

# THE *Egg* AND *Card* BOOK



The Years of a Marriage  
*Jane Dorner*

# Go to Posterity on an Egg

Twice a year, throughout my married life, I have recorded the year gone by: not in the form of a diary (and how I wish I had) but in watercolours. In the spring my year is painted on an egg; in the winter, dressed as a seasonal greeting on a card. The eggs follow the story of my life and the cards do too, but in a different way. The eggs express the salient event of the year gone by: the cards are engaged with paradox and puzzles. It's as if I am saying this is what happened but how does one interpret the significance? That's the older me talking, not the one who biannually sat down with a black drawing pen and paintbox to sum up the months gone by, but the one who, in her seventies, wonders what it all adds up to.

To find out – or at the very least to leave a record – I have assembled here all my painted Easter eggs (with a handful by others in the family) and all my Christmas cards. With their help, I have tried to remember what happened each year. The reason I wish I had kept a diary, or even just an appointments calendar, is that so much has been forgotten. Now, with Facebook and other social media, all sorts of minutiae are recorded, from baby-to-bride pictures to what people had for lunch and notes on dental appointments. Maybe that too, like thrown-away diary dates, will become like white noise: so much of it that you can't find the nuggets of meaning.

Easter and Christmas mark holiday periods – for our family the religion has no significance but the festivity of each occasion does. It is when we always get together as a family. It is a time to eat well, dress up a little, celebrate with music and song, and, above all, keep friendships alive. Every year my list of people I want to send a card to increases; every year I think,

surely that person is worth one more postage stamp, even at 10/6 a throw; every year I find I haven't printed enough. I never get as many as I send; I always get some from people I didn't send them to. That is a conundrum I can never work out.

But ignoring the religious connotations doesn't undermine their significance. Two spring-time traditions converge upon an egg. It sits as part of the Seder platter at Passover and is a symbol of sacrifice and loss. But being a more recent addition to the Seder plate compared to the sweet and bitter herbs, the symbolic meaning of this roasted egg seems to be more open to interpretation. So maybe it symbolises the cycle of life which includes hope, promise and rebirth. That tallies with the Easter tradition – intentionally coupled with Passover – when eggs take on the spirit of resurrection and are therefore a part of the celebration Sunday which commemorates the famous 2000-year-old story. There are chocolate eggs galore in the shops in spring and fancy egg dishes bruted in the March and April magazines.

Eggs mean growth, protection, the font of creation and take on magical properties in religious and mystical interpretations all over the world: in China where eggs are given as temple offerings; in Persia where gilded eggs are given for good luck; in the early Americas where the West wind blew eggs into a valley to conjure up a red Indian tribe.

Christmas symbols are equally complex and also associated with pagan and other winter festivals. Essentially the birth metaphor embodies new beginnings. It represents fertility, purity and the creative root from which we all spring. In this, it is like the egg. The card, as an expression of that, is a 19th-century construct associated with the commercialisation of Christmas and so mixes kitsch with devoutness. My cards draw an ironic reference to this with their ubiquitous 'Person' Christmas figures (male, female and sometimes just a red hat) which, I like to think, mock the absurdities of the time of year in their jaunty irreverence.

The egg decoration comes from the imagination – maybe it's the sub-conscious, maybe it isn't. For me, it starts with a family tradition. Almost every culture has an egg-decorating tradition, from boiling them wrapped in natural dyes, to the elaborate wax-resist patterning of the Slavic tradition, making artificial eggs out of porcelain for ladies, or the exquisite jewelled Easter eggs made by Fabergé for the Russian Imperial Court. Wooden eggs, marble or semi-precious stone ones, Bristol blue glass, papier maché, and bead-encrusted ovoids are also collectibles. Some creations contained hidden surprises such as clock-work birds, or miniature ships. The idea is more prosaically popularised in plastic by the Kinder egg with its surprise toy inside a thin chocolate casing.

