

Wednesday 24th March 2010

And Now the Good News...

Those who know me well will tell you I have an abiding interest in and passion for metaphysics (no giggling at the back of the class please). Metaphysics, as everybody knows, is the philosophical enquiry of a non-empirical character into the nature of existence. In other words, things are not always what they seem.

For example, I am rather partial to nuts. 'Bring on pistachios', you might here me say or, indeed, 'Produce the honey roasted lightly salted cashews'. Nothing could be simpler. However, I was amazed to find recently, on the back of a humble packet of peanuts, the confusing message, 'May contain nuts!'. What might I expect to find? Pineapples? A pair of boots? A troop of colobus monkeys?

'Things are not always what they seem', though, applies to carers too. How should we see life as an unpaid or family carer? Are carers, for example, purely victims of circumstance?

Taras cares for his wife. "We have been married for 28 years and I have been a full time carer for 21 years. She has permanently dislocated hips and other related problems and is also a celiac. We have three grown up children.

Our first seven years of marriage were quite 'normal' but then my wife's disability took a turn for the worst and I stopped work to become her carer.

My caring role has been and can still be extremely difficult but I have learned a lot. My aim now is to use my experiences to raise the profile of carers and to see if their circumstances can be improved, to ensure that carers are better provided for in the future".

Becoming involved in speaking up for other carers has given Taras more confidence and opened up possibilities. "I am involved in two community groups; Barnwood Residents Association and Barnwood Community Project and also with Gloucester City Homes on two of their focus groups. I feel like I'm putting something back and making a difference".

So, if not victims then, should we see carers as saints; dutiful, devoted and selfless? Anne became a carer almost 14 years ago when her husband had a terrible stroke.

"I had always enjoyed art, drawing, making pots but all that stopped - there just isn't time, you're so concerned about caring. You can get very cut off; so many times you're unable to do things and have to cancel that in the end you just don't bother to arrange anything and you let life slip by.

But at a carers respite weekend I did some 'art therapy', which I really enjoyed. I began to think about myself again and realised that I am still a person and not just a carer. I don't think that's a selfish thing. It's easy to neglect your personal appearance and doing the things you love - all that has to stop because you can't physically get away".

So what appeared to be a short break had long term consequences for Anne: "I'm still friendly with several people I met on the break who I still see every week. And I think about things differently - to go on caring, you have to think about yourself".

So indeed appearances can be deceptive and it's all too easy to make assumptions and generalisations. I've just been informed that the peanut, or groundnut (*Arachis hypogaea*), is a species in the legume "bean" family (Fabaceae) native to Mexico, South America and Central America - it's not even a proper nut.

So that's it for me and metaphysics. Fortunately, I'm also fascinated by the illusory nature of rugby football and the aesthetic interpretation of the laws of Guinness but that's another story...