

Hi

I bet you didn't expect to have the latest about Hannah's Day so soon after the event. Perhaps the little lady herself had something to do with it as circumstances dictated that I had the whole of the following day to do nothing other than eat my meals and other necessary tasks, but write - first on paper then later, directly onto the PC. So let's get going with what I wrote yesterday.

Before the event I knew I wanted to write to tell you about the day regardless of whether you joined us or not. I'm now in an excellent position to do nothing else, sadly for the wrong reasons, but I must make the most of every opportunity. The glitch putting me in this situation didn't happen till the very end so I'll write chronologically and you'll just have to wait till the very end to find out what went wrong.

For the first Hannah's Day we bought a gazebo and a net of lights which covered the inside roof making the whole thing into a magical space. I wanted to use it again this year, but our garden was in a state. Last year my husband Nigel could only manage damage limitation because both I and his mum Pauline were hospitalised.

My godson Stephen came to the rescue. Over the last few weeks he has done wonders. In case you don't know it, let me just describe our garden. Curved steps lead up from our patio to the main garden area which are flanked on either side by retaining walls. To the left of the top step is a circular area with small aromatic bushes around the edges: lavender, rosemary, miniature olive trees, etc. which Nigel and I planted the year before last. After Stephen cleared the interior of this area, I trimmed back the dead stems from the bushes. At the local market we found some patio pots, planted with assorted flowers - like those in hanging baskets. Having been told they'd been planted up in slow release fertiliser the day we bought them, we decided to just sink the pots into the ground. The area is now covered with small flowers, both blue and white, which spread out from under the leaves of the huge begonias (some yellow some scarlet) and really unusual and strikingly pretty, pink and white geraniums. With the pots in place and some broken paving slabs as stepping stones all the bare earth is covered.

Between the fence and the retaining wall on the right of the curving steps is a narrow strip of land. Originally unkept, unruly and covered in rubbish, this is now covered in freshly laid gravel. A few pot plants near the fence break up the plain expanse of brown wood. Sitting on the small bench placed at the house end, is now a pleasure.

By the last day of July Stephen had the gazebo up, positioned over the circle of slate chippings with which he'd surrounded our future circular lawn area at the far end of the garden. In the planter against the right hand fence assorted potted plants have been arranged, to be properly planted out at a later date.

Once invitation and information cards, on paper, electronically and for texting on mobile 'phones were prepared and sent out, food supplies were ordered on-line to be delivered the morning before the big event on the 2<sup>nd</sup> August.

I'd been looking forward to the preparation of food as I thought I'd have company all day. Not only had Stephen (who's a chef) promised to help me all day with preparing the food, but I had other volunteers to help too: my younger daughter Barbi and three friends, little Julie, big Julie and Don. Little Julie had an appointment in the early afternoon but had promised to get over as soon as she could. Big Julie and her sister Don were coming to do their regular Friday morning cleaning. I'd hoped this would include getting the living room ready for the party after Nigel had moved his stuff out and into his studio the day before. But he hadn't got much done because his back was hurting and the weather was too hot. (We've had a lot of really hot, humid days and Nigel's been seeing a chiropractor because his back's been really bad.)

Friday the 1<sup>st</sup> August was a lot cooler than the day before. Although a sunny day had been forecast, there were several showers. More were promised for H-Day the next day but I still had high hopes for good weather for the party.

I didn't realise Barbi trying to pick Stephen up on her way here was the start of Problems - note the capital P. She couldn't get an answer from his mobile to arrange that lift. On 'phoning me we found out she'd been trying a wrong number. Because nothing had been cleared from the living room when they got here, that, together with a few other bits that Stephen needed to do in the garden, was our first priority. Then big Julie and Don arrived to clean and it looked like 'all systems go.' Famous last words those, aren't they?

The first clue that something else was going wrong was a 'phone call from Barbi's friend, Sarah. Barbi and I both have Labradors, litter sisters who are nearly two years old. My black one is Pinto (so named because she had pink nail polish on her toenails to identify her from another of her litter sisters who was also black.) Barbi's chocolate Lab is called Minstrel for obvious reasons. Minstrel hates being on her own, so although Sarah knew she'd have to go out later that day, she was looking after Minstrel to minimise her time on her own. Thanks to treats of a dog food with which she's not familiar, Pinto's chocolate sister had the squits. As Barbi and Sarah live in a block of flats so have to take the dog downstairs every time she needs to go to the loo, Barbi obviously had to get back before Sarah went out.

