

Saturday 04 December 2004

Jill's home is not too far from the airport. I took a civilized Scottish cab. The Russian cabbies drive very dilapidated cars and they drive them like maniacs. In one way it's good to be back in civilization.

Jill's lovely daughter Karen, came over especially to let me in last night. Jill got back at about 22h00 from a week in Manchester where she had been giving a class. She's a little bundle of dynamite and what she's been doing is promising to be very interesting. I think I'm going to be learning a lot while here with Jill.

Sunday 05 December 2004

Jill and I are now in London where we're staying for the rest of the week. Jill has some very interesting work here and some interesting meetings, which I'll discuss when they've happened. Yesterday afternoon we took the train to Manchester, where Philip picked us up, drove us to London and gave us accommodation in his lovely house out in Ealing, close to where Victor lives. Philip is the prime minister's brother. He's a really nice guy and I'm really delighted I met him. Now that Jill is part of their family, she is to have lunch with the Prime Minister in about two weeks.

Today Jill is going to go with Philip to pick up his Mercedes in Wales. I have some shopping to do, particularly trying to find a new camera. I wasn't successful in Frankfurt.

Tuesday 07 December 2004

Yesterday morning we had a meeting with Asthma UK. Jill paid them a courtesy call to tell them she was planning an asthma-free day which involves a standard fun-run for raising funds. The money was to go towards training 365 Buteyko practitioners and Buteyko training for 100 children. She was hoping they might be interested in cooperating.

She pulled out all stops at the meeting. Every argument they raised she could counter with written evidence. For example they talked about the high cost of Buteyko courses. So she pulled out the independently produced costing of Buteyko therapy vs. standard treatment. She even mentioned there was a good chance the prime minister would open the event.

We had our first two public seminars and practitioner training sessions yesterday. There was a disappointing turn out with just 1 person at each venue. And for this Jill had come all the way from Glasgow, had driven to Wales with Philip to fetch his other car so that she could use it for her work here and then driven hours to these venues and back. But Jill was not deterred. She said it would grow.

London: Sunday 12-12-2004

At last I'm on the train to Truro, with the beautiful English countryside flashing by.

Jill had two of her former students attend the class at Reading, which meant the class was bigger and therefore more interesting. We travelled out to Henley every evening after this class for practitioner training sessions. Jill has a vast amount of practical medical knowledge which she brings to her training sessions in addition to the experience she has had training Buteyko practitioners. This meant getting back to London usually around 10 o'clock at night. I took her for dinner at the local pub on Thursday, and the again on Friday when Dennis Champion and his Russian sweetheart joined us. He just happened to be in town at the time. I got another crack at practicing a bit of Russian.

The evening was marred by a violent drunk who got out of control and kept coming into the pub although the waiters had banded together in an attempt to keep him out. They seemed to be panicky, so I thought I'd help them. I got him around the neck and put him on the ground where he could be restrained. That was pretty easy with five or six other guys involved. But I was totally disgusted at the reaction of the waiters. There was clearly no procedure for dealing with these people in place apart from calling the police. There was absolutely no training and there were no bouncers. Instead they set about kicking him in the head while he was down. I let him go and went back to Jill, totally disgusted. I couldn't understand why they didn't just tie him up with a serviette, table cloth, tea towel etc. Anyway, when Jill went to the pub the next day with Phillip, they asked after me and promised me a free drink if I came back.

Interestingly, Jill was appalled that so many people tackled this man and frightening him. We had a heated discussion about it. Jill favours the professional approach of using psychological principles to defuse this sort of situation. My view is that



psychological approaches are good in a clinical setting, but not at midnight in a pub with a lot of untrained people around. In my opinion the priorities are to restrain the individual so he can't hurt others or himself (he nearly put his fist through the window). I have to say that the police were there very quickly and dealt with him very effectively.

Yesterday I spent the day with my daughter Karen. It was wonderful catching up with her again. In the evening Jill invited us to a play where her daughter works. We went to a pub after the show. Jill was very impressed with Karen, and offered her accommodation if she was ever in London or Glasgow, as well as use of her car. The two of them got on extremely well.



Karen, Phillip and Jill



London is an anti-climax after Moscow. The underground is very slow compared to the frenetic pace set by the super efficient Moscow Metro. There seem to be a lot of diversions on the freeways that block traffic for days. The feeling I get about London is summed up in this poster at the big information panel in the station. Note that it has been pre-printed and is framed in a permanent display cabinet at the board.

Wednesday, 15/12/2004

I'm on a Virgin train, leaving Truro, and heading to Bath on my way back to London. I'm meeting Anne Burns, who is holidaying in Bath with her parents, from Ireland.

Mullion, where I spent the last two days with James Oliver, must be one of the happiest little villages in the whole world. It is quaint, picturesque and has all the old world charm you could wish for. The locals buy up all the home crafts produced in the area, and hang everything up on their walls in homes and guest houses. The accompanying picture is just a sample of what I found in my bathroom. The hotel room at the old vicarage was



magnificent, a huge double bed, masses of room, a huge bathroom, and Jacqui couldn't do enough to be helpful, all for a modest UK\$29 per night (I can't find a pound sign on my keyboard).



James picked me up from Truro drove me to Mullion, and took off two days from work to talk to me. We had wide ranging discussions amongst the pub lunches, dinners and a lovely meal Caroline cooked for me. I also managed to go on walks through the countryside.

Thursday, 16/12/2004

I caught up with Anne in Bath, where we chatted in a café for about two hours. It was nice seeing her again, and while we could have done with a lot more time, I was very tired and anxious to get back to base again.