The cards generally have a starting point in a visual paradox, an optical toy, a Victorian card or a children's puzzle. I am alert all year to visual ideas. I snatch them up and put them in a box file which I comb through as Christmas approaches to see which one I can work up into that year's card. More often than not, something else comes to me out of left field. I've enough unused ideas to keep me going a good few more years, though some were always too complicated for the 100-200 copies we were making. My cottage industry – or how I enslaved my children in the production line – is documented later in this book. Sometimes I returned to a themed subject matter reflecting family life preoccupations, so one or two cards complement the eggs.

My eggs and cards, then, belong with each other. Together they tell the story of 44 years of married life and then a few more alone. The children interweave throughout the narrative told by the watercolours, but they are not the main story. I suppose I am. It's one way of accounting for one's life.



Stephen and I met on 9 November 1969. Our first Easter together was before we were married, but by then we had fixed the wedding date for 20 June and he had moved in to my top-floor flat in Noel Road in Islington. We painted each other an egg that first Easter and that was how the 48-year-long tradition of recording the mood of a year started.

1970

Hand-painting the breakfast egg was always a tradition in my childhood – usually quickly done because these were eggs for eating and would be put in an egg cup with chick-shaped egg cosies to keep them warm. Then would be the surprise of the reveal as you removed the cosy, a mother-of-pearl spoon at the ready to tap the thinner end of the oval and peel off the shell while hoping not to get poster paint on the gleaming white.

Stephen, still an architectural student at the Architectural Association (AA), did an imaginary building-scape with balloons and zeppelins floating above a Classicist vista – a style he was later to eschew in favour of Modernism. At this period, he had a feeling for Italian baroque following on from spending a long summer sharing a house with architectural student friends in Italy. In later years he was to regret not buying that house, which was a tumble-down ruin and apparently could have been acquired. That was the first of many country dwellings he lusted after buying as a holiday retreat. It never happened.

In the egg, Tuscan cypresses lead the eye to distant mountains (which he didn't at that time know he would rarely be able to drag me up). Cupid is shooting a dart from the balloon with its heart-decorated motifs to the airship which has a streamer behind it reading 'Easter for love'. The inscription at the bottom reads 'To Janie with love'.



The iconic configuration of the cypresses on that egg turned up in our last-ever holiday together when we stayed with all our family in one of Iris Origa's La Foce villas in the Val d'Orcia where that very s-bend line of trees was located. We were told that it became a symbol of the area.

We were crazily in love with each other and some years later the Best Man at our wedding told us we had been impossible to be with at that time because we had eyes only for each other and barely noticed anyone else around us. We had stayed with them on our three-month-long honeymoon in Mexico, and would moon at each other on the back seat of their convertible, while they slipped banknotes folded into the identity card handed to a Mexican cop to mitigate being caught for speeding. I imagine we were indeed insufferable and wonder whether the speeding was to get away from us.

I was 26 and he 25 and both of us were yearning for the coup de foudre that occurred when we met. It was love at first sight – or nearly first sight because technically we had been introduced before that, but between ourselves we only counted the day 'it' happened.

'It' was at a dinner party in my Islington flat. Stephen and I were introduced because I was involved with Young Friends of the Tate and had said to our chairman that I would find an architect – why we needed one, I no longer recall. A mutual friend thought we were a natural fit and when a couple of weeks after our initial encounter, I needed an extra man for a dinner party I was having I thought, that nice young architect – he'll do. And so he did.

Both of us had been in make-do relationships that didn't live up to an idealised concept of romantic love that was somehow the zeitgeist of our time. The pill had recently crossed the Atlantic to our shores, but was not generally available on prescription to unmarried women until 1974. Three years after this egg! It was a very different climate then to be young and in love. The expectation was that love led to marriage, and in your early 20s at that. We may have married seven months after meeting one another, but we were, for that time, technically regarded as being on the shelf.

For most of us, the sexual freedom of the so-called Swinging Sixties really only took off in the seventies when women were enabled to choose whether to have a child and to enjoy the same sexual freedom as men. Women's magazines were almost all concerned with how you catch your man, how you keep him, and how to look after a household. *Ms* and *Cosmopolitan* were just beginning to break out of this mould, but I didn't know about either of them then: far too sophisticated for an emigré daughter like me.