Then Stephen got a 'phone call from someone wanting him for paid work. As he's been unemployed for a while and his debts are mounting up, he's getting fed up with not having enough money to do and buy what he wants. Even though he didn't want to go back to cheffing, he's keen to take anything on offer. So he had to go to meet up with this guy but promised to come back in about an hour and a half. (Yeah, right!)

By the time Nigel got home for his lunch at nearly 1pm, the living room was clear of everything that shouldn't be in it for a party, but I was on my own. Sainsbury's had delivered the on-line shopped groceries that morning but other than putting the frozen sausage rolls in the freezer, saving space which would later be used for the bag of ice Barbi wanted to bring to the party, I hadn't even looked inside the bags. Consequently nothing had yet been done towards preparing the food for the next day.

Once lunch was over and Nigel had gone back to work, the 'phone ringing interrupted my sorting out the shopping. Stephen wanted to apologise for not getting back sooner as promised and asked how we were doing with the food. He seemed surprised when I said it hadn't even been started, then expressed guilt feelings as he'd assumed it would be finished and had made other arrangements for the afternoon. He did agree to organise cous cous salad which I'd hoped he would make. This must have soothed his conscience 'cos he didn't offer to rearrange his plans back again. At that point I wasn't too worried because little Julie had said she'd be round and unless something dreadful happened, I knew she wouldn't let me down.

I started boiling eggs and defrosting chicken pieces and getting them ready to go in the oven with whatever seasoning I'd planned.. (I'd bought a jar of honey, mustard sauce for half of them and intended to use Stephen's idea of garlic salt and fennel for the remainder.) When little Julie still hadn't arrived by 3pm I began to get a bit concerned. When the doorbell went I breathed a sigh of relief, except it was one of our neighbours Mary saying that she and her husband John would be joining us the next day but wouldn't be able to get to us till about 6pm.

Eventually about half an hour later little Julie turned up. Then we got going in earnest. Julie took eyes out of new potatoes and cut them. After they were boiled she added mayonnaise to make them into potato salad. Once the eggs had cooled after having their 5 minutes boil, she peeled and mashed them with mayonnaise whilst I finished peeling the others to put out in halves. With the chicken in the oven being checked every so often, we peeled (if necessary) or washed vegetables: carrots, red, green, orange and yellow peppers, spring onions, celery, cauliflower and broccoli, for crudités and lettuce for 'bedding' underneath the cooked chicken when we laid it out. Once the chicken was done, we cooked, then cut up, sausages both meaty and vegetarian. Gherkins, were cut up then returned to their jar, then finally, by the time Nigel was home, the only thing left to do was Fruity Feast - a citrus-free fruit salad - one of my specialities.

Little Julie had nothing to rush home for so she had supper with us, after which she and Nigel both helped with peeling fruit (if necessary) then cutting it all up prior to gently mixing it together. By the time we'd finished we'd combined (in no particular order) kiwi's, mango, pineapple, melon, apples, pears, plums, peaches, apricots and nectarines. We had strawberries too but didn't add them till the mixed fruit was in the bowl as otherwise they'd have got bruised and wouldn't taste so nice.

By 10.30pm we'd finished everything and sat down with ice lollies to watch Roxy marry Sean in EastEnders. When little Julie finally left she took the frozen sausage rolls home, leaving the space for Barbi's ice in the freezer. Nigel and I were both shattered when we got to bed an hour or so later.

On the morning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> August, Hannah's Day 2008, it rained ... and rained ... and rained. It was raining as I spoke to my friend Jenny (Stephen's mum) on the 'phone after my text plea to her the night before to borrow her folding chairs to go in the gazebo. She had a manic day planned as a family get-together had been organised at her sister's for the same day. They were going to that then were going to come back here later for our bash. Nigel went to pick the chairs up from Jenny before she left home, then left them in the car claiming his back hurt too much to carry them upstairs as it could be done later.

Rain still fell as I moved the dining room table round to its party-food position by the back window. Whilst I cleaned the table then spread a cloth on it, the windows streamed with rainwater, which still carried on falling whilst I cleared the kitchen work surfaces ready for drinks. By 12 o'clock, with visions of squishing or paddling instead of dancing, I 'phoned Pippa to say that it was probably a good idea to cancel the Biodanza element, which we'd tried so hard to get organised. (Biodanza is moving to music under the direction of a leader - in this case Pippa. There are no steps to learn and it's a magical experience.)

