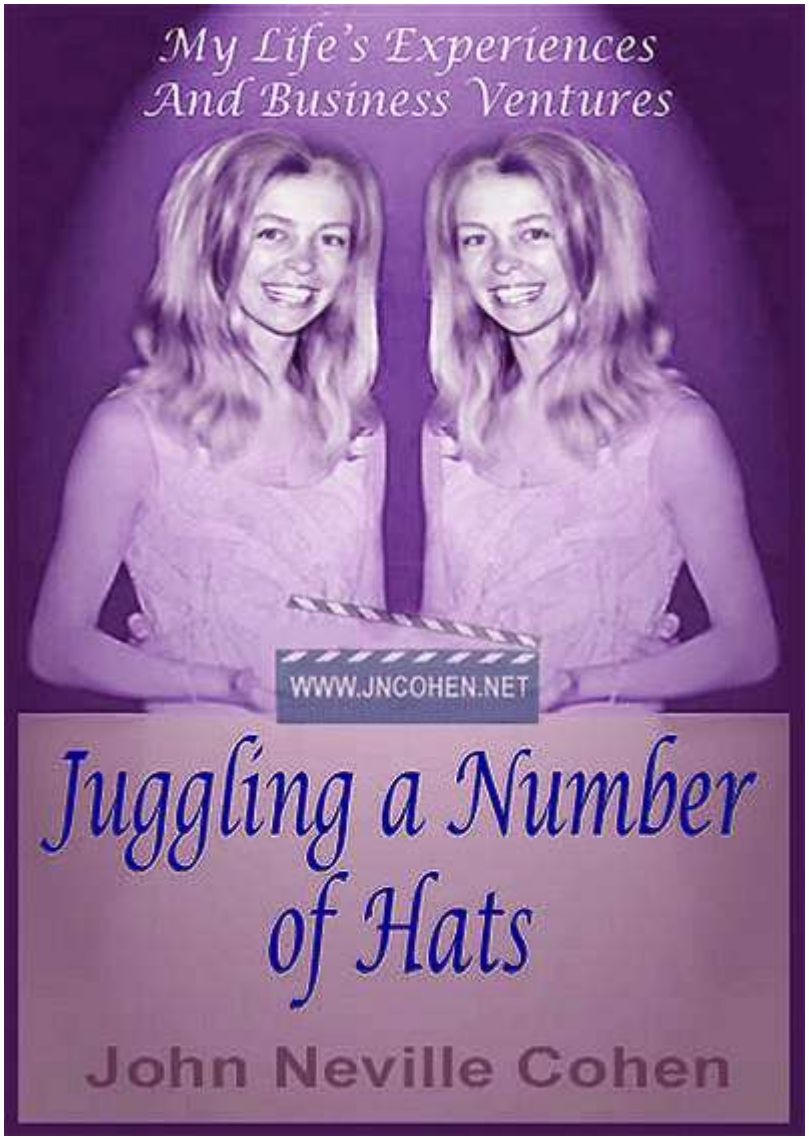

Juggling a Number of Hats!

My Life's Experiences and Business Ventures

By

John Neville Cohen

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Preface

I had made a comment, one day whilst feeling very frustrated, that I could write a book about all the problems we were having with our property development scheme. Trudy replied, "Well why don't you?"

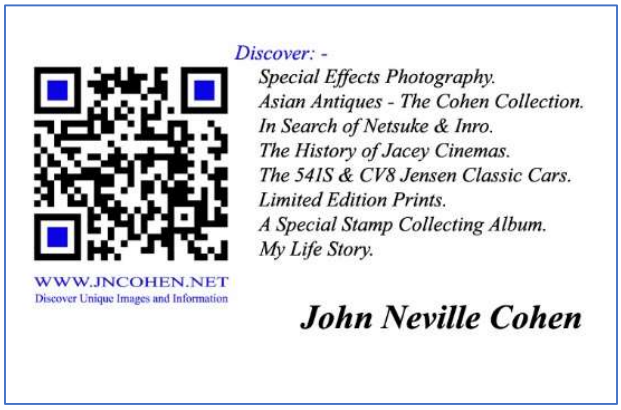
I thought about it and decided it would be anything but enjoyable reading - so who would ever want to read it?

Instead, I have written about my experiences, our friends *(not about our family as that remains private)* and all about my different business ventures, as one day our children, our grandchildren, or somebody just might be intrigued.