I was dipping into *Woman's Own* and *Good Housekeeping* which had taught me to iron my long hair with brown paper on top to straighten out the frizz. The stick-like thin Twiggy was still (just) on the front cover of

almost every magazine and Mary Quant's mini-skirts and hot-pants were all the rage. I cannot believe that I actually wore a mini-skirt to the registry office when we got married: I did not have the legs for it. I was the wrong shape and size for my era (but, then, what young woman does not feel that?). Luckily maxi-skirts were also in fashion and I had the good sense to wear a long dress to the wedding party itself. I can't get into it any more (still in a bottom drawer) but I was a little chuffed when my first-born, Emily, couldn't get into it either at roughly the age I was then. I made the dress (gold embroidered bodice with gold silk skirt), as I did mine and his wedding rings and the major part of the wedding breakfast, which was served in my parents' garden. There's another change: a do-it-yourself wedding being replaced these days by big expensive gala occasions at hire-out venues.

Like me, Stephen felt a misfit among his peers – he didn't do drugs, play football or love pop music. He did play the guitar, but (like me again) he didn't care for Bob Dylan who was only very slightly older than us and all the rage. He had longish, floppy hair and wore flares. And he smoked Gaulloises. But not for long as I soon made my feelings about smoking apparent and he stopped without much difficulty or regret.

We were drawn together not so much by our egregious relationship to the youth culture of the time but because we had the same interests, had Eastern European roots and, above all, because we both liked making things. For him, the fact that artistic pursuits were valued in my family was fresh air to him, stifled as he was by his own father's pushing him towards academic professionalism. Ludwik would have liked to say, 'My son, the doctor', or 'My son, the lawyer' or something of that sort. Stephen wasn't cut out for that; he might have been a superb linguist, but because Ludwik himself spoke seven languages fluently he couldn't see that this was a talent his son had inherited that might be worth nurturing. I think I encouraged him to value his creativity and that's one good thing I did. Stephen was a superb craftsman; his father eventually came to appreciate this and to feel proud enough to say, 'My son, the lutemaker'.

The Easter egg collection symbolises that attraction to creativity. It also points up one of the central differences between us. Stephen, being a perfectionist, painted only a few eggs because he preferred to do nothing rather than something second-rate. I was more prolific because the record-keeping urge is stronger for me than to rise to the egg heights of the Fabergé effect. Every year, I would blow him an egg and he would say, 'I've got an idea for this one', but it would rarely materialise. I am sorry now as the ones I have show that sensitive charm that so attracted me to him in the first place. I would have liked to have his interpretations of the year gone by rather than just my own.





I gave Stephen one egg almost every year (with seven years not accounted for) and he gave me either four or five (so 40 years not depicted by him). There are a total of 53 to date (2018) which includes three and a half by the daughters. Our tradition – and I don't know where I got that from, perhaps it grew all by itself – is that each egg summarises what have been the main events in the Easter-to-Easter year in which it was painted. Some were not dated so I have had to look at family photographs to gather up clues; though the photographic record is not a reliable archive as the pictures – all taken by Stephen – are almost exclusively holiday snaps, portraits of birthday cakes, series of children climbing trees, making funny faces or eating melon slices, pictures of lutes in the making or close-ups of frogs, wild flowers, butterflies and beetles. The 40 years he has not put on an egg are in these photos. And they augment the gaps in my bullet-point egg-capture of the year. A year is a long time and there is so much more in one that can be portrayed in ovoid form.

I don't know when I started painting hollow eggs, nor what happened to any of them before these in this collection. They are all blown. I make a hole at each end of the egg, about 2 mm in diameter, and then blow the flesh of the egg out into a tea cup (to scramble later). You can use any sharp instrument but I find an old-fashioned corkscrew works well because having made the smallest hole possible, you can twist the corkscrew to enlarge it while keeping it round. Too large is ugly and makes the shell more fragile and too small means it is difficult to blow the egg out, especially when you get to the membrane containing the yolk which may need piercing with a



darning needle to get the yolk out. I then wash the inside with water and blow that out too.

