

The Background

Internal newsletter

April 2010



Staff Rebellion Averted— and the hens are laying well

When Brian asked me to write a bit for the Background about what was up and coming this month I thought: 'that's easy as we have so much going on.'

Then I sat and considered who was about to read my piece and realised that you all know what is going on or are totally immersed in producing what's going on.

Not one to be put off, I thought of telling you about the new ideas I have bubbling away, but then I realised that may be a step too far and I would have a rebellion on my hands from overworked staff, trustees, and volunteers.

So that's a topic for the back end of the year.

For now I'm afraid all the news I can offer is that my chickens are laying well and fresh eggs are available in the office at 5p an egg. And the quail eggs will be available next month !

Sash Newman, Chief Executive

Camilla hit by back pain on trip to Poland

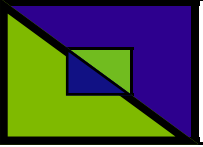
A bad back forced the Duchess of Cornwall to cancel a number of engagements during a recent tour of eastern Europe with husband Prince Charles.

Clarence House announced that a trapped nerve in Camilla's back meant a change to her original programme.

She was due to fly with Charles to eastern Poland to visit a national park and mosque, but was advised the necessary helicopter flights and car journey might aggravate her back problem further.

Instead she remained in Warsaw, visiting the British Embassy in the capital before heading to a museum featuring the life of the composer, Chopin.

Both the duchess, 62, and Charles have suffered with back problems in the past. Her bad back struck on day two of an eight day-long visit to eastern Europe, which also included stopovers in the Czech Republic and Hungary.



Chris's last day—and she was last to leave as usual

Chris's last day in the office turned out to be slightly bizarre ...

We decided to take her out for lunch and Helen called a local pub to make reservations for the eight of us that were in the office on that Wednesday, 31 March.

It was particularly cold that day, so people stayed in their coats to drink the first cup of tea of the working day before hanging them up. However the heating in the building decided to pack up and it wasn't very long before we could see our breath and coats were put back on.

Fortunately the pub had said that they get really busy at lunchtime so would we mind coming down early at noon. Let me tell you we practically ran down the road with visions of a warm cosy environment. The pub was warm but only in contrast to the severe cold of the office ! And as to busy there were the eight of us and two other people.

That said we had a good time and Chris really enjoyed herself. She liked her presents and she was overwhelmed by the generosity of the Helpline volunteers and the sentiments you all expressed in your card.

We returned to the office and the even colder environment but slightly emboldened by red wine (only one small glass each – honest) we decided to put the heaters on. Last time we did this we lost all power for three days. After an hour confidence and warmth had risen so coats were shed. Then someone said: "oh it is quite warm now" and the god of mischief came out. You guessed it, all the power went out.

The final oddity to a strange day was the flowers that the Helpline volunteers had sent. They had not arrived by 4.30 so we had to tell Chris we were expecting them and Helen spoke to M&S to get them re-delivered to Chris's home. But they told us they do not re-direct so we made arrangements for one of us to take them to Chris's house. Spookily the flowers turned up just after Helen made the call.

I tried to persuade Chris to go home, with everyone else (too cold to work with nothing to work on) but she kept saying just one more thing, the volunteers need... so in the end just Chris and Carolyn were left as I walked out of the door saying: "go home and thank you for all your hard work."

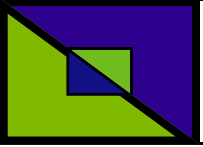
It is strange to come back after a week's holiday to see Chris's empty desk. She will be sorely missed and, as I said before, leaves big shoes to fill.

Sash

RUN FOR BACKCARE

BackCare needs runners to take part in the 2010 BUPA London 10k event.

We have 10 guaranteed places for volunteers who can raise at least £250 each in sponsorship. The race starts and finishes in St James's Park close to Buckingham Palace. If you would like to run please contact fundraising@backcare.org.uk



Journey to (almost) the Top of the World

If like me, you love mountains, the chance to get close to Everest, the highest summit in the world, is an opportunity not to be spurned.

So when my wife suggested I should trek to the the famous peak's base camp to celebrate my 70th birthday, I jumped at the chance.

Lying on a beach bores me so I figured the effort involved in hauling myself up to 5364 metres above sea level should be enough to keep me focussed.

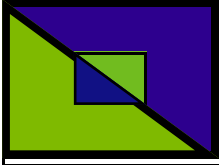
In fact, it was probably the hardest thing I have ever done.

The physical problem of climbing up countless steep slopes day after day was easy to cope with compared to the increasingly short supply of oxygen.

High altitude sickness as it's called, knocked most people in my group of 16 trekkers sideways.

The symptoms range from headaches, to constant nauseousness, vomiting, lack of appetite, to breathlessness requiring immediate evacuation down the mountain.

Three of our group didn't make it to base camp – about the average.



Fortunately, I eventually acclimatised to the thin air and achieved my ambition to stand at base camp and soak in the atmosphere of one of the most famous spots on earth.

Even there the majesty of Everest is largely hidden by a cordon of mighty lesser peaks wreathed in soaring walls of ice and snow.

But high high above them, scoured by freezing winds, there is no mistaking the siren summit which has drawn so many mountaineers to death or glory over the years.

I salute their courage and those who have made it to the top – base camp was high enough for me.

It stands in the middle of the Khumbu Glacier, a surreal landscape of creaking ice and rock debris where the only other sound apart from the wind is the roar of avalanches on nearby slopes.

Amid the setting sun and the swift return of minus 20 degree temperatures, we retreated to safety and a modest celebration.

This trek is not a relaxing holiday, but as a personal challenge I would recommend to anyone who loves the outdoors.

The Sherpas who guided us and carried our bags are some of the most cheerful and hard-working people on earth.

We visited wonderful Buddhist monasteries, crossed high ravines on swaying wind-blown suspension bridges festooned in prayer flags, and marvelled at the sure-footedness of heavily-laden yaks on the trail.

Flying into and out of Lukla, one of the most dangerous mountain airports in the world, to start the trek, where I was unaware of a crash two years ago which killed all 16 trekkers on board !

These are memories I'll never forget.

Mark Dowdney, Volunteer

HELPLINE UPDATE

There was an assessment day on 17 March for the five new trainees. All five passed and following the final training day joined the Helpline at the beginning of April. Tony Eaton, who has been with us for five years, has retired and three other volunteers, Heather, Louise and Janice are only able to offer occasional cover due to health or work commitments. Helen is retiring from the email service but is still happy to offer occasional cover there, and remains committed to her Monday shift on the Helpline which she has covered with Teresa for six years. Liz Killick has been working on revising the spinal surgeon's list and has nearly completed it, and has created a list of spinal units throughout the country which will be up on the Helpline pages soon. This was a massive piece of work so thank you Liz!

This is my last newsletter as I retired at the beginning of April, so a big thank you to all the volunteers for all their help and support over the last six years, I will miss you!

Chris Hughes Helpline Manager