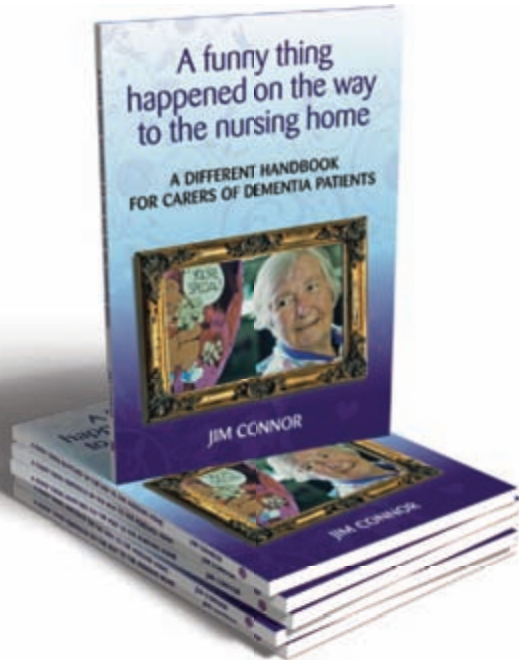
“We had a great time, feeding the fish at Doctor’s gully in Darwin, and patting the dolphins at Monkey Mia. We even made love in the hot springs at Mataranka one beautiful night, when the full moon was shining through the Pandanus palms. We almost got caught, but heard approaching footsteps and just managed to get you back into your cossies before people emerged from the shadows.”

I paused here and watched to see if some humorous response would be forthcoming — a smile even — but there was nothing. Just an intense fixed look as if she were weighing me up. On I went with our life’s history.

“On coming home we went down to Canberra, to begin a work for long-term unemployed kids. After five years we came back to Bateau Bay, where we had built this house (whilst living in a caravan in our backyard). You carried the bricks and I laid them, and the kids helped as they were able. Last year we celebrated our Golden Wedding, and here we are now, in our own bedroom, in our own home which we built with our own hands.”

While I was going through the saga of our life together, I was watching for some sign of accord, a flash of recognition, but it just wasn’t there. So I said to her, “Well love, are you happy to go to bed now?”

She looked straight at me, moved her head from side to side slowly and said, “My! You have done your homework, haven’t you?”



More than 10,000 people
already own a copy of this book.

To buy your copy
phone **1800 628 058** or visit
www.funnythinghappened.com.au

You can also send a cheque or money
order to Bookbound Publishing
598 Gumma Road, Gumma, NSW 2447

RRP \$25 inc P&H

**A loved one dies.
A carer is left behind.
What now remains of life?**

Jim Connor has chosen to give his life over to helping carers come to terms with their predicament. He can do this authentically, because he's been there and has survived.

He continues to liaise with the carers' groups, speaks at forums concerned with dementia, at Alzheimer's conferences and still serves on committees, helping to put together plans to enhance the lives of carers and their patients.

This book has emerged as a result of all these activities, but primarily from Jim's own life experiences. It is given over to all those trying to deal with dementia and similar wretched diseases, in the hope that their lives will become enriched.

**If you enjoy a good read,
appreciate humour with honesty,
are not afraid to weep,
are worried about your loved one's behaviour
or your role in caring for them,
if you are a professional carer
who takes the job seriously,
or even a GP who seeks more knowledge,
then this book is written for you.**



Jim & Norma