We needed music to dance to and I'd even managed to borrow a generator from Paul, an old friend of Nigel's. That had been another midweek nightmare. The Thursday before the party I'd borrowed Nigel's car to collect the generator, intending to pick it up then get to Nigel's work in time for him to come home and have his lunch before going back for the afternoon. Needless to say, the generator wasn't ready for me to collect it and by the time it was, Nigel had walked the mile or so from his work to Paul's place. He was fine about it till we got back home, then he made me feel dreadful (obviously not deliberately) by making a big deal about no time for lunch, not even for me to make him a sandwich. Then he accepted £10 from me so he could spend probably just as long, especially if there were queues of people filling up their cars, stopping to buy a ready-made sandwich from the garage on his way back to work.

Little Julie had said she'd be here with her granddaughters, at 11am on H-Day to help me put out the party food onto plates ready for our guests. When the doorbell went some time between 11.15 and 11.30am I thought it was them but I was disappointed. It was Jenny's husband Gerald and her younger daughter Penny bringing round a couple more garden stools and the bowl of cous cous salad Stephen had prepared. I had another false alarm when another friend, Mick, came round with a box of beers which he wanted to leave here for when he came back later.

When Julie still wasn't here by 12.30pm I SOS'd my granddaughter Katherine who lives with me and Nigel. She willingly came down to help me. I got out serving plates and bowls and she started arranging the prepared food which Julie and I had stashed in the fridge. A couple of hard boiled eggs and a few lettuce leaves had frozen to the back of the fridge, but the former would thaw out in time. We threw the latter into the compost bin as I had plenty more to use in its place. Little Julie and her granddaughters Laura, about 12 years old and younger sister Danielle, about 10 years old, finally arrived an hour or so later. They prepared labels for everything as Katherine and I got it all spread out or cut up and on plates or in dishes ready for people to help themselves. After a while Katherine took over with the children and Julie carried on with helping me. Finally, whilst Nigel went upstairs to have a shower, the little ones emptied packets of crisps and peanuts into bowls to be dotted around the room and in the gazebo.

And guess what? Just after 2.30pm it stopped raining and the sun came out. Big Julie had brought round Barbi's wallpaper pasting table the day before, so I took that up to the gazebo and put it up, covering it with a piece of green cloth I'd had in my Tarot/Astrology bag as an emergency tablecloth. Laura and Danielle helped me bring in the folding chairs from Nigel's car and we put them and the stools up in the gazebo too.

I was just arranging the chairs in the living room when our first guest, Isabel from the Biodanza class, arrived. Pippa came soon afterwards and little Julie made them all a cuppa. I was just about to finish off replacing the drapes in the gazebo which Stephen had looped over its roof support poles, (which had dropped off when they'd got heavy because they'd got so wet) when John and Mary from next door arrived, far earlier than the 6pm they'd said. Apparently Mary's sister was coming over later so she wanted to be back home for her. In my haste to get the drapes in place I put the one with the sun in the centre upside down. Of course I got embarrassed when that error got spotted by Nigel's sister Wendy when she arrived shortly afterwards with Nigel's other sister Clare and her daughter Elise and his mum Pauline. My ex husband Tony and his wife Ros, who got here at exactly the same time so witnessed my discomfort, thought it was really funny.

Just before they arrived I'd got everyone who was already here into the gazebo, including Pinto, as that was where I wanted to be to socialise, so I suggested opening the back gate so they could wheel Pauline's chair in that way. Not only would she be able to join in, but she'd also be able to see how lovely how garden looks. My elder daughter Mara and her husband James arrived soon after.

We uncovered the food so that everyone could help themselves, then as there were a few flies who seemed a bit too interested in it, someone thoughtfully laid a tablecloth over the entire thing. After a couple of hours all the afternoon guests except for Mara and James had left. I was thinking about getting changed but then another friend, Jim arrived. He too noticed my upside down sun on the drape when I showed off my gazebo - my outside pride and joy.

Barbi's other daughter Becki 'phoned to say she was waiting for a cab to bring her over so Mara offered to go and get her. As she was about to leave the house, Barbi arrived with her husband Richie, big Julie and Don. Barbi had forgotten the cheese and pineapple hedgehog in red cabbage but big Julie brought some yummy jacket potatoes with fillings and Don brought a plate of sandwiches. I didn't realise that Becki was at Barbi's and had directed Mara to Sainsbury's where she works. Fortunately mobile 'phones saved the day and Mara found Becki and Don's daughter Carmen (who everyone calls Bund because she looked like a little bundle when she was born.) But Becki too forgot to bring the cheese and pineapple hedgehog. (I wonder if this is going to be part of the H-Day tradition - it got forgotten last year too.)

