

Yvonne – my Rubenesque friend



'Why do you want to come and visit a couple of old fogies like us?' I asked Yvonne. Mike and I were more than twice her age.

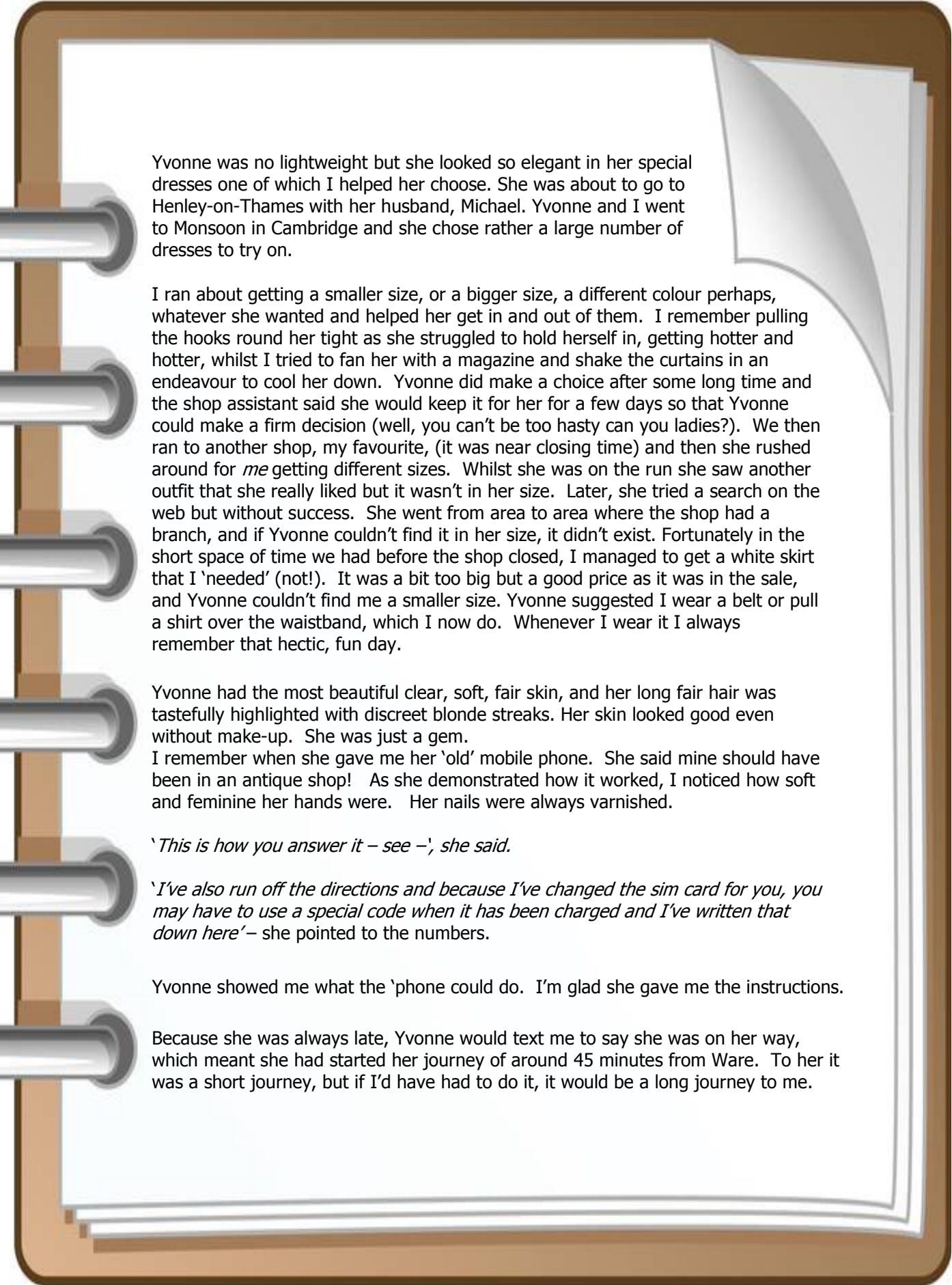
'Because I just love coming to see you guys' she would reply, smiling.

We just loved it when she came. Yvonne was noisy, chatty, full of fun, intelligent, kind, helpful, and when you opened the front door and she burst in it would be like a ray of sunshine coming into the house. She would always raise our spirits.

The 'Rubenesque' bit made Yvonne and me really laugh. Apparently this was a description given to her by a friend; whether it was a family friend or not I can't recall. I knew that I would find a painting of such ladies in my comprehensive home reference library, which I had bought for my children many years ago. We found pictures of ladies lying outstretched on sofas dressed in posh hats and long dresses doing nothing. We fell about with laughter looking at them but in the real sense I could understand the comparison. The correct definition I found later read:

'... she is the Rubenesque pear-shaped woman of ample bust, plump cheeks, soft full lips and a healthy profile of alluring curves and crevasses'.

Quite a compliment I think and very apt, although I really didn't know too much about the crevasses!



Yvonne was no lightweight but she looked so elegant in her special dresses one of which I helped her choose. She was about to go to Henley-on-Thames with her husband, Michael. Yvonne and I went to Monsoon in Cambridge and she chose rather a large number of dresses to try on.