So, this is mostly about my adult life, having left school. I was an international award-winning amateur photographer *(promoted by Kodak)*, a director of Jacey Cinemas Ltd., an Asian antique collector, a Jensen classic car specialist, a partner of a sunbed business, a commercial photographer and designer, an insurance agent, a property development director, and a publisher. I seem to have concentrated on several aspects of graphic design, having created quite a lot of logos and house styles, brochures *(included are the ones for my own businesses)* and leaflets, as well as of course, my photography. Most of this would not have been possible without the support of my wonderful loving wife. Trudy has looked after so much of our daily needs, she is an excellent cook, she kept our homes clean, and brought up our children, is always cheerful and so good to be with.

We have been lucky enough to have met some really interesting people over the years and most have become our friends.

There is already plenty of information available at www.jncohen.net so, I have been rather brief here on some aspects and simply provided the relevant links instead.



The Early Good Years

I was fortunate as our family were privileged, my parents had wonderful lives and were very generous, we went on some lovely holidays together and I had a happy childhood, quite a lot of parties with family and friends too.

But I was not fond of my school days, only 'Beaconsfield' the Jewish boarding school was interesting, but I hated leaving home every time the holidays came to an end.

A Phobia

I do have a phobia, which can be embarrassing, as I have great difficulty controlling my fear of wasps. This relates back to an awful day late Summer when I was young. I was so proud that I could tie my own shoelaces and had even learned how to make a double knot, so that they would never come undone. But on one particular day, I had both shoes tied tightly, ready to go to school, when I suffered such a stinging pain in my right foot, between my big toe and the next toe. I desperately tried to take my shoe off, but it was certainly not easy because of the double knot. Before my shoe was removed, I was stung a second time!

A wasp was inside, it was half dead, when my mother finally got my shoe off. But I was in agony, my foot and two toes swelled up, and hurt for such a long time.

Ever since then, all my life, I have been struggling to remain calm whenever a wasp comes near. What is annoying is that wasps always seem to come to me!

I learned that the best way to stop them bothering me *(usually the worst times are when eating outside)* so I kept a fine mist bottle sprayer, filled with clean water near me, whenever possible. This wet mist makes them hurry away and best of all they do not return!

Hurt by a kite

Unfortunately, I had two traumas with my right foot whilst quite young. The second one happened a year or two after the wasp stings, when I had received a present of a large 'traditional box kite' that was an oblong shape *(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Box_kite)*. There were four narrow long aluminium rods with the fabric stretched over them, so that once assembled it looked like two colourful open-ended boxes next to each other, with a small gap between them, in total it was about five foot long. It proved rather difficult to get it to fly, so my father had a go and succeeded in flying it quite high over our tennis court at Woodbourne Road.

It went remarkably high up, but suddenly the wind changed, and it came racing down fast towards us. I remember whilst looking up at it, that it appeared to be coming straight for me, so I ran towards the other end of the tennis court, thinking it would miss me . . . it did not! I had stopped running believing I was safe, when it landed right next to me, but one aluminium rod had gone straight through my leather shoe and into my right foot!

After all these years I still have the scar. I must have passed out, because I do not remember what happened next, but I suspect I was taken to hospital. I never saw that kite again!

Boarding School

My life changed for the better, when I became the Junior sports champion at Beaconsfield, I was quite good at athletics, particularly at jumping and running the sprint *(not so good at long distance)* after this I was suddenly quite popular.

Beaconsfield Boarding School

But the headmaster one half term, disappeared with all the school funds and the school closed - never to reopen! the students had come from all over the UK as there were very few Jewish boarding schools and we only knew each other by our first names, so I lost contact with all those that were not from Birmingham.

My dear parents desperately had to find another school at short notice and the only one I could go to was Greenmore College, a day school, very mixed, but there was hardly anyone else that was Jewish there. This school no longer exists, but I was aware of some particularly nasty bullies there *(two later ended up in prison)*. However, this was where I met my best friend Bob, who lived within a few minutes' walk from my home in Knightlow Road. After the exams at sixteen I was so glad to get away.

Robert Herrick (Bob)

We used to spend a lot of our free time together and we played tennis and snooker quite often. We could make a short cut to each other's homes from our back gardens because we only had a field between us.

Bob and I decided to go camping once, in the Summer holidays the idea was to have a week together to help each other revise for the GSE exams, we went to Alveston and we found an empty field, sloping down to a river, not too far away from our homes *(near Stratford upon Avon)*, having obtained permission from the local farmer we decided to camp there.

We found a level place a little further up from the river and pitched our tent, we had some food with us, and we had borrowed an army dinghy and our plan was to try fishing for our evening meals.

Having spent the late afternoon and evening looking around the area, once it was dark, we made a campfire, cooked something to eat *(our attempts at fishing were not successful)* and later got into our sleeping bags *(the tent was just large enough for 2)*.