Anyway, Mick (the friend with the beers) came back, Stephen arrived back from Jenny's sister's, Jenny's daughter Jane came round, stayed for 5 minutes then left again and we didn't see her for the rest of the evening. (Apparently she'd had a row with her ex-husband, with whom she only got back together a couple of months ago, and they'd split up again.) One of Katherine's friends came round bringing a bottle of Cava which she tried to share with everyone. Two more of our friends Simon and Andy, arrived later, then Jenny and Gerald got here, followed by another friend, Vivien shortly afterwards. The latter is scared of dogs because she got bitten by one as a child. Pinto must've sensed it because she growled or barked every time Vivien moved around. Pinto only ever barks when she's frightened so it could have been the floaty dress Vivien was wearing which scared her, but I think it was probably that she picked up on Vivien's fear.

Towards the end of the evening, or rather, into the early hours of the morning, Mara together with husband and friends, had already left. My daughters were the only ones I went outside to wave off, but as often happens, waving to Mara was intuitive. When Barbi was about to leave, she and I were sitting in the gazebo. I was eating my Fruity Feast, which by this time I'd got out of the fridge and together with Greek yogurt had offered to everyone who was still there. As Barbi walked down the steps towards the house, I sensed she was thinking "Mum went to the door with Mara when she left." As I got up and followed her I watched her relax and smile again when she realised that I was doing the same for her. So although the intuitive hasn't changed, the thinking time is lessening and the actions are becoming much more like the intuitive ones.

Back to what happened after the party yesterday. I've 'phoned both my daughters as well as Pauline and Jenny to tell them, so now I'd better write it down for posterity.

As I was preparing the food before anyone came, I asked Nigel if I should remove the tomatoes from the vine. He replied no-one would be likely to take a whole string of them so it would be good to show guests what they were being offered. Jenny, Gerald and Vivien were the last to leave. After they'd gone I went up the garden to see what needed to be brought back from the gazebo. Whilst we were socialising, Jenny had asked (or in her Leonine way, nicely demanded) food be brought out to her. Vivien had

obliged by bringing out a plate of food which by the end of the party had hardly been touched. Lying on the top of it was one of the strings of tomatoes, minus a few fruits which had been taken off by other guests. Wanting to put the food away, I picked up the bowl together with other things I wanted to bring back indoors and made my way back down the steps.

Those steps were designed for my mother (the Hannah of Hannah's Day) when walking was difficult. She'd never managed to use them, but they'd been specially made to be wide and deep in size but shallow in height so that it would be easier for her to go up and down. But for everyone else, used to normal stairs, they're difficult to negotiate. Concentrating as I was on the two bowls I was holding, I didn't realise I had another step to go before I reached the patio. Twisting my ankle on the bottom step I fell awkwardly onto the crazy paving. The plates of food crashed down around me and I was left on my back in absolute agony. I really thought I'd broken my ankle to the extent of saying to Nigel that I thought he might have to 'phone Jenny to ask Gerald (who doesn't drink alcohol) to come back and take me to the hospital.

Being concerned that I cut my hands on broken pieces of china if I leaned on them to try to get up, Nigel was frantically sweeping the bits of food and china into a heap out of the way in a corner. I just wanted to get off my back which I couldn't do without help so kept asking Nigel to help me. Eventually he put the broom down and helped me sit up, after which I was able to pull myself up by holding on to the gate and gatepost. But my ankle was still too painful to do anything other than hobble indoors.

The party food was still on the table waiting to be packed up to go in the fridge, so I asked Nigel to pass me the rolls of plastic bags so whilst I was doing that, he could get me the Arnica and a crepe bandage. Even then the pain was incredible and Nigel insisted I go upstairs so I could keep my leg up. The only way I could negotiate the stairs was on my bottom. Even then, when I got to the top I couldn't stand up and had to bang on Katherine's door with my walking stick, which Nigel had retrieved for me from the front hall. (I t's been living there for the last few months since I stopped needing it to go everywhere.) Katherine helped me up and onto my bed, finding me some I buprofen when I asked her to.

Today Katherine and Nigel have both been great, helping me as and when I've needed it. She's out now having arranged to meet up with a friend so Nigel's been doing virtually everything for me since she went out. It makes me feel guilty to keep asking him, but as he said, I didn't do it on purpose. But as with most ill winds, it has meant that I've been able to not only write but also type in the last seven and a bit pages. Now all this entry needs is to be manipulated to make it into the letter I've been promising myself I will write to send to everyone I invited to this extraordinary event.

But any more writing will have to wait till tomorrow. Now I'm falling asleep so will have to stop. I'll leave the rest till tomorrow.

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