My first Easter egg shows a Japanese lady doing embroidery. A nod, I suppose, to my new-found domesticity in my first, and only real, love affair. I am not sure where I got the Japanese connection from – perhaps it was the year in which we both read *The Tale of Genji*. Or perhaps it was because the first present Stephen gave me was a Japanese grasshopper made of reed – a small and delicate piece of craftsmanship that he gave me about two weeks after we met. I have it still.

The theme presages the gift that Stephen gave me on our first wedding anniversary: a Japanese print of a lady wearing a kimono with dog faces in its design. He had inscribed this on the back – ‘Old Japanese proverb: When a future wife meets a man’s dog, it always knows whether she was a vixen in her previous life. And thus the man will know if his choice was wise. This lady passes the test.’ Meaning me. We weren’t sufficiently au fait with Japanese culture to realise that the subject of the framed print is almost certainly no lady. However, there is a tenderness in my young woman with her silks and her ceremonial tea things that speaks of my mood at the time. Feminism was just beginning to gather momentum, and its effect was profound on all my generation, but I did not see it then.

As a summary of 1970, that Easter egg ought to have shown the pyramids at Oaxaca and Palenque seen on our honeymoon in Mexico, had I known how stunning they would be, but we were married in June and went on our honeymoon for three months so it was all post-egg. I had left my job as Editor at Longman the year before. I was last man standing in what we paternalistically called the Far East division, and resigned in a flurry of disappointment because a riot had broken out in Singapore, where I was to be posted for a spell, and it meant I could not go. But for that riot, how different life might have been! Before leaving I had cleverly fixed myself up with a contract to write a slim schools’ book called *Cortes and the Aztecs* before I left under the misguided theory that I could do the research while we were travelling in Mexico. Of course I didn’t.

The book was written and published, all the same; my first book and I felt quite proud of it then. Sixteen more conventionally published were to follow and a few more co-authored volumes. At a certain point I dared to call myself ‘a writer’ though I always felt that term belonged to the novelist, biographer or serious historian. My books were largely journalism in book form. The one that is truly mine and my story is *A Life in 490 Recipes* self-published in 2014. Then there is this one which is another form of autobiography. And I am planning another: a book of ‘stuff’ and why one surrounds oneself with decorative objects and what story each item tells.



1979 This *is* an egg though it may not look like one – the back is half an egg, the front is a bit of cigar-box cedar with a matchstick as the bridge and the neck is papier mâché with drawing-pins for pegs. It is not dated but I am fairly sure it was in 1979 because that was the year in which the BBC documentary film ‘In the Making’ was made (shown in the following year). Stephen had been having a lot of media attention around that time and was well established as one of the best lute makers in the world. The 20-minute documentary has been streamed on vimeo and is on a link from Stephen’s website at [www.lutemaker.com](http://www.lutemaker.com). I am not permitted to say what the BBC said when asked for their permission: they neither gave it nor am I contravening their copyright. He looks so charmingly young and gentle on the film.

Cutting an egg in half longways using a razor blade is not the easiest thing in the world: he would have done it perfectly, needless to say, but I wasn’t at the time displeased with this first and only lute that I made. He did try to teach me to make a cittern, which I still have in its component parts and it is a pity that it never got finished. He also made me do wood tests, bringing home small samples and giving me grades for how many of them I could identify. I still know a few.

In 1979 he made a lute for the Crafts Council which is still in their permanent collection. A couple of years later he went on to the Advisory Committee of the Crafts Council: his first pro bono role.

This was the year Stephen’s sister Angela got married to John in Toronto: he went to the wedding and (typically) I stayed at home. Not a great traveller me. Angela was widowed some four years before I was, and although there were visits, I barely knew John. Stephen and Angela are very different



– he taking after his Polish Jewish father and she after their Canterbury CoE mother.

That year's Christmas card is printed on a friend's Albion printing press. The central block was done as a linocut which was made into a nylon block to fit the height of the type. Each letter had to be hand inserted and each card individually inked and pressed down: it required strength and patience. I can't remember how many I made.



This egg commemorates the time when we had an allotment on the Waterboard land alongside the footpath leading to Tetherdown Primary School where all three children went. I don't think our garden produce was as prolific as this and when I say 'our' allotment, it would be more accurate to say Stephen's as I was never handy with a spade and always dispirited whenever I did blithely plant something and then the slugs ate it all.

