

13, Riverside Walk  
Airton  
North Yorkshire  
BD23 4AF

19 March '92

### Tales from an Iterant Jobber letter 11

Dear Reader,

Your little gift arrived this very day, all snug and cosy in its box. Many thanks for being so thoughtful. I'll cherish the little kiwi always and it now occupies pride of place in my display cabinet amongst my other curios.

I would have written sooner only I have been caught with Election Fever and become a bit of a couch potato myself watching all the political broadcasts and to compound the viewing we now have the added scandal of the Duke and Duchess of York's separation! The news broke today so you can imagine what a field day the press are having. Nevertheless I am taking an active part in electioneering. I am doing my level best to get this present government out of office and to that end as you already know I attended the Liberal Democrats' conference in Glasgow and last Tuesday spent a complete day in our area and surrounding villages delivering leaflets.

Glasgow was a real eye-opener. I was very pleasantly surprised how clean a city it has become with magnificent buildings of the large Victorian order and I was very impressed at the two art museums I visited. Particularly was I astounded at the Burrell Collection, a collection of some 8000 to 9000 antiques, paintings and artefacts, many of them quite priceless which were donated to the City of Glasgow by a philanthropic industrialist Sir William Burrell who stipulated that they must be housed in a countryside location as he was afraid that the smoke and grime of Glasgow would damage his collection. He gave the Collection to Glasgow in 1944 and it wasn't until 1967 when Pollock House and grounds were presented to the City were they able to build a purpose built museum on the grounds and it's a beautiful museum very similar to one in the Netherlands, the Kröller Müller museum in that many of the exhibits can be seen in natural light and they are both built in a park surrounded by mature trees. The museum was opened to the public in 1983.

#### Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> March

Well, the elections are really hotting up here – we go to the polls on April 9<sup>th</sup> and there is everything to play for. At present the two major parties are neck and neck about 40% of the electorate each i.e. Tories (conservatives) and Labour. The Liberal-Democrats are at 15% and the rest at 5% but at least 25% are "don't knows" but I hope we can get rid of this inept, inefficient, incompetent, dishonest, evasive and corrupt government.

#### Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> April (one week later)

Talking to you last night reminded me that I still had a letter to complete so here I am – having switched off the TV eschewing politics for tonight, my thoughts focused entirely on you – not so difficult really as more often than not that's where they are anyway. A fortunate man indeed to be awakened each morning by your vision so it's always with a glad heart that I face each day and finally when I wend my weary way to my lonely bed it's with so many sighs and deep yearning for you to be beside me before I commend my soul to oblivion and the dark cloak of night! So you see dear reader, these are the thoughts I really want to express on the

phone but I'm too diffident and feel also that I might embarrass you but somehow when I'm writing my pen takes over, runs away with itself and bares my innermost thoughts.

Now back to politics before I embarrass you further. Well it's good news. The electorate have finally woken up to 13 years of Thatcherite policies and the latest polls confirm that whilst the Labour Party have increased their lead, the party that made the most gains is the Liberal Democrats at the expense of the Tories. The latest poll shows 41% Labour, 36% Conservative and 19% Liberal Democrats and there's still a week to go.

Now, about my skiing holiday that I promised to tell you about – a blow by blow account as I recall. Well to be honest it was with much trepidation and disquiet that I approached this holiday. In the first place I had scant information regarding the apartment. All I knew was that I had to fly to Geneva and then take the bus to le Grand Bornand and also there was the fear that I had forgotten how to ski so it was a holiday with a challenge of obstacles that I had to overcome rather than a holiday to enjoy – quite the wrong attitude really! Finally the Saturday dawned. I had to be at Birmingham airport by 6-30am. I had stayed overnight in Bedworth at Sue & Steve's and it's only a 20 minute drive to the airport. The flight itself was uneventful although departure was delayed about an hour due to tardy latecomers and then we missed our slot in the queue.

I was more than pleased to find Brigitte and boyfriend waiting for me on my arrival at Geneva. They were to return to Amsterdam that very day but were kind enough to wait for me and ferry me back to the apartment a distance of some 75 miles. My world seems to be populated by kind and thoughtful people. I only hope I shall endeavour to be the same – to emulate them! The apartment was perched on top of a hill and the balcony afforded a breathtaking view of the village below surrounded by snow capped mountains – fabulous! They showed me how to operate the appliances and where everything was located and then we had to make a hasty retreat downstairs to stow the skis and boots in a locker in the cellar as they were already running late.