I ran about getting a smaller size, or a bigger size, a different colour perhaps, whatever she wanted and helped her get in and out of them. I remember pulling the hooks round her tight as she struggled to hold herself in, getting hotter and hotter, whilst I tried to fan her with a magazine and shake the curtains in an endeavour to cool her down. Yvonne did make a choice after some long time and the shop assistant said she would keep it for her for a few days so that Yvonne could make a firm decision (well, you can't be too hasty can you ladies?). We then ran to another shop, my favourite, (it was near closing time) and then she rushed around for *me* getting different sizes. Whilst she was on the run she saw another outfit that she really liked but it wasn't in her size. Later, she tried a search on the web but without success. She went from area to area where the shop had a branch, and if Yvonne couldn't find it in her size, it didn't exist. Fortunately in the short space of time we had before the shop closed, I managed to get a white skirt that I 'needed' (not!). It was a bit too big but a good price as it was in the sale, and Yvonne couldn't find me a smaller size. Yvonne suggested I wear a belt or pull a shirt over the waistband, which I now do. Whenever I wear it I always remember that hectic, fun day.

Yvonne had the most beautiful clear, soft, fair skin, and her long fair hair was tastefully highlighted with discreet blonde streaks. Her skin looked good even without make-up. She was just a gem. I remember when she gave me her 'old' mobile phone. She said mine should have been in an antique shop! As she demonstrated how it worked, I noticed how soft and feminine her hands were. Her nails were always varnished.

'This is how you answer it – see –', she said.

'I've also run off the directions and because I've changed the sim card for you, you may have to use a special code when it has been charged and I've written that down here' – she pointed to the numbers.

Yvonne showed me what the 'phone could do. I'm glad she gave me the instructions.

Because she was always late, Yvonne would text me to say she was on her way, which meant she had started her journey of around 45 minutes from Ware. To her it was a short journey, but if I'd have had to do it, it would be a long journey to me.

'She's just left' I would call out to Mike.

'OK I'll start the dinner now' he would reply.

Yvonne just relished Mike's cooking. He served up lamb quite a lot because that was one of her favourite meals. She had it roasted, grilled, casseroled but her favourite was grilled with tarragon sauce.

Her eyes would light up as Mike placed the plate in front of her. She loved crumble too – apple, blackcurrant, raspberries, (which Alan next door gave us from his garden), topped with a creamy Irish vanilla ice cream. Yvonne also enjoyed a nice cheeseboard and when we all sat down to feed ourselves, the talking started and didn't end for hours. In fact one evening we talked until 3 o'clock in the morning and Yvonne would have stayed the rest of the night if only she had brought her tablets with her.

'She's here Mike' I would shout out and he would say *'I know I heard her car'*.

Yvonne could talk about dry lining, cars (especially yellow Beetles), Arsenal – its games, its players, its stadium - chocolate, houses, furniture, tiling and grouting, give financial advice (she was an accountant), computers (she was a wizard on mine and I marvelled at her knowledge), Ireland, clothes, hair and make-up, travel, children, films, music and that was just the tip of the iceberg. If I wanted to know anything about anything, she was my girl.

The only thing I had over her was the names of plants. I took her out into the garden and pointed out my Fatsia Japonica. Yvonne gave me a rather old fashioned look and I knew I had got her. She was even quiet for a few seconds! Not to be outdone, she started reeling off long names about extinct dinosaurs!

'But that's not a plant!' I would say.

Now I will tell you how I first met Yvonne.

I had retired a couple of times after working for many years in an insurance company which was within walking distance of my house but I couldn't hack it at home all the time. I'd caught up with all the usual outstanding jobs that build up – cleaning, tidying the cupboards, sorting out clothes, gardening and washing the curtains. One day, fortunately for me, I bumped into a company director I knew quite well. She lived very near me.

'Why don't you come back as a temp and get from under Mike's feet' she said.

I was so grateful she said that and didn't need her to say it twice, and so back I went.

'I'll have her' said Nicola, the Manager of the Finance Department.