We fell asleep, but in the early hours about 5 or 6 am, we heard some strange noises, and our tent was moving, we got up and had a look outside and found ourselves completely surrounded by inquisitive cows, a couple of them were using our supporting cables to scratch themselves and the next moment the tent toppled over!

That morning we went and bought some poles, barbed wire, and made a fence surrounding our camping area, but this also failed to deter the cows too, every day a section was demolished! My Mum and Dad came to find us after a few days and brought us a particularly good picnic, they were curious to know how we were getting on.

Bob and I went camping

Near to us, in the same field, was a caravan where two actors from the Royal Shakespeare company stayed and at times, they practised their parts outside where we could hear them quite clearly. But after a week we were not sorry to go back home. However, although we did not revise much, we did pass our exams.

The Assistant Projectionist

When I left school *(with a pass in the essential five subjects)* I had no desire to continue in the education process. I was truly fortunate to be able to join the family business. My Grandfather Joseph Cohen had created a successful business, consisting of a chain of cinemas and a property investment company.

So, I joined my father George who ran the cinemas, whilst his brother Stanley helped grandpa with the properties. I needed to prove my commitment and so for the first two years I began as an assistant projectionist.

This was tough for me, because of the unsociable hours involved, the programs began at 10:30am and ran till 10:30pm Monday to Saturday, then from 3:00pm till 10:30 on Sundays. So, we had to be there half an hour earlier at 10:00am to be prepared and usually we did not leave till after 11:00pm at night.

In those days Birmingham hardly had any night life, so my social life was very restricted. Of course, our working hours were staggered and varied each week, but I had to work alternate weekends and my odd free days were usually when all my friends were still working. But a great bonus for me was that I loved all the cartoons, particularly 'Bugs Bunny' and 'Tom and Jerry' and these were always included.

I can imagine that anyone reading this, especially those much younger than me, if any ever will, will find it hard to imagine how things worked, as technology has advanced so much since the 1960's. In those days the Internet, computers, mobile phones, or even the concept of digital systems for everyday life simply did not exist - life was so vastly different when I was young.

Because these cartoon and comedy programs lasted for only one hour and then were repeated, there was so much more work for the projectionists, as each projector spool only lasted about 20 minutes. Firstly, every week all these short films *(about 5 minutes each for cartoons and about twice as long for the comedies)* had to be joined up and timed with the adverts, to form the one-hour program.

Once the first projector had come to the end of the spool, the second projector would take over and whilst that was running, the spools had to be changed on the first projector, the spool that had been taken off had to be rewound, before the second projector reached the end. The number of times these old films ran through our projectors were so much more frequent than with the usual feature film cinemas and they often broke!

Our projectors ran with carbon arc burning, providing the light source, later to be replaced with the far better Xenon lamps. The carbon rods had to be carefully aligned and fired, to form a very bright arc, if the gap between the rods, or their alignment was not exactly right, they would fail to ignite.

Once fired it then took quite a few minutes to reach the full brilliance required, from then on, the gap between the burning rods had to be constantly monitored, otherwise the colour of the light would either be too blue, too red, too dull, or worse of all would go out. As these rods burned a mechanical device was supposed to maintain the gap, but this could not be relied upon and often had to be overruled and corrected.

The biggest constant fear for the projectionists *(always two of us in the projection room)* was that either the film would break, this happened quite often, or the change over from one projector to the other *(there were two identical projectors)* would be miss timed, plunging the cinema into darkness.

All these old films had to go through our projectors ten times a day. I remember well on many occasions the film would break, thank goodness most often beyond the point where it was projected, so the audience was unaware that anything was wrong. But this meant that the film failed to go on to the second spool and instead snaked and twisted all over the floor!

The panic to catch it quickly and to desperately try to thread it back into the spool to be repaired later, will never be forgotten! Once this had happened and the second projector had taken over, this damaged film had to be cleaned, all joins checked and repaired as it was wound back on to a new spool, before it was ready to be threaded back to show again. All this whilst the next spool had to be threaded on to the first projector *(which then had to be fired up)* well before the second projector's film ended.

Promotion

Gradually having been promoted to chief projectionist at our other Birmingham cinema for a few months, I was moved to assistant manager and eventually after several years, to the head office film booking department.

This was where films were selected and the programs planned, involving tricky negotiations to determine the percentage of the box office takings that could be agreed to be paid to the distributor. After a while in film bookings, I was taken to learn and assist the General Manager Mr Tonks, whose job was to keep an eye on all our cinemas, particularly the staff, the general look, and the condition of the cinemas overall. But more interestingly to check if there were any kinds of stealing going on.