I accompanied them back to town for a quick coffee and a snack and after bidding each other fond adieus I was left on my own. I was quite proud of myself that day as I never spoke another word of English but conversed in French albeit most in terms of shopping and found that they understood me but better still that I understood them. It was now just after one and since all the shops closed until 3pm I took a leisurely stroll back to the apartment admiring the scenery along the way. The walk itself wasn't long, under half a mile but it's uphill all the way and little did I realize how irksome it would become performed with ski boots and carrying skis especially after a hard day's skiing. I rested up in the apartment sitting out on the balcony and soaking up the sunshine until it was time to return to the village for the shopping. I just love fresh French bread, don't you? I loaded up on bread and cheese and here I was confronted by such a variety that it was difficult to make a choice but, after telling the shop assistant I wanted a strong cheese we settled on a local one which turned out well, what else? Because it seemed awfully heavy by the time I got back to the flat. Oh yes, milk, cornflakes, fruit, fruit juice and tomatoes and packets of soup and so to supper of bread, cheese and soup taken on the balcony to absorb the last vestige of the setting sun and watch it paint a palette of gold, red and orange and adorn the snow capped mountains in a pink mantle. I had decided to retire early and then rise again at 10-30 to 11pm to await Geoff's arrival ETA midnight. This I duly did going out on the balcony each time a car came up the hill but to no avail and it wasn't until after 1am that he eventually arrived. I can safely say we both breathed a sigh of relief.

We decided that Sunday was going to be a lazy day, a day of rest – so after a leisurely breakfast we walked into the village and had a look around and bought some postcards. The centre was full of people all in skiing gear rushing off to the slopes. We got caught up in the enthusiasm and in order to make full use of our ski passes we thought we'd join them. It was back to the apartment to change and clump back down in ski boots and skis. This is definitely

the part I hate most having to clump fairly long distances in ski gear. Well, eventually we joined the long queue at the tele-cabine all the skiers pushing and shoving to gain pole position to jump into a moving ski lift, a cab like vehicle which holds six people comfortably and eight at a pinch. It's on a conveyor belt system moving along slowly enough for people to enter carrying their skis and then the cabin door closes automatically and you find yourself suspended in mid air watching the village diminish and right below a few hardy skiers adept enough skiing back to the village down some steep inclines, icy patches and areas quite bereft of snow. I immediately vowed to myself there was no way I was going to attempt that return to the village but rather I'll take the cable car on the return trip. Whether this was due entirely too prudent necessity or sheer cowardice I wouldn't know or care but one thing I was certain of I was going to take the easy route down but Geoff, the brave or foolhardy lad did take that way and regretted it sorely. He said he was never more frightened because in skiing once you've embarked on a slope there is only one way out and that's down! Well, the following day they roped that route off entirely so perhaps I was prudent after all! When we disembarked at the top I'm immediately confronted with a quandary. Before your eyes is a beautiful scene of snow and mountains and colourful skiers headed in all directions. Now I have to make the nail biting decision of which direction to take. Make no bones about it the wrong selection could prove disastrously fatal. There appears to be so many routes and they bear little resemblance to the ski map I carried. In the end Geoff decided on a route and I followed not too steadily on my pins. Fortunately this was a gentle longish run which terminated at two downhill runs, one a blue run and the other a red one and also a nice restaurant at the foot of the drag-lifts. I opted for having our lunch in the glorious sunshine – that's my idea of skiing, sitting down all relaxed with good food and drink and soaking in the sun away from the miserable English winter.

After lunch we took the drag-lift to the blue slope not realizing how treacherous the drag was. No sooner had we straddled the button when "woosh" we were struck from behind by a force of about 2G that really lifted your feet off the ground and just as you composed yourself the button struck again, a double whammy. A few people lost their balance and as a consequence lost the drag-lift and had to start again. Poor Geoff the button struck him in the most tender and vital part of a man's anatomy which doubled him up in pain and brought tears to his eyes.