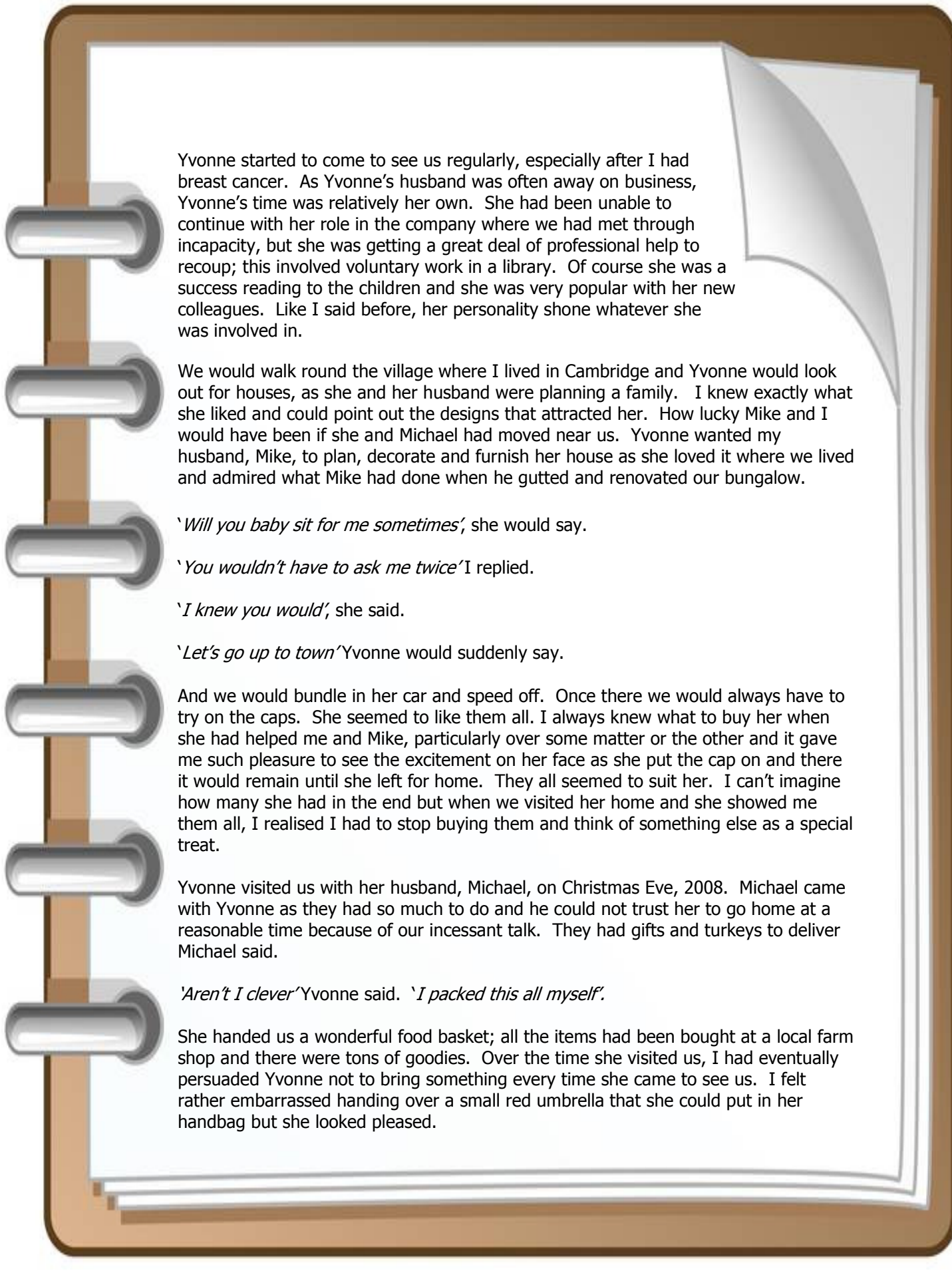
I didn't let on - because I wanted the job - that I couldn't add up for toffees. In fact I had a fear of figures, and still have. I expect Nicola soon sussed me out though. On the other hand, I had always managed Mike and my finances and investments, and although I probably could have done better, my system worked well enough and still does. Fortunately Nicola put me under the guidance of a young lady called Yvonne, and that is how we met.

She drove a yellow Beetle, which suited her outgoing personality. I remember looking out of the window towards the car park from my office on the fourth floor and could always pick Yvonne's car out. I used to think 'thank goodness for that' when I saw it, because I knew I would be done for if Yvonne didn't arrive. I seemed to be in the office before her on most mornings and when she did arrive I knew my day would be a good one.

I had said to another of my young colleagues, Kerry, that I was going to work with a girl called Yvonne and she said *'you'll really like her'* and despite the fact I could have been Yvonne's mother, I really, really, did like her instantly. You may think from the age point of view that it was rather an unusual association but I just loved her. From the outset she did everything to help me, both personally and on the work front. I can't remember how long it took me to learn the system I had to work on, but with Yvonne there, patient as usual, that was all I needed. In the end I did cotton on but it took a while!

By the time Mike and I moved to Cambridge I was in another department and as it was to do with the mis-selling of pensions and I had to talk to clients, I think I made a fairly good job of it. I enjoyed the contact with the policyholders, well most of them that is!

As I'd worked with my special colleagues in the company for many years I endeavoured to travel from Cambridge to Potters Bar so that I could continue but sometimes it took me three hours to get there. You can imagine what a state I got into, and I was working flexi time! The extra carriages being attached to the train at Royston nearly always delayed it, making me late for the change and connection at Welwyn Garden City. Ironically, if I had travelled out of working hours, I would have been able to have got on a train at Foxton which went directly to Potters Bar. Mike had to drive me every day to Foxton from home and meet me again in the evening which took about twenty minutes. In addition, from Potters Bar Station I had to get the company bus to work to complete the journey, so that was four changes of transport altogether. Also, on the way back, I would have to wait at Hitchin for the connection to Foxton, although I was not so panicky going home as I was starting out. Obviously it soon became all too much for me.



Yvonne started to come to see us regularly, especially after I had breast cancer. As Yvonne's husband was often away on business, Yvonne's time was relatively her own. She had been unable to continue with her role in the company where we had met through incapacity, but she was getting a great deal of professional help to recoup; this involved voluntary work in a library. Of course she was a success reading to the children and she was very popular with her new colleagues. Like I said before, her personality shone whatever she was involved in.

We would walk round the village where I lived in Cambridge and Yvonne would look out for houses, as she and her husband were planning a family. I knew exactly what she liked and could point out the designs that attracted her. How lucky Mike and I would have been if she and Michael had moved near us. Yvonne wanted my husband, Mike, to plan, decorate and furnish her house as she loved it where we lived and admired what Mike had done when he gutted and renovated our bungalow.

'Will you baby sit for me sometimes', she would say.

'You wouldn't have to ask me twice' I replied.

'I knew you would', she said.

'Let's go up to town' Yvonne would suddenly say.

And we would bundle in her car and speed off. Once there we would always have to try on the caps. She seemed to like them all. I always knew what to buy her when she had helped me and Mike, particularly over some matter or the other and it gave me such pleasure to see the excitement on her face as she put the cap on and there it would remain until she left for home. They all seemed to suit her. I can't imagine how many she had in the end but when we visited her home and she showed me them all, I realised I had to stop buying them and think of something else as a special treat.