As we had twenty-three city centre cinemas from Edinburgh down to Brighton, we did a great deal of travelling together. I found Mr Tonks to be remarkably interesting, full of guidance, as well as having a wealth of information on all aspects regarding the day to day running of our cinemas.

Detective Work

0n one occasion the manager, cashier, and usherette in one of our London cinemas had to be fired and replaced. This was because they were all involved in a swindle to cheat our box office takings. The system we had was that a ticket was sold and when the customer entered the cinema, the usherette tore the ticket in half, putting one half on a spike *(like a large needle)* attached to a string, the other half was then given back to the customer.

These strung together half tickets were kept, and spot checks were done, to make sure the ticket numbers were in sequence and that the box office amount tallied with the number of tickets sold. Sometimes these spot checks were also carried out by the film distributors, as they also had an interest, as they were paid an agreed percentage of the takings.

What we discovered was that when the ticket was issued by the cashier the usherette sometimes failed to tear the ticket in half *(one half was to be given to the customer)*, then having shown the customer to a seat, she quickly gave the ticket back to the cashier to sell again.

This extra sale was later split between the three of them. It soon amounted to quite a lot, even though it was only done at quiet times several times a day. Once sold again, the usherette then quickly added her half to the string to keep the numbers on the tickets in order.

The discovery was made by paying one of our usherettes, or assistants from another city, to go and buy a ticket and to stay in the cinema for a couple of hours.

Whilst inside he, or she kept their half ticket and had a counter to add up every person that came in. Then a spot check was carried out to see how many half tickets were on the string, after their ticket number, to see if this number tallied with the head count. This detective work was used at various times at every one of our cinemas.

My Own Department

Later, I set up my own department at head office, responsible for all newspaper advertising, the 'Front of House' publicity and to create a new house style that would make our company name better known. This involved creating a logo.

But first of all, the promotion of our programs involved changing the look at each cinema, so instead of relying on a few posters in frames, I organised that the entrance foyers were wherever possible boarded up and decorated with a much larger display, depicting the programs from floor to ceiling. This made so much more impact, as even people further away, or driving past, could easily see what was showing.

We had also changed some news theatres to become continental film cinemas, showing the best European films from famous film directors. So, for many years, our cinemas had been known as; The News Theatre, The Tatler, The Times, The Monseigneur and later The Cinephone. Few people knew of the name 'Jacey Cinemas' so my department set about designing how we could change the name of our cinemas to 'Jacey' and form a house style.

I employed Vicky Wright *(with public relations experience)* as well as a young graphic designer, our logo came about from my idea to use the primary colours of film emulsion, magenta, cyan, and yellow.

This logo lined up with the Jacey name *(in grey expanded Egyptian)* it was soon approved and was introduced at every property and cinema. All our stationery was redesigned, and all newspaper adverts always included this logo. We also created 'Miss Jacey' to represent our company at various events, Aisha Ahmed was an usherette at our news theatre who had won a beauty contest, she was lovely and had a nice personality and with my mother's guidance she became a great success, the press loved her!

Because of the wonderful city centre locations, of both our cinemas and the various properties, the Jacey name was soon well known, and this certainly helped improve the status of our companies.

For some years, my department was involved in the design of our cinema canopies and the task of creating the best way of promoting the continental films, as the distributors simply supplied the standard original posters and stills that were used in the foreign country. Often these had little appeal to the British, so we would view the film and decide on the best images, catch lines and on a few occasions even a change of title.

Then we would work with the 'Front of House' design team to create our floor to ceiling boards. I was also approached a few times, to design new promotional material for films that we had not booked, by other film distributors too, this helped as we charged for this service. There were a lot of wonderful times with Jacey Cinemas, we organised several special cartoon and comedy events in various cities, which involved dressing up and several stunts in the streets, such as the promoting of a 'Crazy Show' for example.

Later film premieres, when the stars were brought over, or special opening nights when we opened another converted news theatre, as a continental film cinema, mostly with the Jacey and Cinephone name. But best of all attending the Cannes Film Festival each year, where we were invited, by some of the film distributors, to see the films they hoped we would agree to book for our cinemas.

Those occasions were very glamorous, smart, and dressy and we were very fortunate to be treated as VIP's. The most exciting thing for me at these Festivals *(in my young 20's)* was to be able to see up-close, Sophia Loren, Brigitte Bardot, and Gina Lollobrigida, even if only briefly.

I was so taken by Brigitte Bardot - she was stunning and so vivacious! I was so fortunate as the closest the vast majority of people ever got to these stars would have been the cinema screen!