The grow-your-own years didn't last very long because in addition to slugs, the soil quality there was not so good. Later on, Stephen kept two beehives on the same stretch of land and for several years we had marvellous batches of honey. Then one year, very sadly, they must have not had enough sugar solution as they did not last the winter. We felt some guilt eating that year's honeycomb.

The egg also logs my passion for baskets – I cannot seem to pass a basket stall in a foreign country without wanting to buy one. It's the collector in me that won't let the voice of reason prevail as it whispers, 'You don't need another basket' in my ear. I particularly like them for picnics, though they are much heavier and less convenient than the knapsack picnic sets you can get nowadays.

This was the Easter of going to Derbyshire where we stayed in a converted pigsty; there Emily dressed up in costume at Sudbury Hall as a birthday treat (the curator was a distant friend) and someone fell into a stream and cried. This is documented in a little watercolour booklet, which was another

1980 or 1981



**1996** I am not sure why I have done this Michaelangelo dome; we had a postcard of it propped up on the bookcase. Maybe I drew inspiration from that.

I am at this time a Trustee of the Kraszna-Krausz Foundation book prize for photography and the moving image (1994-2006) which involved having dinners once a year in interesting places. The first few were on a barge moored in Marlow where the house that inspired *Toad of Toad Hall* was. Later meetings were held at Magdalen College in Oxford hosted by the Principal who had a very tasteful residence furnished with finely chosen antiques. A valuable Chinese bowl or Iznik tile would often be on the table as a centrepiece to admire. Other treats included being allowed to handle some of the oldest books in the world in the environmentally-protected pod above the library with learned commentaries by Bodley's Librarian, a fellow trustee.

What else happened in 1996? Emily was spending a gap year in Australia; Vita was at Leeds doing a BA in History of Art and Gaby must have been doing his A-levels. Stephen was going on rock-climbing, skiing and sailing courses. He had inherited a small amount of money when his mother's house was sold and was able to enjoy some out-door activity. He took a course in hang-gliding as well. I was sitting on various boards being passionate about authors' rights in an electronic age.

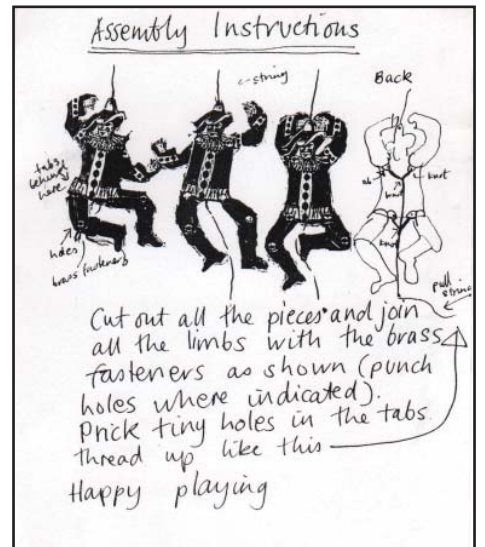
In my last editorial for *The Electronic Author* I mused on what the word 'reader' has come to mean now that the 'Dear Reader' of the Victorian novel has demised. 'Reading', I said, 'is hearing and watching too; reading is mouse-pouncing. A screen-reader scrolls, scans, highlights, cuts, pastes, sorts, stores – all bustling activity compared to the original "raedan" meaning to "make out or interpret". Light signals pass across the retina, but at what

point significance grasps the mind is less clear.' Perhaps that now sounds harsh to the generation growing up with reading on screen, but I constantly note how people neither write nor read emails attentively. Predictive text often leads to an email saying the opposite of what is intended. And if you want an answer, it's best to write one email for each subject raised.

I thought interactive story-telling was going to take over and went to (and presented at) several conferences on multimedia. There were some exciting ideas and possibilities and I think they probably migrated into computer games: novelists and children's authors stuck to what they knew. My most prestigious presentation was at the Arts Club in Mayfair that November. I'd achieved, what then was hard to do, an internet connection. To demonstrate how little control authors and artists had over their work I downloaded the Mona Lisa from the electronic Louvre in digital form. I transformed it, live, into a Mona Lisa with my own face superimposed – child's play now, but at the time it elicited some astonishment. Was it right, I queried, that such treatment should lead to Magritte advertising Royal Mail or Man Ray constipation tablets? The Estates of both had taken the advertisers to court. Getting permission to show these advertisements in the basement of a Dover Street house had required several letters.