Yvonne visited us with her husband, Michael, on Christmas Eve, 2008. Michael came with Yvonne as they had so much to do and he could not trust her to go home at a reasonable time because of our incessant talk. They had gifts and turkeys to deliver Michael said.

'Aren't I clever' Yvonne said. *'I packed this all myself'.*

She handed us a wonderful food basket; all the items had been bought at a local farm shop and there were tons of goodies. Over the time she visited us, I had eventually persuaded Yvonne not to bring something every time she came to see us. I felt rather embarrassed handing over a small red umbrella that she could put in her handbag but she looked pleased.

'We have everything we need, so please save your money for yourself' we would say.

Eventually she did accept this but it was hard for her to adapt because she was so big-hearted and kind. Consequently, on birthdays and at Christmas she would treat us so generously which we were not used to. When I saw her on the last birthday when she came I opened the door to see her smiling face; she had a huge bunch of flowers and gifts. Yvonne came in all excited as it was my special day, or was it? She looked around for my cards which would have been displayed on our unit but there were none.

'Where's your cards?' she said.

'I hate to say this Yvonne but my birthday is later on in the month, but it's so nice to have an early birthday'

I joked, trying to soften the blow.

'Oh my God I have got dates muddled up and I expect I have forgotten someone else's birthday', she said.

That was just like her, thinking of other people all the time.

When she and Michael came on Christmas Eve I had to say to Yvonne *'Keep away from me. I have a very nasty throat and chest infection'*.

Later, over Christmas I had to take two lots of penicillin to help stop the cough and to fight urticaria which I always got as my body would react to a severe cough or sore throat (urticaria causes a nasty red, itchy wheel-like rash). I felt just awful and thought it would lead to bronchitis.

'Don't worry', she said, *'I've got it too'*.

Michael and Yvonne left to deliver the rest of their gifts; they were such a generous couple, soul mates for years, Yvonne's mum had said to me.

On 12 January I had a nasty back operation. Yvonne came to visit me in hospital with a gorgeous bunch of grapes and a silly book about a lady who was an awful housekeeper. Yvonne knew that Mike did all the housework and cooking.

'I suppose you think that's funny' I said laughing at the title.

I read the book later at home when I was recouping and thought I would give it back to Yvonne to read as it was quite amusing but it also had a message about happiness being important before work. Unfortunately, I was never able to talk to her about the book.

When I was due to come out of hospital I told Yvonne that I thought it would be difficult for me to sit in our Mini and I would be getting hospital transport home.

'No you're not' she said, *'I'm collecting you in Michael's car. I can warm the seat up for you and adjust the back, so you will be comfortable'.*

That was Yvonne all over – thinking of others. I remember clearly her telling me just prior to me going into hospital to make sure the nurses washed their hands before administering injections.

'It's really a matter of life and death you know' she had said.

On the day she collected me I 'phoned her when I thought she would arrive at the hospital. I never knew the exact time she would come and just rested on the bed with my belongings at the ready.

'Can you please collect a wheelchair from downstairs as you come into the main entrance', I asked.

'You've just phoned at the right time', she said. *'I'm just walking towards the hospital'.* *'I'm so sorry I'm late but I got held up'*, she said.

All of a sudden she appeared with the wheelchair. I thought this girl is capable of doing anything and everything. We had such a laugh as she wheeled me out past the patients and into the corridor.

'Good job my arms are inside this chair', I said, as we missed the swing doors by an inch.

Yvonne said:

'I'll be all right with a bit of practice' and we got awful giggles as she turned quickly into the lift. I held on tight in case I would be shunted out.

When we got down to the main entrance we had to tackle the revolving doors, or revolting doors, as my children used to say.

Yvonne was very nifty with this manoeuvre and I couldn't believe that she had parked her car right outside. I was thinking we would have to go into the car park.

'How were you able to park here?' I asked her.

'I phoned the hospital and told them my friend couldn't walk and they said I could park here for a maximum of half an hour.'

I didn't know this was possible but Yvonne, a newcomer to the hospital, found out.

Yvonne had heated the seat and helped me in the car. She took my case off the wheelchair that was hanging on the back and a young man passing said:

'Don't forget that blue plastic bag.'

I don't know why I remembered that but I can see Yvonne now taking the bag and putting it in her boot, and thanking the young man all at the same time.

Because we had just left the hospital Yvonne produced a small bottle of bacterial hand wash and we used it in the car.

'It's just a precaution', she said.

Yvonne was such a capable person and I noted in my diary that she had collected me with the words *'What a girl she is'*.

Because of my having screws and a rod inserted in my back Yvonne did her very best to avoid all the potholes, especially those near the kerb. We chatted and laughed all the way home and I can picture the scene as though it were yesterday. Yvonne stayed for dinner that Mike had prepared and soon we said 'goodbye' as she had to make her way home back to Ware.

Towards the end of January, and I cannot remember the exact date, I had a text from Yvonne saying that she was going to Florence for the weekend with Michael. She had forgotten so was rushing about preparing and packing. Apparently it was very cold and wet there. Yvonne didn't seem to feel the cold very much. I often asked her where her coat was as even on a cold day she would wear short sleeves and never seemed wrapped up like me. It seemed after the visit to Florence that she became unwell.

I sent a text to Yvonne saying that I was moving about a little easier after my back operation and doing my exercises. I said that we should do as we are told and for her to look after herself following her chest and throat infection. She replied saying she had the nasty anora virus (which I was unable to trace and which she queried the spelling of) and said that there was nothing more the doctor could do unless she stays in and rests and that it could take weeks. Apparently, she went on to say, you start to feel better and so go back to normal and then it takes you out again. She said she was sorry but it looked like we will both be invalids for a while but hopefully she would see me soon.