I should point out that Grandpa Joseph was the first to introduce the cartoon cinemas throughout the UK and later my father George opened the first cinemas specialising in continental feature films.

Our cinema business was extremely successful and there were lots of glamorous occasions, so life was particularly good for us all. I became a member of the 'Institute of Directors' in Pall Mall and Mum and Dad joined the 'White Elephant Club' in Curzon Street *(a beautiful restaurant and bar for those involved in the entertainment world)*, we had some incredibly special evenings there after our film

premieres.

Thinking back, I met quite a number of celebrities and interesting people, we entertained some of the UK male pop stars; Adam Faith, Jess Conrad, Craig Douglas, when we opened the 'Jacey in the Strand' and several French female film starlets that included Catherine Deneuve *(before she became so famous)*.

Aisha 'Miss Jacey' with Craig Douglas and Adam Faith

Martine Carole came to the opening of our 'Cinephone' Birmingham and Robert Mitchum attended the film premiere of 'Yellow Teddy bears' also at 'Cinephone' Birmingham.

I met Yoko Ono in London *(we had shown her film 'Film No 4' about lots of bottoms)* and later I was invited to one of her London exhibitions that was really extraordinary. I should mention that Aisha Ahmed 'Miss Jacey' represented us at all these events, she had a nice personality, and she was just as attractive as any of the celebs!

The Film distributors we knew well were also very strong personalities, there was Kenneth Rive, Anthony Balch, Phil Kutner, Tony Tenser and Adrienne Fancey. Ken Rive had worked for British intelligence before film distribution and Phil Kutner had made Brigit Bardot famous by distributing her film 'And God Created Woman' directed by Roger Vadim. Tony Tenser promoted Brigitte Bardot and invented the catch phrase 'The Sex Kitten'.

Social Life

Now that I had normal office hours, I had more free time to concentrate on photography, this soon became my main hobby. I think it was partly due to working as a projectionist that I got the idea to consider the possibilities of photographing projected images. More about my photography later.

Also, at this time my social life improved dramatically. One of the advantages, having started with the continental cinemas and because we had five in the West End of London and all the main distributors were based there, the company decided to rent a London flat in Park Street, Mayfair a particularly good location for any of the directors to use.

So, I was able to arrange to do my work in London on Fridays and then have the benefit of staying there for the weekend, where I had got to know quite a large circle of friends. My sex life was great, but is best kept private, I will simply add that I only ever had one lover at a time, I was very choosy but fortunate too, as I was only ever with the most beautiful girls.

There was far more fun to be had in London, than in Birmingham, this was the period known as

'Swinging London' and London was the central attraction for all of Europe, it was where it was all happening for the young. The music *(thanks to The Beatles)*, the fashion *(mainly Mary Quant)* and the mini skirt considered so outrageous *(never seen before),* and then Carnaby Street, or the Kings Road became so famous.

Suddenly, youngsters had freedom and fun unlike ever before! The first discos I joined were amazing, 'La Valbonne', 'The Establishment', 'The Flamingo Club', these were member only clubs, but there were so many discos opening all over London.

Then there was 'Annabels', 'The Playboy Club' and for live pop music 'The Ad Lib Club', 'The Marquee Club' and 'Ronnie Scott's. As I was known to be in the entertainment business, I was fortunate and had no problem getting into any of these private clubs. I discovered there was such exciting night life that had never existed in Birmingham. Eventually, 'The Elbow Room' opened in Birmingham, but as far as I was concerned London was the place to be.

I soon had a large circle of friends, mostly Jewish who lived around Hampstead, Hendon and Swiss Cottage, Ronnie Hendon, Jeffrey and Richard Rosenbaum, Howard Peters, Harvey Lament, Alan Josephs to name a few, this all came about through my involvement in a couple of charities. I was invited to join the Junior British O.R.T. based in North London, which I did.

All sorts of events were arranged to raise money, whilst at the same time, planned to be enjoyable and fun for our own age group. The O.R.T. charity was to help children all over the world and not restricted to Jewish children, although the committee was 100% Jewish.

I was about 19 years old at this time and I had become joint chairman with Martin Spiers of the Birmingham J.N.F. committee. It was my suggestion that both charities would benefit financially and that we all would have a much greater time if we could selectively support each other's events. So, I set out to see if the London committee would undertake to come to Birmingham for one of our events if I persuaded the J.N.F. committee to come to support one of theirs.

Everything was soon agreed, and it proved to be a considerable success, not only financially for each charity, but also socially, generally I found that these committee members were much more interesting and amusing, than found in other circles, so we all got together quite a few times, and this led to several new romances!

