

Introduction

Unlike previous years, I've tried really hard this year to get the write up of Hannah's Day to you fairly soon after the event. This was made more difficult by the fact that a couple of weeks after Hannah's Day I was booked to go on a Spiritual Development holiday course in Italy. But I'm not writing to tell you about that. I want to let you know what happened here on the 7th July, our 8th Hannah's Day.

In spite of rain turning on and off like a tap, the last guests left after 4am. I distinctly remember getting to bed was just past 5am 'cos when I was sitting on the loo prior to getting into bed, Nigel said it was SOO. "Pardon" I replied. He then translated that as 5 am and I realised he'd been reading as letters the numbers 5.00 on our digital clocks.

One of the high spots of Hannah's Day for me is having our gazebo up in the garden. We've got a circular lawn which was designed to be exactly the right circumference as the gazebo, which once up, usually keeps the grass underneath dry so that we can walk around inside with bare feet. I leave the gazebo up afterwards for as long as possible as it really feels a special place - our own canvas paradise. I'd wanted to put it up the day before the party, on the Friday, but as Nigel and I were going out into the garden the rain started. It seemed silly to get wet just for the sake of it when it might be dry the next day, so we left it.

Preparation

It was bright and sunny on Saturday morning so Nigel and I decided to put the gazebo up after we'd had breakfast and walked Pinto (our black Labrador.) We got as far as getting the first half of the metal supports in place when it started to rain. The weather has been really unpredictable lately, so we came back indoors to wait for it to clear up. Sure enough, the rain stopped a while later so we took out rags and towels to dry the structure we'd erected so far, then managed to get the canopy and the rest of the supports in place. It stayed dry whilst we fastened the guy ropes, but once again, the clouds thickened and it started to rain.

That was the pattern on and off for the entire day but fortunately none of the showers were too heavy. In between waiting for the rain to stop and organising the gazebo, Nigel and I cleared away the remaining things that weren't going to stay in the living and dining rooms and the hallway, like Pinto's toys and large plants which took up loads of room. Outside we did manage to put up drapes against two of the 6 panels of the gazebo which give it a really cosy feel under the canvas. A wallpaper pasting table covered with a cloth was erected beside our garden bench both of which were against the draped panels. A couple of small tables were put in the centre of the gazebo, whilst folding garden chairs were set around the remaining panels.

Back indoors we started to get the food under way. As you probably gathered, we weren't ready for the allotted party start time but no-one had arrived by then anyway.

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Nigel went out to buy himself some beer whilst I frantically tried to get the last of the tidying done and the food prepared.

An added complication over the last few days had been my trying to get back two of June O'Neil's drums which had been borrowed at the last drumming session we'd had at Hannah's Day 2010. June, the lady who runs the sessions, had kindly agreed to run another drumming session for us this year, so I wanted to have them here to give back to her.

After a lot of difficulty I finally managed to contact the women who'd borrowed them and had great difficulty getting them back. Of course they were returned separately, both at the last possible moment, Saturday whilst I was trying to get everything ready for the party, so talking to them in turn took up loads of time which I really shouldn't have spared.

When Nigel finally came home, he went upstairs to have a bath and get himself ready. I'd had my bath first thing in the morning, so whilst Nigel was upstairs, I decided to do the Hoovering as once guests arrived it would be more intrusive to be vacuuming than preparing food. Nigel came back down as I was moving the Dycan out of the living room and said he'd finish off the food and tidying the kitchen whilst I got myself ready.

The Party

I was just putting the finishing touches to my hair when I heard the doorbell followed by voices so knew that the first of our guests had arrived. I came downstairs to greet Diane (who was one of my fellow students at my first ever Astrology class about 30 years ago) and her new boyfriend Paul, who I'd never met before.

Sadly, Nigel hadn't finished the rest of the preparation so I had to apologise whilst carrying on with it. My daughter Barbi and her husband Richie arrived as the food was mostly done. Our dining room table had been expanded to make extra room on it and I hoped the glimpses of white tablecloth through the dishes we'd prepared would be enough space for the food contributions guests were bringing.

Shortly afterwards June turned up at the same time as Karen and Tim, who usually look after Pinto when we go on holiday. Realising who June was, their two foster children, Chelsea and Nathan, helped June bring in all her bags of drums, then made themselves useful by putting bowls of peanuts and crisps on the small tables we'd put close to the chairs around the living room. Finally all was ready.

