

1st July, 2009

## A HAPPY SAD STORY

DEAR DIARY, I decided to sit in the park yesterday because it was hot, I mean really hot from 8am in the morning until 10pm at night. I had a stack of bits to read so I made some picnic food and grabbed a carton of juice and off I went in search of a quiet place to sit in the common.

I found a nice little area that wasn't too close to the children's playground, it wasn't on the dog-walking trail and it was a good distance away from the ball games. There's nothing worse than a ball smashing you in the face when you're at the park minding your own business. My nose bled for hours once when I was hit by a cricket ball at the park. I'll never forget the look of horror on my mum's face when I came home with blood stains on my orange and yellow summer dress.



Anyway, I spread out my bits and pieces, took my sandals off and got comfortable.

I was one hour into contented bliss when I saw an old man in the distance slowly walking towards my general direction. He reminded me of my dearly departed granddad. I looked down again because I didn't want the old man to think I was staring at him.

I glanced up and it looked as if the man was heading in my direction! He was the one staring now. I then began to wonder what this might be about because clearly he was heading for me because no one else was around and if he had any ideas about wanting to share my space, I may have to decline.

A tall, handsome, salt & pepper haired man stood in front of me and said "I couldn't help heading this way; I was compelled to walk in this direction". I looked up at him and smiled and said "oh, OK" and I looked away trying to appear busy and uninterested. This was his cue to leave but he continued to converse.

*What happened in the park yesterday is still a surprise to me.* Me and Mr Doyley spoke for three hours! If they made talking an Olympic sport, he'd get gold, silver and bronze, but I'm not complaining. Meeting Mr Doyley was one of the most enchanting encounters I've ever had in my life.

Mr Doyley lost his wife five years ago. She died of cancer and it was a slow painful death. But she had the opportunity to put things in order and say goodbye to her loved ones. She made Mr Doyley promise not to wither away and die of loneliness but to instead experience all the things they didn't have the time to do. She said when he finally meets her again in heaven, she wants to hear about all the places he visited, all the new people he met and all

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the experiences he had. Mrs Doyley begged Mr Doyley to try something new regularly and to speak to a stranger or at least say hello to someone every single day and so far, he's kept his promise. I turned out to be the stranger that he said hello to yesterday.

He said in keeping his promise to his wife, one of the first things he did was completely out of his comfort zone. He decided to go abroad. He had never visited his son who lives in Barbados. His son, his daughter-in-law and grand-children always come to visit him so he decided to go to Barbados to stay with his son for a month. Prior to that he had never travelled abroad alone. Now he goes abroad every year. He visits his brothers in Jamaica and his friend Henry who now lives in Greece. He's even been to Bangkok on a Thai cooking course.

He also took his first tube journey after his wife had passed. He thought understanding the whole process of the Underground would overwhelm him and make him feel out of his depth but he said he regularly goes from North, South, East and West London in one day. Mr Doyley said he visits Camden Market frequently, The Houses of Parliament and Big Ben, he's been up on the London Eye, he visits various museums, shops in Oxford Street and took his first visit to Harrods last Christmas and he often does what I was doing and that's sitting in the park.



Also, Mr Doyley had never been to the **Notting Hill Carnival**. But now he goes every year and helps his daughter with her Arts & Crafts stall.

Mr Doyley also enrolls into an Adult Educational class every year. His Computer Skills for Beginners gave him the confidence to purchase a laptop and now he uses the internet and can email his friends and family. He's also learnt Spanish and is currently doing a jewellery making course.

Mr Doyley admitted that before his wife died he really took her for granted by being selfish, stubborn and proud to behave like a philistine. He said he took pride in not having his food warmed up in a microwave, not realising that he was creating more work for his wife. He took pride in staying at home stubbornly refusing to go out for meals or foregoing trips to the cinema saying he can eat at home for little or next to nothing and he can watch films on TV. Mrs Doyley liked to go out and socialise and he liked to stay at home either pottering around in the garden or sitting in front of the TV with a beer. He said sadly, now that his wife isn't around, he would chop off his left foot just to see her getting ready to go out, putting on a nice dress, lipstick and perfume. He said he always enjoyed their social evenings out once he forced himself to go.

He said one thing he never did to Mary was betray her. He said "oh yes, I looked at other women. All men do". "When we were courting, before we married, I even fooled around with other women, just kissing and flirting, but the minute she said yes to my hand in marriage, Mary was the only woman for me". He said in their 47 years of marriage he never strayed once. He said one of the reasons why he never strayed was because he loved Mary

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and he never, ever wanted to hurt her, hurt his children, embarrass himself and endanger their marriage for greed and curiosity.

He said he now realises that the key to happiness is making someone else happy. He said that as long as he makes someone else happy, he feels a sense of fulfilment when he goes to bed at night. He just wishes that he made Mary happy every day instead of being stubborn and static because love alone isn't always enough.



He said young lady; never take your loved ones for granted. Because one day they're here and the next day they're gone. Mr Doyley said "I had the opportunity to tell my wife how much I loved her and how sorry I was for being a lazy husband and I was able to promise her that I would live, just like she did and not exist just like I was doing before she died". Mr Doyley said to me "seize opportunities, try things out of your comfort zone, don't be afraid to take risks and always be grateful. **Always be grateful for what you already have.** If you're not grateful for what you already have, you'll always be unsatisfied, chasing things you think you need and when you get what you think you need, you'll still be unsatisfied. Things don't matter. People do".

He finally said I'm very happy to have met you Miss Mayfield and I wish you and your family a very fruitful life. I'll be sure to tell Mary about you when I meet her in Heaven.

Tears welled up in my eyes as if I were saying goodbye to someone I've known all of my life. I wanted to say "don't go yet Mr Doyley, I want more", but he got up, firmly shook my hand - I really wanted to throw myself on him and hug him - and he walked off in the direction he came from. He turned back and waved and I waved back. He disappeared like a beautiful mirage.

Mr Doyley really made me think about life with a better perspective. I'm very aware that I've been on a glass half empty crusade lately. Moaning about what I haven't got, wallowing in self-pity and acting as if the world owes me a favour. But I can honestly say from the bottom of my heart that meeting Mr Doyley was just the pill I needed in order to wake up with a new attitude. I'm so happy that my initial approach to being disturbed by a stranger didn't put Mr Doyley off; I think something outside of me and Mr Doyley was at work yesterday. Something quite magical brought us together.



I don't want someone I love to die before I decide that life is an incredible journey which should be appreciated on a daily basis. I know I won't feel positive every day but the least I can do is start to look at things differently because when you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change.

August Mayfield