That was the last text I received from her. I still have it saved on the mobile 'phone she gave to me with the smiley face on the front.

On 3 February Michael phoned us to say that Yvonne had been admitted into intensive care in hospital. Her lungs couldn't cope without oxygen but with treatment it was hoped they would repair.

Yvonne was in intensive care for seven weeks. Mike and I went to visit her on 16 March and I am so pleased we did. I held her hand and spoke to her. I wanted to tell her so much. I stroked her arm which I felt was rather cold and asked the nurse if she was warm enough. I remember her fingers were so relaxed they just fell back into position without any strength or reaction. I didn't like that. All the machines were in operation and so that her lungs were not overworked a machine called an oscillating ventilator vibrated all the time.

Apparently there are only a few of these machines in the country and Yvonne was very lucky to be provided with one. She was heavily sedated to enable her to gain strength and repair. Her infection had cleared and everyone had great faith in her getting better, including the doctors who cared for her. Nurses were with her 24 hours a day. The care she had was phenomenal.

On Sunday night 22nd March, I went to bed as usual and at just after 10.21pm my mobile rang. I didn't need to look at the text to see what it said, I just knew; I had that horrible gut feeling. It was from Michael saying Yvonne's life support had been turned off. I got out of bed pulled on my dressing gown and went in to the lounge to see Mike who was watching football. He looked up but didn't say anything.

Mike she's gone', I said, 'we've lost her'.

Mike switched the TV off and we just hugged each other and cried.

Shortly after, and I can't remember the date, we had notification of Yvonne's funeral. I couldn't take this in and I know that nobody else could either. It was printed in yellow and the envelope was yellow too – Yvonne's favourite colour.

Yvonne's funeral took place on 15 April 2009 at 12.30. It was at Stevenage. Following the service there was a Celebration of Yvonne's Life in Ware. So many people had gathered together completely stunned that this service was going to take place. We were all given an Order of Service programme. A photograph of Yvonne when she was bridesmaid to her sister, Maria, was on the front.

Now you can see for yourself how beautiful she really was. The mourners gathered, and waited, and waited. 12.30 had come and gone. Nicola said *'she's late'*. At 12.45 Yvonne's coffin arrived cared for by her wonderful close family. Maria, Yvonne's sister, commented on the lateness in her Tribute.

As was her custom in life, Yvonne Michelle Cockerton was late for her own funeral.

The service was the most moving I had ever attended, with the exception of my own young daughter, Nicola, whose service took place in 1984. Yvonne's mum had chosen the one hymn, *'Morning has Broken'*, and there were Tributes from close friends and family. Yvonne's friend Katrina, who she met at University, sung *'May it be'* and Maria read her contribution - *'Memories of my extraordinary sister'*. In Michael's Tribute he told the congregation how they had met and progressed through their lives together. Some of the details I had known because Yvonne had described to me how they had met (working in Tesco's as students), earning their degrees, buying their first house, and going from strength to strength. Songs - *'Rule the World'* and *'Shine'* were played by Take That, and James Blunt's recording of *'Goodbye my Lover'* was also played.

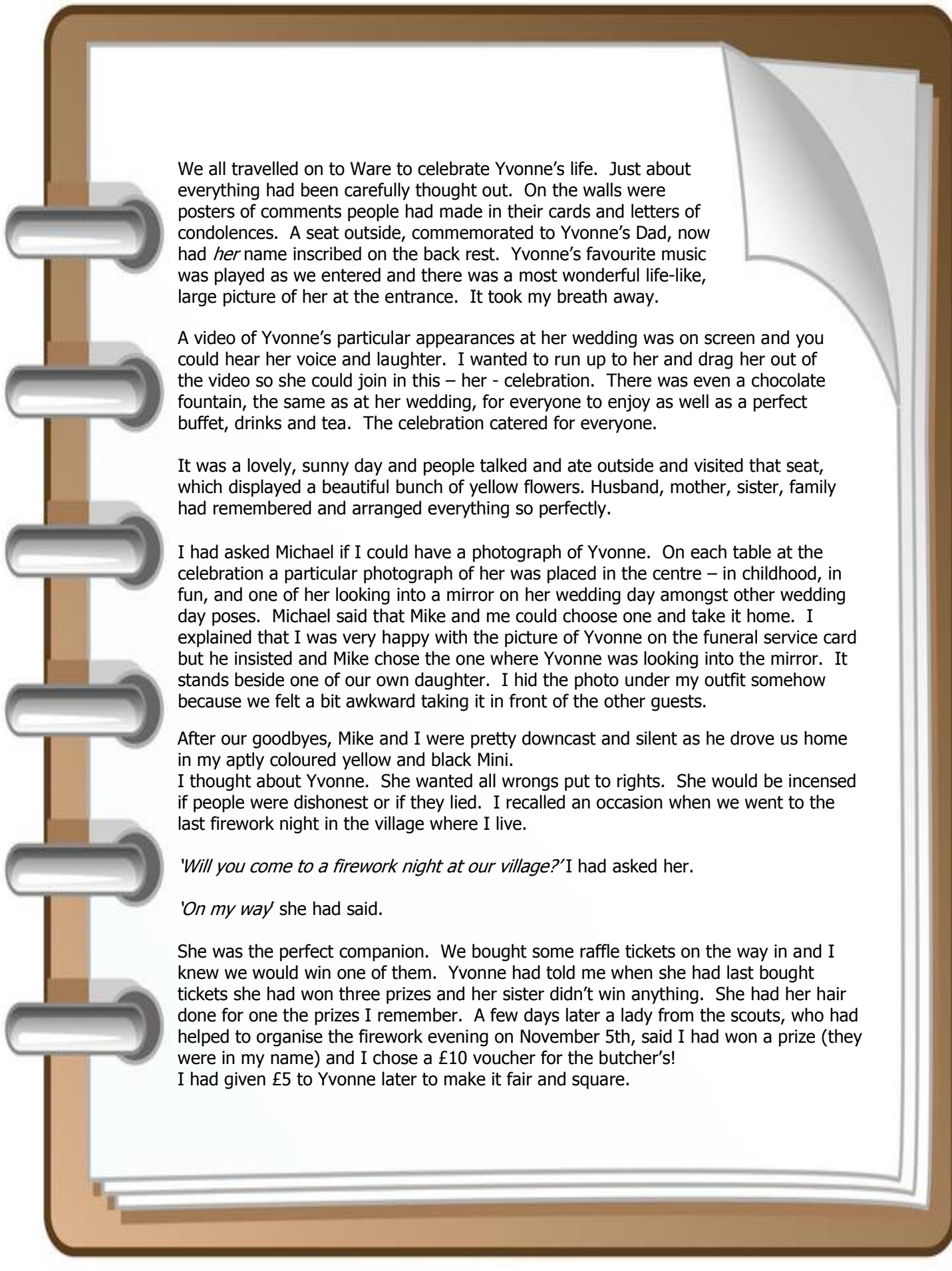
The family had arranged for a new yellow Beetle to be displayed because Yvonne wanted one. The flowers were in the shapes of a bar of Cadbury's chocolate and a yellow car, and her name was spelled out in flowers. Everyone wore buttonholes of yellow without being prompted.