This was the year The Devonians began – four and a half couples and some extras all rented a large house in Devon. Each family unit cooked one dinner and there was a gently competitive rivalry to create the best meal at the lowest cost. I won, principally because I had been to the Plymouth fish market on the morning of the first day; it was ridiculously cheap and served from-the-sea fresh. The four 'whole' couples went on to cook for each other every year at various times. We celebrated our 20th anniversary in Devon as I began to write this book, and the house on the River Dart we stayed in then is on my 2016 egg. Every year we get together for a supper; every year we creak a little more and notice that we are less nimble. But every year, the food is amazing, helped by the fact that we have got into the habit of our get-togethers being bring-a-dish so each couple (and it is usually the girls) can shine at one course.

By 1996 I'd wised up about the difficulties of mass production of hand-cut Christmas cards and this pierrot was sent as a self-assembly package. Postcard-sized, to fit in a standard envelope, and photocopied and guillotined by the local reprographer. I wonder how many people bothered to cut it out and string it up. I got the idea from an old poster of Polchinelles that was given to me in France and which I still have framed in the hall. Quite why or how the gift was made is lost to time but I dimly recall visiting a hand-printing press and finding it there. It is an Image Pellerin and the internet doesn't yield any clues; my card credits the source.





**2010** Stephen and I were very ‘coursey’: we liked going on creative-making-things courses together. Around this time we were keen on book arts and had joined the Society of Bookbinders and would spend Saturday mornings vying with each other to be teacher’s pet in leather paring (him) or parchment painting (me). This marbled egg records this interest and was the year we went to West Dean twice: once to a two-day marbling course and once to a week of bookbinding. I used one of the marbled papers Stephen made in the full-leather version of my recipe book (illustrated in one of the 2014 eggs) and perhaps I shall do the same for a bound version of this book.

It was as Stephen used an old West Sussex newspaper to paste on that he saw an old vicarage in Yapton advertised for sale. He had always talked of moving to the country and having a large garden. This was walled, had lawns and trellises and a well-planted kitchen garden with asparagus and fruit cages. There were two out-buildings: a workshop for him and one for me with its own gallery upstairs. We went to see it twice and mercifully it was he who worked out that while we could swap our Muswell Hill house for this much larger, Georgian property we would not be able to afford to run it. I often think what would I be doing now in widowhood if we had moved. We came very close. I had thought I could no longer hold out for living in London and that his turn to move – expressed so many times – had now come. I was sick with misery at the thought. Perhaps he saw that – or perhaps he didn’t au fond want to move there himself.

This is the year of Emily’s directing a fundraising opera event at Buckingham Palace and getting a letter of thanks from the Prince of Wales who was the principle guest, which (bizarrely) hangs in her hall in the house in Walthamstow. ‘Bizarrely’ because none of us is a royalist. Stephen maybe





**2013** This egg depicts what a prostate cancer cell looks like under the microscope. I think some dye was involved in the photo-micrograph I found on Google to show up the cell structure. It looks like an aboriginal design not the evil growth that would rack Stephen's body.

I can remember in filmic detail when we realised that the remission was over and that the cancer had flared up again after 12 years of lulling us into a false sense of security. On 22 February we went to Le Gavroche for a fabulous dinner with friends who generously treated us. It was meant to be our turn next. That was a Friday: the following Monday Stephen was admitted to hospital and the 14 months of treatments began: radiotherapy, chemotherapy, endless drugs to be popped out of packages and sorted into plastic day boxes. It had been a routine check-up but his oncologist was not happy. I remember her saying, 'I'm so sorry,' and I did not know then that she was effectively saying, 'There isn't anything we can do'.

It would be another year before I understood that. And even then I was in a state of denial that it was happening, even when one of the doctors at the Marie Curie Hospice, under whose care he was, told me (not him) that we were looking at 'long months; maybe a year'. It was a two little months. I was so shocked by this that I couldn't process it. I couldn't take it in: I didn't tell the children and by the time I did he had 11 days to live.