My London friends were such a happy lot, and we had many very funny times together. Grandpa and Grandma very kindly allowed me to invite my friends to stay in their flat in Bournemouth, we did that a few times for a long weekend, and we were very careful not to damage anything and to leave it as we found it, a cleaning lady came to change all the beds when we left.

Some became very close friends, and I went on holidays with them, Ronnie Hendon and I loved skiing and one year we went to St Moritz. Skiing in those days was rather difficult as the skis were very long and fixed only to ankle high boots, but once mastered we loved it and we had a fabulous time!

I had been skiing every year before, having joined the 'Ski Club of Great Britain' with Bernard Thomas *(Bernard was an eminent physiotherapist for the England Cricket Team).* Now with the newer designed knee-high boots and short skis, it is all so much easier than when we learned how to ski.

My parents threw a large party for my 21st Birthday at a hotel, and as I really wanted to have my London friends with me, I invited Ronnie to celebrate his 21st with me, as our Birthdays were quite near to each other.

Some of our mutual friends could not be in two places at once so I was glad, we did this. It worked out

well as they all came to Birmingham and it was great, we had a wonderful weekend together.

21st Birthday Weekend
A few photos

Ronnie Hendon and I shared our 21st Birthday

Henley in Arden Famous Ice Cream

Fooling About on the River Avon

Ronnie and John Together Again, 50 Years Later in Marbella!

Martin Stern and I went to Juan-Les-Pins together for a summer holiday, when I had a new MGB convertible - I did the driving and we had quite a time with girls we met, best not to say anymore! Many years later, I learned that Martin so enjoyed being in the South of France that he bought a place in Antibes and once retired spent a lot of time there. So, we too met up again in Orange, France.

But I remained happily, a confirmed bachelor for so many years, getting married at 29 was considered rather late in those days.

Award-Winning Photography

I was having an incredibly enjoyable time, there were quite a few special girlfriends, and I met some very attractive girls through my photography too. I met lots of people, by giving talks about my photography to various photographic societies.

No one knew how I was achieving my photographs on Kodachrome. I had the idea to photograph projected images, and I experimented by projecting images on to other objects, instead of a screen, then sometimes projecting more than one image with extra projectors to blend images. No one had done this before, but by using my technique it was not difficult to have a negative and a positive image on the same emulsion, which was considered impossible.

Of course, now with digital images and software like Photoshop anything can be done, but I was creating my pictures in the 1960's and using Kodachrome film, as I preferred to show them by projecting them on a large screen. Each time I finished a roll of film I had to wait about a week for the processing before I could see the transparencies!

Things got extremely exciting, when I won the International London Salon Trophy, which led to Kodak promoting one-man exhibitions and later to invite me to go to New York for an exhibition of my photography at Grand Central Station all at their cost.

Thanks to E. J. Fancey *(a film producer and distributor)* who had seen my photography and wanted to know if my technique could be used with filming movies.

I knew him well and I explained why I could not guarantee it would work, as I was concerned about synchronizing the projector with the movie camera shutter.

He arranged that I could use a studio, together with a 35mm projector and a camera for a day in London. I did a series of tests and found it worked quite easily. Later the early James Bond films used my method to create the film credits.

Sir George Pollock

Sir George contacted me, telling me he was fascinated with my photography and asked if we could meet up in London *(this was after I won The London Salon Trophy)*, which we did, and we soon became friends.

We exhibited together and he joined me, when I opened the very first gallery of photography in the UK, at our Galleries in Marble Arch I called it simply 'The Viewfinder Gallery'. He had a very dry sense of humour, and I was so pleased when he kindly wrote the introduction for me for my planned book 'The Magic Lantern'.

Sir George was a solicitor, but had retired to concentrate on photography, as he had found a way to make colourful abstracts by lighting large pieces of smashed glass, full of fractures, that he lit from different angles using coloured celluloid.

He then had lots of different possibilities by focusing into different depths of the glass and adjusting the angle of the lights to form his pictures. He called them 'Vitrographs,' and they were very dramatic!

He won many awards especially for his invented equipment to produce AV shows, well before any computers. Sir George had a string of letters after his name *(all well-earned)* and he became the President of 'The Royal Photographic Society' and the Chairman of 'The London Salon of Photography', he also served on the Council of 'The Royal Society of Arts'.

Meeting Trudy

Whilst in London one weekend, planning to meet up with friends, I had driven to see Martin at his home in Ossulton Way, Hampstead and this was when I was to meet the girl I would marry.

