

Oddments from my 1988 diaries. I've added a few comments where a bit of background seems necessary.

1.25pm Thursday 22nd October 1998 - Parker House

(Whilst working on contract to Parker Hannifin in Hemel Hempstead)

Did I ever tell you about the floors they have here? They are so shiny that if you look at the floor when you're sitting on the loo, the walls of the cubicle reflect downwards, so it looks as if you're peering down a lift shaft which has a light at the bottom. Most odd. If you look down and your shadow blocks the light, it looks like your shadows hanging upside down in the shaft.

The contract with Parker Hannifin finished, this was my next assignment for FI, (F International) a company who employed freelancers like myself for various contract assignments. I've kept first names of my co-workers, but as I've lost touch with them so can't ask their permission to talk about them, have removed their surnames.

These entries were written as if I were talking to my daughter Barbi who was typing them up for me. As I may have used ordinary brackets in my chat, any notes to her are enclosed in square brackets []. Her replies are in curly ones {}.

Where I think that what I've written about isn't likely to be of interest here, I've just inserted ...Did a bit more chatting here... so you'll know I wasn't just sitting and twiddling my thumbs between entries.

1.14pm Tuesday 17th November 1998

I'm doing my first day on this contract for City of London Telecommunications, COLT for short. There are 2 other consultants, Beverley and Jon and our Team Leader is Trudie. We're working alongside 2 other groups: one is another FI team doing another project which has involved the preparation of a process map of the bits our team is looking at. Obviously this has helped our effort enormously.

The other team are a group from KUDOS. They started their project at the same time as the other FI team were called in by a different manager. The two managers involved have agreed to combine on this, so we're going to be sharing information with the KUDOS people. I haven't met any of them yet.

Trudie was waiting for me where she'd promised to be when I arrived. After showing me where the essentials were, like the loo and the kitchen, she told me about the set-up. By the way, the ladies room is a veritable treasure chest of goodies. There's a basket on the side which contains sanitary towels, tampons, a shoe cleaner, spray deodorant amongst other things. There are no proper handles on the loo doors though, just these locks which taper so your fingers slip off if you try to grip them. The only way you can get the door open is to pull on the coat hook. I just hope they're fastened on firmly.

After Trudie had gone through my duties, Jon gave me an overview of the Fault Management System (FMS) for which I'm writing the training manual. Beverley came in to the company last week and showed the document format we were using at Parker. The people at the meeting were impressed with it, and as no-one from KUDOS was there, they're going to have to use the same layout to conform.

After Jon went through the overview, I went and sat with Beverley and adapted the templates I created for Parker. Beverley had already partially changed the headers and footers.

8.55am Thursday 19th November 1998 - on the Metropolitan Line just outside Chalfont and Latimer (no sorry we're at Chorleywood now,)

Decisions, decisions. Which seat to sit on in the carriage - one facing forward or one facing backwards? Do I write diary now and poems of complaints etc at lunchtime or vice versa? It's really difficult to write anything at all at the moment. I wonder why underground trains always joggle you around more than mainline railways seem to. [Sorry about the writing Barbi, I'm doing my best] {It's OK I'm getting quite used to deciphering your squiggles.}

...Did a bit more chatting here...

6.22pm - Baker Street - Metropolitan Line

What a pavlova! Great Portland Street station was closed, so I followed the LT officials instructions and walked for 2 minutes till I got to Regents Park station. That's on the Bakerloo Line only, so I tried to catch a train to Baker St to catch the Amersham train which would get me to Chesham in time to catch the Chesham train which I have been getting for the last couple of days. With that one I should get to Chesham at about 7, so would normally be home by half past. I say normally because there's an added complication which I'll tell you about in a minute.

No-one, or almost no-one anyway got off the train at Regents Park. Consequentially I had to miss 2 trains before one came along with any space to squeeze into. (I'm not as pushy as a lot of other people.) At Baker St I fought my way into the mob heading for the escalator to get to the Metropolitan Line. Once there I saw that there was a train to Watford ready to leave from platform 4. I battled up to the platform in time to see the train pulling away. Back down again to the platform screens. The next Watford train, a fast one, was leaving from platform one. That's the one I'm on now. The next stop is Harrow on the Hill, which is also used by the main line train which stops at Chalfont. So I'm gambling that there may be one of these before the next Amersham train I want. If I don't, I'll have to wait another ½ hour, so won't get to Chesham till 7.30pm.