In 2013 we both thought we would get over this bout and that he would have another remission of a few years. We had a family holiday – all of us in an exquisite villa in Umbria that we invited them to. It was May and there we all are in Montepulciano on the back of our December greeting (bottom right). This follows the pattern of the egg in referencing our current concerns and is a skit on a blood test form complete with polythene envelope. The carol sheet that is part of it lists Shingle Bells; Silent Night? No! and The First No[t]Well. I don't know why we were trying to laugh it all off.



**PRIORITY**

The Collingwood Centre  
NHS Foundation Trust

PATIENT NO. 20210333

SEASONAL GREETINGS FOR THE NEW YEAR REQUEST FORM  
PLEASE WRITE CLEARLY USING BLOCK CAPITALS WITHIN THE CHARACTER BOXES

Hosp.No. 2013-2014

Surname GOTTLEIER

Forename STEPHEN

GP JANE DORNER

Consultant Santa Requested By us to all our friends

Bleep No 8883 2602

Request date / / 2014

Request time -

**PRIORITY**

Sociability Details  
Please indicate when you would like to examine the patient to test the results

Category  
 NHS  
 Private

Please mark test requests using a **X**

Additional Tests **URGENT! MERRIMENT TEST**

Lab Use Only

Domestic chemistry  
 patient/patient  creativity   
 lovely family  workshop   
 caring friends  lutes   
 furry pussy cat   
 plenty to read  glass   
 philosophical   
 entertainments  Feasting  Fasting

Neurology  
 good cheer   
 laugh frequency   
 exuberance   
 glee

Biostasis  
 change endurance   
 adaptability   
 forward-looking

Email your results to  
 jane@editor.net  
 or  
 stephen@lutemaker.com

Time taken  
 not known  
 District nurse

Form 913  
 Feb 2009

Carol sheet for staff and family

Shingle Bails  
 Silent Night? No!  
 The First Noel  
 On the Feast of Stephen  
 I Saw Three Trips  
 What Child is This?  
 Santa Claus Comes to Town