I took the underground from Paddington back to Ealing with my baggage. Some of those old but efficient escalators in Moscow would have been welcome, with all that excess baggage I carry. At Ealing common, they woke up a black mini-cab driver for me to take me to Kenton House Hotel a few minutes down the road. The driver sounded like a Zulu from Natal. I asked him where he was from, and he said he was from Ealing, but that his forefathers had come to London from Natal in South Africa, and that he was one of the Zulu tribe. But he assured me his accent was indistinguishable from any other Englishman and no way could he be mistaken for a Zulu from Natal. He also gave me a lecture on the war in Iraq and how the Americans were only interested in the oil. I left my newspaper in his cab so he can update his conversational prowess with more current issues.

The Kenton House Hotel, which I booked through the internet, is not in a quiet residential area as was advertised. I have a tiny pokey little room at ground floor

facing the very noisy street. I will not be spending much time in this place, that's for sure. Again, in modern London you would expect to be able to use the telephone line for downloading e-mail, but that would be wishful thinking. Continental breakfast is included and consists of cereal, toasted plastic white bread and coffee. I think the Russians should open up a hospitality school for training London hoteliers. I suppose some of the clientele are quite happy with the place. We have a bunch of what looks like painters, who rolled into the hotel last night like a flock of bungling walruses. They snorted, burped and farted their way through breakfast this morning, communicating strictly in monosyllables. Gosh how I miss Moscow, with it's quiet and dignified Russian citizens!

I decided to go for a walk last night to keep away from the place until I was tired enough to sleep. There is not much happening in this area, but I did find a nice little pub with no-smoking signs on the tables. So I ordered what turned out to be the worst hamburger I ever had. I thought the meat might have been off, (it tasted like you would imagine sweaty feet to taste) but I survived the night without incidence, so it must have been ok. But the beer was great – Fosters from Australia!

I'm going to spend today looking for an internet café and tonight looking for some interesting entertainment. I'm seeing my first friends from tomorrow.

Last Letter from London: 25/12/2004

I guess the main reason I hate London is because things just haven't been going too well while I've been here. That's not really London's fault. That's because all the good stuff that happened to me in Moscow had to come to an end some time, and I'm left in London with all the crap that has to balance things out in life.

Take yesterday for example. I decided that Christmas eve, being the last day on which anything is open, I'd better send off a 5 kg pack of excess luggage, which would reduce my overload to around 5 kg. The tragic sight of seeing people at Heathrow having to empty their bags of excess luggage was really scary, and while Lufthansa has been generous in letting me get away with it so far, maybe EasyJet won't, and maybe the other LH flights will be so full as to require them too to insist on baggage limits. Adding to my fears, one of the guys at the hotel said he was recently forced to pay 1% of the 1st class fare for every kilogram he was over the limit.

So the first thing I had to do was sort what I could afford to send back and make up some sort of scale so I could weigh the components. I bought some string and a plastic ruler (they didn't have a wooden one). While my washing was being done at the Laundromat, I walked a few miles to the nearest hardware store, where I found a suitable stick. I made a hanging balance with the string, cut carefully measured notches in the stick and weighed all the bits I could afford to send back, carefully.

I needed to take two subway trains to get to the nearest post office. There I found that the cost of sending the stuff was way beyond what I expected. After agonizing over this for about an hour, I decided to send it anyway.

It was 4'o'clock by the time I got to Covent Garden. Part of the delay was due to me taking a northbound tube instead of a southbound one, combined with a partial strike on this line. Unfortunately by this time the transport museum had just closed, which is the one thing I was really anxious to see. (I had gone to the main museum the previous day to try to find where the transport museum was, but decided to stay at that museum. Nobody at the hotel knows anything, such as where the museums are, and of course there are no white pages in London.)

So that proved to be a bit of a wasted day. I guess it doesn't help that I'm about an hour out of the city center by tube.

I have to say that the main London museum is quite magnificent. They've really invested heavily in that. I was again struck by how the Italians are so way ahead of everyone else in their sculpture, and always have been since the ancient Roman times. I've also been comparing that with the revolting millennium bridge, and wondered if anything of artistic merit is ever going to come out of our community again. The last few generations have left absolutely nothing for our children to enjoy.

Probably the highlight for me was being taken to St Paul's cathedral by Janet Brindley.



You'll see the cathedral dome in the background, behind Janet standing on the Millennium bridge.

The other picture is a view from the pointy structure at the top of the dome and some of the views from inside the dome, between the inside and outside dome.



I also enjoyed my day out at Colchester. It is supposed to be the oldest city in England. The ruins of the abbey in the accompanying frame was made probably 1000 years ago from the stones that the Romans used for their buildings. The second picture is part of the ancient Roman wall around the city that is still standing. There are many examples of these, with many of the houses actually built to incorporate these walls.



Sunday Morning

I'm at Stansted Airport with four hours before the plane goes. It's been another one of those traumatic events in London. I had planned to take the tube to Liverpool Street station from where the train goes to Stansted. But the guy at the hotel told me the metro was closed Christmas day AND Boxing day. So last night I walked down to the metro station, where everything was locked, but I found a poster with the opening hours. It said that the metro was closed on Christmas day. Phew! What a relief!

I checked with the Indian trader next to the station, where I've been buying a lot of Lychees (they are one of the cheapest fruits here in England!) but he thought they only opened at 8.00. A shopper said it was 9.00 and someone else told me 10. There was no indication on the station. This morning I popped down to the station again at 7.30 and it was still closed. But I called a phone number listed on the poster, and discovered the guy who said 9 o'clock was right. I guess I could have saved myself the trouble and just taken the average out of all the times I was given.

But then there was no knowing when the first train would arrive. The cost of the train to Stansted is quite high and it turned out that the best way to get there, considering the tube would leave too late, was by taxi all the way. I think all this inefficiency is one of the things that makes London so expensive.

Today is a very happy day for me. I'm leaving London at last!