Having got on to the drag-lift the trick is to get off at the summit and if you haven't got the knack and release too early you slide backwards down the slope and if you release too late you stand a chance of running into the wall of snow that decelerates the drag button. On my first attempt I released too soon and it was all a panic to stop myself sliding backwards into the next skier coming up the slope. Somehow with the help of my poles I managed to drag myself up to the summit and turn left onto the ski slope. Hey! I've written five and a half pages and I haven't started on the serious skiing yet. Well, this slope I found to be well within my capabilities. The piste was wide so I was able to traverse and turn and still control my descent. Of course it wasn't all easy, some areas were quite steep but I managed to ski back to the drag-lift without mishap. I therefore decided I would stay in this vicinity for the rest of the afternoon as there is nothing I care less about than not knowing the terrain that I ski on! Geoff however decided otherwise so we agreed to meet back at the flat about 4pm. When I returned to the flat I was wet through. I suppose this was due to hard physical exertion or cold sweat of fear or perhaps it was a combination of both but a good soak in a hot tub did much to put me in good shape again.



## Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> April

Oh boy! I didn't realize I could be so long-winded and garrulous, this blow by blow account is getting too tedious so I'll just relate the high points. Well we haven't arrived at Monday yet! Besides things are beginning to get on top of me, what with my project and studying for my exams which take place in less than two weeks time and I haven't really started in earnest to study and the time I seem to have wasted on the elections but talking to you last Sunday made all the difference and cheered me up no end. I know we are thousands of miles apart but when I hear your voice I feel extremely close to you. I get a buzz, I'm on a high, a boost of adrenaline, so there you have it, that's the effect you have on me.

Now back to the Sunday of our ski trip. We went out for dinner walking to *the village*. It gets quite cold at night so we didn't spend too long scouting for a good restaurant but we popped into one that looked reasonable and it was just that, reasonable. The meal was quite good, we had steak. On Monday we decided to purchase the ingredients for beef stew and make enough to cover two days and for Wednesday and Thursday I would make a bouillabaisse, a fish stew as we saw some fresh fish for sale but, unbeknown to us fish is only available on Mondays. We ended up having beef stew for four days but with a variation on a theme because Geoff picked up a tin of red peppers thinking they were tomatoes. The second pot of stew, to say the least, had a distinctive flavour but we enjoyed it all the more. For Friday's evening meal we had a light supper, cheese, croissants and cake, left over biscuits (cookies) and the remaining fruit.

On Monday we went back to the same slope, had a couple of runs before lunch and then Geoff persuaded me to take the chair lift right to the top of the mountain and, being somewhat more confident I did the rash thing. One thing about chair lifts, at least you can sit in comfort but it also gives you a bird's eye view of the slopes you have to traverse and to curse yourself for being so foolish! I managed to get off the chair lift quite nimbly and the first part of the slope was within my capabilities but at the crest of a hill my gaze fell upon a deep chasm, a gaping hollow bowl that I had to negotiate, even Geoff found it difficult. There was certainly no way I could ski down it. I side slipped like many of my companions until I reached a level where I was able to start skiing again. Needless to say I never attempted that slope again and the rest of the afternoon was spent at my favourite slope. Tuesday we took another cable car to a different area and this was really good because the slope was more gentle and I was able to practice my parallel turns and keeping my skis closer together, gaining confidence all the time before meeting Geoff at our restaurant rendezvous back at our usual slope. Well Tuesday went without mishap. I was certainly getting more competent and therefore more confident. We went up the slopes earlier on Wednesday which was our first mistake because the warmth of the sun hadn't softened the ice crust and it was like skiing on ball bearings and there was no way I was able to control my skis. After a few runs on the gentle slopes we skied all the way to our favourite haunt, by now the texture of the snow was better so I became more adventurous and strayed onto another red run and it was here that I ran into trouble with my head banger which you know all about. I know what Elvis Presley meant when he said he was "All shook up". I continued to ski but retired hurt and painful sooner than I expected. Thursday I was determined to be more cautious but would you believe it another mishap. On the second or third run up the drag-lift we came to a dead stop and for me it was stopped at the steepest part of the gradient. Usually when the drag stops it's because someone has fallen off so we just wait for a couple of minutes till they're off the track and it's all systems go again. This time however I was really sitting back on my button, the sun was warm and I was quite relaxed just waiting for the drag to start off again but after about twenty minutes I started to worry as people were leaving the drag and starting to ski down the hill again so there was I up this very steep incline trying to get my butt off the button and facing in the wrong direction. Somehow I had to hang on to the drag and turn my skis