...Did a bit more chatting here...

6.48pm - Harrow on the Hill - Chiltern Line

I'm on the main line train now, but won't know if I've made the Chesham train till we get to Chalfont. (Presuming of course that we do stop there. Otherwise I'm bugged!)

...Did a bit more chatting here...

7.22pm - Chalfont & Latimer Station

Well they didn't delay the Chesham train for us poor sods. So I'm back again. I'm now sitting on the Chesham shuttle train after spending some time waiting in the overheated waiting room, which was (just) preferable to standing in the cold on the platform.

...Did a bit more chatting here...

It's now 7.30pm and the train's just pulling out of the station.

...Did a bit more chatting here...

I think we're nearly at Chesham, so I'm going to sign off (again). Bye for now darling xxx

8.54am Friday 20th November 1998 - Chesham Station

I want to cry but I can't because I'm sitting in this waiting room with 2 men and I don't want to make a fool of myself. Do you know what, some people are so mean. The shuttle train was still here when I got to the station, but I couldn't get on it because I didn't have a ticket. As soon as the whistle started I called out "Please wait. I've got to buy a ticket but I got stuck in a traffic jam." Admittedly the doors opened again after I'd uttered the first 2 words, but they closed again and the train pulled out of the station with me standing there helplessly. I suppose I could have got on without a ticket, but that automatically incurs a £10 fine - no excuses accepted.

The most frustrating thing is that I left the house in good time to catch the train. Nigel, bless him, had even thrown water over my windscreen and the two front side windows so the worst of the ice had melted. The traffic jam started halfway up Chesham Road and continued up to the roundabout, over it and the bridge to the bypass going to Tring, then right up the road towards Chesham. When I reached the Whelpley Hill turn off, I thought I'd turn into it to avoid the traffic that way. It did occur to me to drive straight to Chalfont, but I reckoned that if I was lucky I'd make the 8.45am Chesham shuttle.

I would have made it too, had I not met one of those stubborn drivers who refuse to back up their cars in a single lane road. I couldn't reverse because about 3 other vehicles had followed me to avoid the traffic. To make matters worse, when he did finally realise that I couldn't reverse, his female passenger yelled abuse at me out of her window.

Even driving into Chesham from the back way was very congested, so I again had to drive at a snails pace. I drove into the car park with 3 minutes to spare; parked the car in record time and ran to the station. The rest you know.

After the train pulled out I asked the ticket clerk, who incidentally had been chatting on the 'phone when I wanted to buy my ticket, how to get to Chalfont from there. "By train." was his answer. I replied that I know that but I'd missed the train. "Oh, you'll need a car then." Gritting my teeth I said I had a car, it was directions I wanted. You can imagine that by now I was extremely frustrated to say the least. He started to give me directions one way, then changed his mind, then said that by the time I'd got there and parked I may as well have waited for the next shuttle. So that's what I had to do.

After I'd bought my ticket I left a message on our work ansafone for Barbi when she got in to 'phone Beverly on her mobile and let her know what had happened. We're now almost at Chalfont, so I'll put this away for now and I'll write again later.

I'm on the Metropolitan Line train to Gt. Portland Street now and I've remembered a couple of things I haven't told you about. Firstly, I'd been using a mug for my coffee at work after being told by a guy I'd interviewed on Tuesday that it was OK to do so. He even showed me how to remove the stand from the coffee/tea machine so that a mug would fit under the spout. The cups that fit the machine are quite small. As the coffee was a bit strong for me anyway, and there's also a very efficient kettle in the kitchen, I've been boiling some water up and topping the coffee up to fill a mug, making the strength perfect and giving me more to drink.

As you probably know I can't get away with anything, even when I don't know I'm not supposed to do whatever it is. For example: my getting caught both times I ever tried to bunk off school; my trouble shooting abilities with software packages; the recent trouble with the garage. Need I go on? Yesterday a manager came in whilst I was refilling my mug. "Who said you can use the mugs?" I gave him the name of the guy who told me I could. He explained that they belonged to another company and weren't ours to use, then he took a dirty one out of the dishwasher and went into the guy's office. He told everyone in there the same thing, then returned to the kitchen. I asked him if it was OK for me to bring my own mug in. So today my bag's a bit heavier, but at least I'll still be able to have coffee the way I like it.