Yvonne's coffin was one I had never seen before. It was white, with painted flowers. It was pretty, it was feminine, it had fresh flowers placed on the top and it had Yvonne in it. Yvonne should not have been there, it was all surreal. It was wrong.

I wanted to speak to Sarah, Yvonne's sister-in-law, as I knew Yvonne had close feelings for her and her two young children. Sarah told me a story about her small daughter, Amber, who was two-and-a-half years old.

The family had been away to Disney and came back after Yvonne had gone. Amber got up early one morning and started singing and waving, her arms held up high towards the rafters. Sarah asked Amber who she was waving to and she said she was saying goodbye to Auntie Vonnie. On another occasion shortly following this one, Amber said she had seen Auntie Vonnie stamping her feet as if dancing. Both Amber and her sister did go to dancing classes and Yvonne often went to watch them and actually told me about her visits. Sarah said that at the time Amber did not completely understand that she would never see Yvonne ever again. I have heard before that small children 'see things' and thought it was an interesting event to quote here.

These two little girls had a great effect on Yvonne wanting a family of her own I'm sure. She adored them.



We all travelled on to Ware to celebrate Yvonne's life. Just about everything had been carefully thought out. On the walls were posters of comments people had made in their cards and letters of condolences. A seat outside, commemorated to Yvonne's Dad, now had *her* name inscribed on the back rest. Yvonne's favourite music was played as we entered and there was a most wonderful life-like, large picture of her at the entrance. It took my breath away.

A video of Yvonne's particular appearances at her wedding was on screen and you could hear her voice and laughter. I wanted to run up to her and drag her out of the video so she could join in this – her - celebration. There was even a chocolate fountain, the same as at her wedding, for everyone to enjoy as well as a perfect buffet, drinks and tea. The celebration catered for everyone.

It was a lovely, sunny day and people talked and ate outside and visited that seat, which displayed a beautiful bunch of yellow flowers. Husband, mother, sister, family had remembered and arranged everything so perfectly.

I had asked Michael if I could have a photograph of Yvonne. On each table at the celebration a particular photograph of her was placed in the centre – in childhood, in fun, and one of her looking into a mirror on her wedding day amongst other wedding day poses. Michael said that Mike and me could choose one and take it home. I explained that I was very happy with the picture of Yvonne on the funeral service card but he insisted and Mike chose the one where Yvonne was looking into the mirror. It stands beside one of our own daughter. I hid the photo under my outfit somehow because we felt a bit awkward taking it in front of the other guests.

After our goodbyes, Mike and I were pretty downcast and silent as he drove us home in my aptly coloured yellow and black Mini. I thought about Yvonne. She wanted all wrongs put to rights. She would be incensed if people were dishonest or if they lied. I recalled an occasion when we went to the last firework night in the village where I live.

'Will you come to a firework night at our village?' I had asked her.

'On my way' she had said.

She was the perfect companion. We bought some raffle tickets on the way in and I knew we would win one of them. Yvonne had told me when she had last bought tickets she had won three prizes and her sister didn't win anything. She had her hair done for one the prizes I remember. A few days later a lady from the scouts, who had helped to organise the firework evening on November 5th, said I had won a prize (they were in my name) and I chose a £10 voucher for the butcher's! I had given £5 to Yvonne later to make it fair and square.

'We'll spend it on a bit more lamb for you' I had said laughingly.

On the way back from the firework do, where Yvonne had eaten a huge hotdog and we both had tea, we sat in her car for a good hour just chatting generally. We exchanged confidences in that confined area and I will treasure the occasion.

Yvonne had told me a lot about Galway where Michael, her husband, had been raised. I remember she often spoke in 'Irish' and her accent was awful. Her lips sort of pursed together tightly talking rubbish and I would join in, my accent being even worse. I used to beg her to stop because my sides ached with laughter but she wouldn't. Michael told us that Yvonne would even do this in the Irish pubs and he would just try to hide his face as he was so embarrassed, not that that would stop her!