Trudy Cohen Fehr

John

I had been engaged once to Lisette a few years earlier, before I knew my London friends, but I broke it off, as it just did not work out well. Certainly, I had no clue, or idea that this beautiful Swiss blond would one day be my wife.

Martin Stern

Martin and I were chatting in his front garden and whilst deep in conversation, I suddenly realised I was alone, Martin had spotted Trudy walking past his house and had left me to chat up this extremely attractive long-legged girl.

I should point out that Martin was always the one to pick up the most gorgeous girls, whenever as a group of fellows we went to a discotheque 'looking for talent' as we called it.

Martin within moments would be the first to be with some lovely girl.

The rest of us after a while and a few drinks, would give up *(as all the best-looking girls were already with partners)* and come back to my flat to play Bridge. Martin never joined us!

Learning to play Bridge was enjoyable, we never had any arguments, and we all owed a lot to John Samuels, who was by far the best player and who in a nice way, explained what any of us did wrong. He was able to remember every card played right from the beginning and by whom, which I found to be remarkable!

Martin had persuaded Trudy that we would take her and her girlfriend *(that she was on the way to meet)*, to go to the famous Carnaby Street. So that was how we first met, but I later learned that Trudy had seen me before, in Martin's front drive playing 'Jokari', this is a game where a hard rubber ball is attached to a box with a long elastic.

It was a good trainer for playing Squash, one can play alone, as I was, when unknown to me Trudy had walked past and apparently liked what she saw *(although she had only seen me from behind)*. This had happened a long time before the day we met, Trudy was an Au-pair with a family further up the road and often walked past but had never seen me again until then.

We ended up as lovers and met up every weekend after that. However, Trudy had to return to Switzerland, having been in London for a year and I had decided marriage was not possible. I was wrong, but it took us four years to eventually marry. Before we had met, Trudy had done a two year jewellery apprenticeship at Sutter and qualified, and then became the manageress of Koecke Goldsmith shop also in Winterthur, before she went as an Au-pair to London to learn English.

We arranged secretly to meet up in Geneva, for a holiday in the South of France the following year, together with some other friends Roger and Gita *(a Swedish girl)*. So once again, I did the driving taking my MGB convertible. It was quite daring in those days to book and stay in a hotel room as a married couple, without being married.

We had a wonderful time together and for the first time did some water skiing, I was not good at it and found it awfully hard to stand up, as it was just the opposite to snow skiing where you lean forward. So, Trudy was laughing at me and told me I looked like I was in a 'sitting on the toilet position' for the first part, before I could stand straight up and lean back!

I found Trudy so captivating, I could hardly leave her alone, it was almost impossible to lie on the beach next to her, without having to rush back to our bedroom.

One Man Exhibition in New York

After my time in the USA for my one-man exhibition with Kodak in New York, I continued *(at my own cost)* to see more of America as I had invitations for more one-man exhibitions and went as far as San Francisco. For my return flight I had to return to New York before going home and I found out that it would not cost much, if I changed my flight and stopped off in Zurich for a few days.

At this time Trudy was the manageress of a select very modern Jewellery shop 'Otto Kraska' in the centre of Zurich and in her spare time she had completed a modelling course.

The Kodak Gallery in Grand Central Station New York

I really wanted to see Trudy again and to see what her parents were like.

So, although I had quite a life in New York with a friend Charles Kolker, who was also a bachelor, he organised a different girl for me every night and we went out as a foursome. He had got to know lots of Pan Am and the TWA air stewardess's *(to be an air hostess was glamorous in those days, they only employed the most attractive ones they could find)* he kept a little black book and knew exactly who was arriving when and leaving again. So, there was an endless supply!

He also tried to persuade me not to marry Trudy *(he had never met her),* but I was so much in love that he failed. I flew to Zurich, met her parents, and liked them so much, they were not against Trudy converting and gave me their blessing. I then organised for Trudy to have work in London and somewhere to stay, whilst we made our plans.

I was invited and voted to join the board of directors of Jacey Cinemas Ltd. *(I was 27 years old)*, as well as a few other cinema companies that Grandpa and Dad controlled. From then on life was even better.

One memorable evening happened, because I had taken Trudy for a special meal *(I forget what the occasion was)* at the Hilton in Park Lane, where we had duck and orange for the main course. We were both dressed smartly and on leaving the restaurant *(on one of the higher floors)* I noticed lots of people going into another room, where each of them was handed a glass of Champagne at the door.

So, I told Trudy to pretend she belongs there, and we will try to gate-crash the party. No one stopped us or challenged us, and we had plenty of Champagne and food offered to us.

We did not know anyone there but found out it was a party for Sammy Davis junior and generally people were very friendly.