After introductions all round and the first contributions of food from guests was put onto the dining room table we all went into the garden and up to the gazebo. Nigel and I have several drums or shakers suitable for the drumming session, so we took these out with us to add to those June had brought with her.

Nigel, Barbi and Richie didn't want to join in with the drumming, so the rest of us chose where we wanted to sit in the gazebo and which instruments we wanted to play. We were just about to start when another friend, Marian, arrived with her boyfriend. I didn't really give them much chance to object when I pointed out the remaining two empty seats in the gazebo. Bemused, they sat down and joined in, saying afterwards that although it was unexpected, they thoroughly enjoyed it.

The actual session, which lasted about an hour and a half, isn't something that can easily be described. June started regular beats on her drum and told us to follow her, then she added chants for us to join in with. Not only did everyone who took part agree that it had been brilliant, but Barbi, (she and Richie had to leave before the session ended) texted me later to say she thoroughly enjoyed listening to the drumming and chanting. Although she said she didn't think she would have felt comfortable joining in, it made her feel very calm and relaxed which is how the rest of us all felt too.

Afterwards, as we packed the drums away, I asked everyone who'd joined in if they could afford to put a small financial donation in a glass so that we could give it to June for her trouble. We didn't collect a fortune, but it shows June that we don't just take her for granted. Several of the men then helped June get her drums back down to her car.

By the time we'd finished and come back into the house, several more friends had arrived. The rest of the day was just as wonderful. We had lovely food, a great selection as always, and good conversation. Nigel had prepared a play list of music so that was on in the background. He's also got a program which displays on our TV screen ever changing patterns which move in time to the music.

A lot of our friends had said they couldn't come to the party as they were either on holiday or had already made other arrangements. This meant that there were never too many people here at one time. But throughout the day, as fast as guests went home, so more arrived to take their places. So rather than having to buzz around playing host and hostess, Nigel and I had a wonderful opportunity to actually talk to people and find out what they'd been doing since the last time we'd seen them.

I wish I could remember more about who was here and what we spoke about, but that's one of the problems with my not being able to write it down straight away. I have the most dreadful memory (which I claim as a bonus when doing Tarot readings for several people as my mind isn't cluttered by those I've done whilst I'm doing a spread for someone else) so for the life of me I can't tell you everyone who came, nor what their news was, no matter how interesting it may have been.

When I used to sell Avon products, several of my customers became good friends. One of these is Rosie, who with her husband Richard, I know joined us on Hannah's Day

because their food contribution was so different. It was a pasta salad - nothing unusual sounding about that. However, in this one the pasta looked more like rice and mixed with it were these tiny, weeny little black olives. Now I never used to like olives but a few weeks before I'd been to someone's house where I'd tried and liked one or two of the olives they'd offered in their buffet. So I tried these in Rosie's pasta salad and thoroughly enjoyed them. Happily for me, there was still some of this left over after the party, so Nigel and I finished it off the next day. (By the way, Rosie and Richard make and sell crafts and some of their items are as singular as their food. For example, Richard makes reading lamps from things like cups and saucers, heaps of books.)

I particularly remember my friend Jenny and her husband Gerald arriving fairly late in the evening as they'd been invited to a wedding on the same day, but Jenny had promised me she would also come to Hannah's Day. Earlier in the day Nigel had set up lights on the tables in the gazebo so we all, plus a few other late arrivals, took our drinks and some food out into the garden and sat in our special place until the early hours of the morning.

When all the guests finally decided to go home Nigel and I packed away the remaining food, leaving the rest of the mess to be cleared up the next morning. Taking Pinto our for her last walk I remarked to Nigel how light the sky still was. He doubled up laughing, pointing out to me that it was light because it was morning. We got to bed tired but happy.

Epilogue

The gazebo stayed up much longer than usual this year as it has to be dry before it gets packed away. We had so much rain that we didn't get enough sunshine to dry it out until after I got back from Italy at the end of July. Sadly, the rain soaked through in several places, so the grass underneath didn't stay as dry as usual, so shoes were often needed. Puddles formed in the canvas top several times and we had to empty them by pushing long handles underneath, thereby drowning the plants growing in the soil on the other side of the circular path round the lawn. The rain also worked its way through the mesh of the side panels so we had to move the folding chairs away from the sides into the centre.

But in spite of that, I don't know what Nigel did whilst I was in Italy, but when I was here we still managed to eat most of our meals for the month of July in our own little canvas paradise. The gazebo is now safely packed up and stowed away in the garage, waiting for the 9th Hannah's Day next year.