I was so fascinated by what she said about Galway and remarked to Yvonne:

'You'll probably end up there when you retire'.

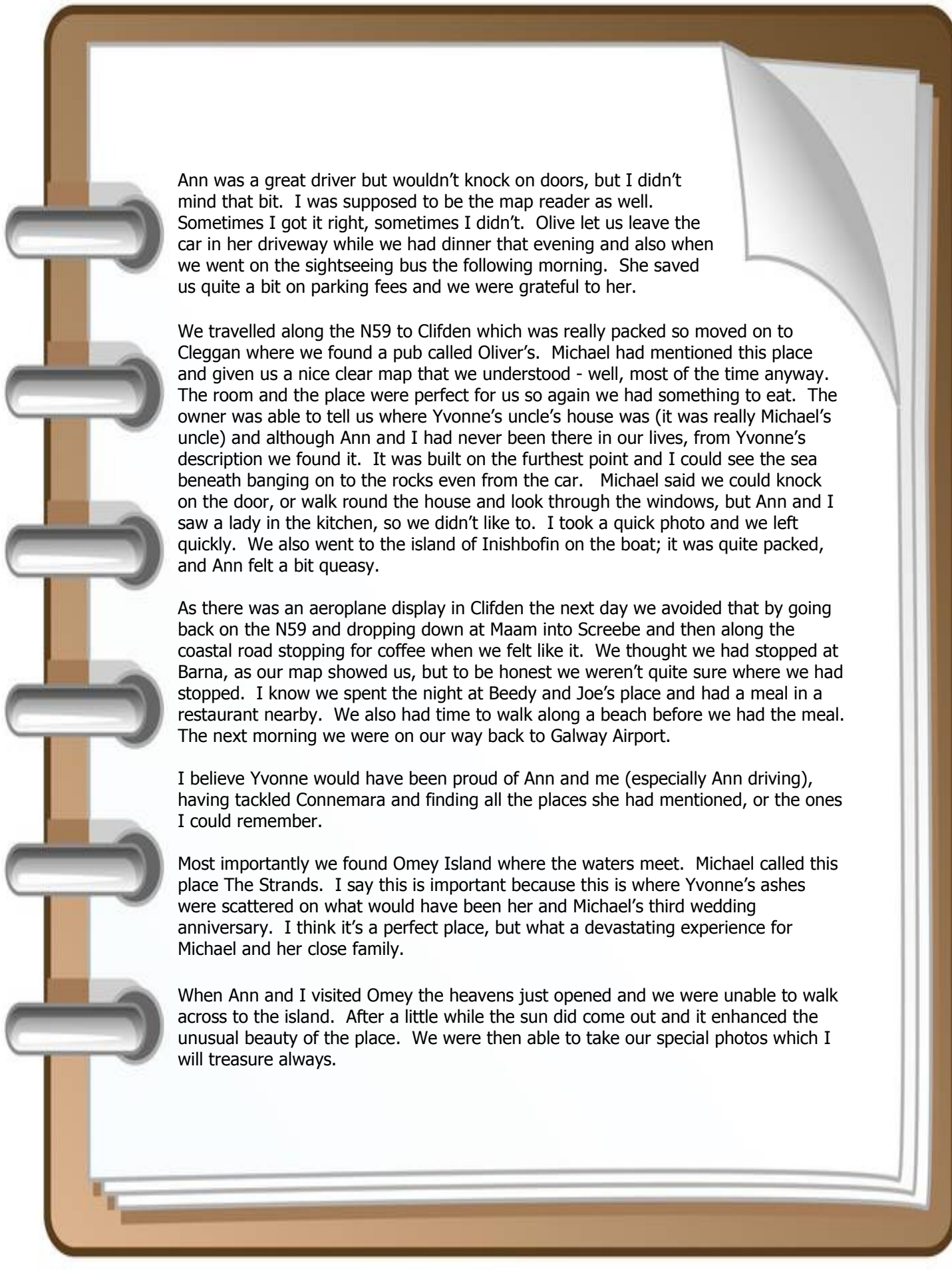
She agreed and said how life was so very different from England. She described the whole area of Connemara to me. Yvonne spoke about Clifden, The Twelve Bens, Cleggan, and the landscape and told me about a house that one of Michael's uncle's had built for his holidays and for his retirement later on. I was just fascinated by her vivid description.

'I'm going to take you and Mike there one day' she had said.

Of course that could never happen but in the summer of 2009 my sister, Ann, and I were organising a few days away. Ann was happy to go along with my idea so we booked a flight to Galway and picked up a car from the airport. We were only away for four days, three nights, but we really packed a lot in. We looked round Galway City and went on a sightseeing bus around the place and took photographs. On the first night we stayed in Galway at a place owned by a lady called Olive and her husband. At the time we didn't realise that she had very busy roads at the front and back of the house, and we drove into the rear driveway after being in a large traffic jam; it was just perfect for us.

I walked up quite a few wooden steps that led to Olive's balcony and entered a large light room where she and her husband were having a peaceful cup of tea and cake.

'Come and look at the room', she said and I asked if Ann could look as well. It was perfect for us.



Ann was a great driver but wouldn't knock on doors, but I didn't mind that bit. I was supposed to be the map reader as well. Sometimes I got it right, sometimes I didn't. Olive let us leave the car in her driveway while we had dinner that evening and also when we went on the sightseeing bus the following morning. She saved us quite a bit on parking fees and we were grateful to her.