Affix family photograph in box

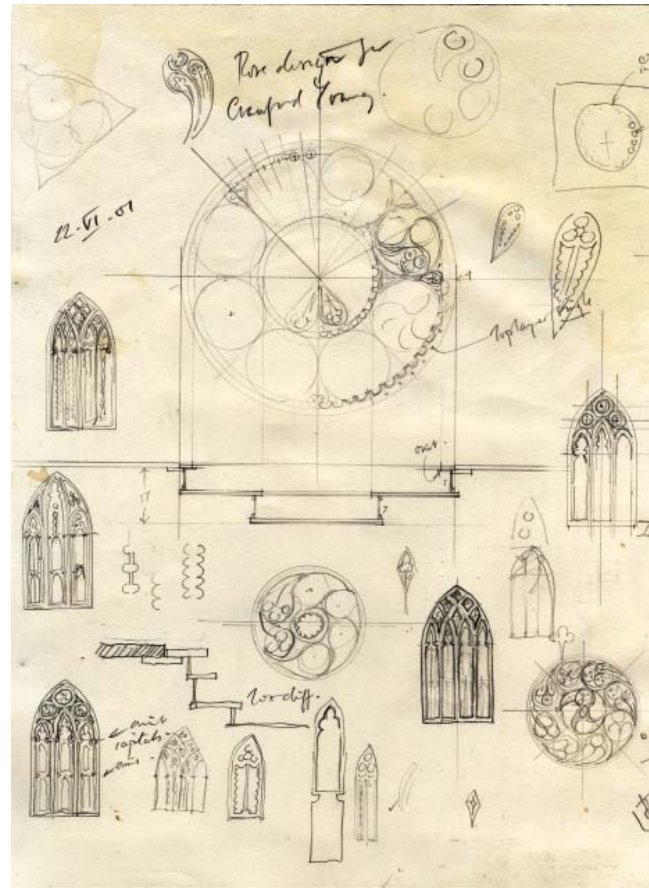
Twitter feed

Additional Notes

Montepulciano in May 2013: from left to right  
 Stephen - a bad year with extra-painful shingles and chemotherapy for bone cancer, but coming through it and anticipating a good recovery over the next year  
 Zim - astonishingly adventurous for a cat who sleeps most of the time...  
 Emily - graduated from the Clore Leadership Programme and has taken up a new position in strategic planning at the Royal Opera House  
 Jane - writing her life story in 500 recipes, taken up singing, broke foot in summer  
 Georgia - research shortly to be suspended in favour of the establishment's first grandchild who will be born to a brand new kitchen and loft conversion  
 Vita - running her own womenswear label from a new studio in London Fields, whilst travel-writing and making fashion films  
 Joachim - balancing work in faraway places with building connections in the cultural world and explorations with Vita and family  
 Gabriel - continues to socialise between acts of Wagner at the ROH and is starting to work in its Education dept, expecting a son in March  
 Nick - looking forward to leading role in Sondheim's *Into the Woods* at the Châtelet theatre in Paris next spring and home life with Emily in Walthamstow.

Good wishes to all our friends - and sorry it's electronic. Blame Royal Mail.  
 Love Jane & Stephen

Perhaps it is a defence mechanism. Alas, Stephen tried so hard to enjoy that last holiday and his last Christmas but he was in dreadful pain from the shingles that had attacked him in his weakened state. I think the shingles troubled him far more than the cancer. The upside was that he went on believing to the very end that it *was* just shingles and I do not think he thought he was dying. I want to think that, I know, but I genuinely do.



There was no Christmas card in December 2014 because we had a memorial concert for Stephen in St George's Bloomsbury at which 15 of his instruments were played. Gabriel compered the occasion and sang twice – I felt so proud. An intensely moving moment was the bowing at the end when the players held up their lutes in a tribute gesture to Stephen. The concert programme was, in effect, our card and though I printed 200 copies it wasn't enough for all the people who came. As this book has so few of his designs the page from the concert booklet with his design for a lute rose stands in for our card. He could have done one of these on an egg. I wish he had.

The CD cover for the concert recording (left) is one of his lute roses and we produced this in a very limited edition of less than 100 because some of the lute-players were contracted to recording studios so copyright dictated that it had to be very local distribution to family and particularly close friends only.



2015

Easter fell on 5 April this year so it was not yet a calendar year since Stephen had died, and I marked it with an egg covered in black velvet and jet bead plumes to represent deep Victorian mourning. There were also some shisha mirrors embroidered in as this was the year of my first venture abroad – to India – where I did an embroidery course with Vita in Jaipur in January-February. I was with her and Joachim for most of my trip, and it was novel and exciting (especially the most extraordinary monument ever built to love and death, the Taj Mahal – which we briefly had to ourselves as we were the first to be let in). However, the week I spent on my own seemed very pointless without someone to share impressions with and I wondered whether travelling solo is something I will ever do again.

My lovely Zim died later in the year; got to his 15th birthday in August and then drifted away in his sleep, curled up, in October. The house was suddenly so very empty and so very quiet. My bed was cold without a pussy cat curled up beside me and purring for his breakfast in the morning. Because you do not have verbal language to communicate with each other there is something very pure and visceral about the love you feel for a cat, and the sadness when that creature, whom you love, is suddenly not there.

And yet – again, I could not cry. And felt locked out of the possibility of the relief of tears. When my father's mother died in the 1918 flu pandemic, he was 16 years old and he claimed he never cried again. I never cried at all.

A sad egg. For a sad year.

### *What defines a life, a marriage?*

In this book, a sequence of beautiful painted Easter eggs in all their fragility give permanent shape to a 44-year relationship: love, marriage, children, successes and failures, illness and bereavement. A second sequence of hand-made Christmas cards counterpoints the eggs, plotting a family's life with an accompanying text that provides context for the artwork.

The painting is vivid and delightful, of astonishing wit, freshness and variety. Turning every page produces visual thrills and continues the honest and engaging account of the author's life and her thoughts on art. It is a remarkable amalgam of creativity and rational thought, passionate honesty and warm affection.