We travelled along the N59 to Clifden which was really packed so moved on to Cleggan where we found a pub called Oliver's. Michael had mentioned this place and given us a nice clear map that we understood - well, most of the time anyway. The room and the place were perfect for us so again we had something to eat. The owner was able to tell us where Yvonne's uncle's house was (it was really Michael's uncle) and although Ann and I had never been there in our lives, from Yvonne's description we found it. It was built on the furthest point and I could see the sea beneath banging on to the rocks even from the car. Michael said we could knock on the door, or walk round the house and look through the windows, but Ann and I saw a lady in the kitchen, so we didn't like to. I took a quick photo and we left quickly. We also went to the island of Inishbofin on the boat; it was quite packed, and Ann felt a bit queasy.

As there was an aeroplane display in Clifden the next day we avoided that by going back on the N59 and dropping down at Maam into Screebe and then along the coastal road stopping for coffee when we felt like it. We thought we had stopped at Barna, as our map showed us, but to be honest we weren't quite sure where we had stopped. I know we spent the night at Beedy and Joe's place and had a meal in a restaurant nearby. We also had time to walk along a beach before we had the meal. The next morning we were on our way back to Galway Airport.

I believe Yvonne would have been proud of Ann and me (especially Ann driving), having tackled Connemara and finding all the places she had mentioned, or the ones I could remember.

Most importantly we found Omev Island where the waters meet. Michael called this place The Strands. I say this is important because this is where Yvonne's ashes were scattered on what would have been her and Michael's third wedding anniversary. I think it's a perfect place, but what a devastating experience for Michael and her close family.

When Ann and I visited Omev the heavens just opened and we were unable to walk across to the island. After a little while the sun did come out and it enhanced the unusual beauty of the place. We were then able to take our special photos which I will treasure always.

Ann and my visit to Galway were completely devoted to the memory of my lovely friend. I was so moved by everything I saw.

When we were in Ireland I told Ann about an incident relating to an IFA (Independent Financial Adviser) where, once again, I asked Yvonne for her advice. Yvonne looked for a local IFA on the web and gave me two names.

'You will have to pay for their services because they are independent, not representing a particular bank or company you see', she explained.

I telephoned one of the IFAs and she came round to the house as I had asked her. Mike and I explained what we were after and she said:

'You will have to pay me for my time', to which I nodded 'yes'.

To cut a long story very short, the IFA did not tell me what her exact hourly fee was at the onset of the visit and when I eventually got the bill I nearly fainted (well, that's a slight exaggeration, but it sounds good!). I 'spoke' to Yvonne about various matters in relation to the IFA by email and this is part of her reply:

'Hi Nutty Tart (that's me)

I have had a chance to read through the wicked witch's breakdown – what a load of old tosh!

Yvonne had worked out that the mileage of the IFAs travel time (I don't know how she did this), had been doubled by the IFA in her invoice. Yvonne went on to say that Mike had done half her work for her (by a spreadsheet of figures) and she quoted a section from the IFAs email saying at the end *'it is utter crap'.*

Yvonne went on to comment on the extreme high cost of the invoice and noticed that the IFA's tone had changed because we were contradicting her and we were right (or Yvonne was right which is more to the point).

Yvonne said, and I quote:

'She has got me so mad – I would rather stick pins in my eyes than pay her! Barbs (she goes on) you have tried to resolve this matter yourself – now its time to bring in the big boys!'

Yvonne had already 'phoned the FSA (Financial Services Authority) for me and gave me a reference number and the name of the person she spoke to.

She ends her email:

'Loads of love, Yvonne xxxx'

I didn't get a chance to tell Yvonne that due to her help and advice, we won the case. I tried to tell her when she was in hospital.

'Yvonne, I've got loads to tell you' I said.

But I don't think she could have heard me. I could only hold her hand.

I relayed another story about Yvonne to my patient sister:

Yvonne had told Mike and me about how she had helped some ex neighbours of hers to buy and sell their house. They had been very good to Yvonne's father and she wanted to repay them for their kindnesses. Yvonne's father meant the world to her and his passing affected her so deeply that it made her ill. Eventually the couple moved into their new house where Yvonne had arranged for various tradesmen to install a kitchen and to do other work which I can't remember in detail. Yvonne had employed a man to do the tiling but he didn't turn up and when she came to visit us she told us that she was going to have to do all the tiling the following day so that the next tradesman could continue his part of the work. That was typical of her. I remember she took photographs of our kitchen to show her ex neighbours to give them ideas, so I suppose that may have resulted in her being promoted to Chief Tiler.

It's odd how these memories came back to me in Ireland. When life goes on normally, memories like this become distant, but in Ireland I was surrounded by my thoughts of Yvonne and they kept on coming into my head.

My last story about Yvonne relates to an apple tree which grows in a lane in our village. We just go along there and take what apples we need. I said to Yvonne one day that I would take her to the apple tree and that would mean that she would be a fully fledged member of the village. Of course she thought I was nuts, but she called me, as you have seen, Nutty Tart anyway.

We never did make our visit to the apple tree.

All I can now say to Yvonne is that I hope you will feel perfectly free and spread your extraordinary spirit and wonderful smile into a new world. Yvonne will always be remembered by Mike and me and we feel that it has been such a privilege to have known such a wonderful person.

I just hope that she will meet up with our daughter, Nicola. If so, nobody else will get a chance to say a word – they will be talking incessantly!

I never thought in a million years I would be writing about Yvonne like this. I will miss her dreadfully. I ache with longing for the pair of them.

by Barbara Waters