Later before we left, Sammy Davis junior came to talk to us, obviously having no idea who we were, but he seemed pleased to see us.

Religious Problems

There were so many difficulties for us, because of religious problems once we had agreed to get married.

But rather than describe this trying period, at that time to marry a non-Jew was considered terrible *(anyone marrying-out would be ostracised)* and my Grandpa Joe was highly respected *(All the stained-glass windows in Singers Hill Synagogue are there thanks to him and there are several plaques in his honour. He was also a founder of a Jewish Masonic Lodge).*

But as my Grandparents and my uncle were totally against such a marriage, I will just say we only succeeded as Trudy, after a lot of studying and help from Reverend Brookes, that involved us in eventually going to Israel, for some months, until finally Trudy was converted in Jerusalem.

Now Jewish in Israel

Nicosia Cyprus

We flew together to Nicosia, before coming home and had a few days there to celebrate, as we now considered ourselves engaged. A funny incident happened on that trip, as I realised our luggage was overweight, I suggested we look out for someone that was travelling light *(with little luggage)* before checking in, to see if we can persuade him, or her, to book in with us all together, this way we could split the weight allowance between us all *(in those days there was nothing like all the security involved now).*

Luckily soon after we arrived at Tel Aviv airport, I saw a smart man on his own with just a briefcase, so I got chatting and asked him, he was charming and agreed, so we did not have to pay any extra. But this meant we would all be sitting together; we did not mind that as we both liked him.

During the short flight in conversation, he invited us for an evening with him, so that he could show us around and have a meal, as he realised, we had never been before. Eventually, I asked him what he did in Nicosia. He then told us that he was the air traffic controller at Nicosia airport! At first, we thought he was joking, but he was not! We did have an enjoyable evening with him, so strange how such things happen sometimes.

We married in 1969 when I was 29 years old. My parents helped us, as they had both become very fond of Trudy and after still having problems with Singers Hill Synagogue, who having accepted Trudy as a fully paid-up member, then told me we still could not get married there, as being a Cohen I was not allowed to marry a proselyte.

We then resigned from this Synagogue and had to join the Liberal one, where they agreed to marry us once we had both been members for six months and learnt about the differences between the two Synagogues. At last, our wedding took place, and we had a lovely reception at Mum and Dad's, thankfully the weather had improved after so much rain the week before, the sun came out and the roses bloomed.

But my Grandparents did not come, nor did Uncle Stanley and Shula. Thank goodness Grandma and Grandpa did accept us, once Michelle arrived, but for many more years Stanley and Shula's side of the family remained rather unfriendly.

Our honeymoon was in Rhodes, and it was a lovely hotel, we were given the bridal suite but on our first night our bed collapsed! We called reception and in no time the one leg was fixed properly, it was a prank set up by the hotel. It happened the moment we both got in, but funny how such things stay in one's memory!

Honeymoon in Rhodes

Despite all that was said about mixed marriages *(meaning different religious beliefs)* unlike so many of my Jewish friends, which ended up divorced, even having married Jewish girls, we have had a wonderful marriage and not long ago celebrated our Golden Wedding Anniversary.

Also, we have not restricted ourselves to having only Jewish friends and have found many close

friends with other beliefs. My view is that it is the type of person that matters, so much more, than how religious they might be!

Paul Morby

Paul Morby, a BBC TV producer, had contacted me after I had won the London Salon Trophy and we first met during my exhibition at the Midlands Art Centre. He was an enthusiastic photographer and so impressed with my photography. Having a common interest, we soon became good friends, so much so, that he did all our wedding photography.

Paul is a great character always very amusing and charming. I was so delighted when he agreed to do our wedding photography. I later learnt that he had been most concerned, being aware of my own expertise, but I was also told that he was also proud to have been invited to do it.

He need not have worried, as he did an excellent job and provided us with a wonderful record and some beautiful studies.

I have kept an amusing letter from Paul, after he had seen the electric plugs in Woodbourne Rd. Apparently, they were almost unique, and he was not able to obtain any for his lighting, so he asked me to prepare some extension cables that he would be able to connect to, but in such a funny way. He signed it "I salute you in Pernod, Paul."

Returning to Hamilton Avenue

We had been looking for a house, for quite some time, before we found 62 Hamilton Avenue, we had spent our first years of marriage living in a 'Woodbourne' flat in Augustus Road *(the name Woodbourne was confusing as Woodbourne Road becomes Augustus Road, after the Westfield Road crossing)* here we were very close to Mum and Dad. We continued living there for a further 9 months, having bought sixty-two, whilst we carried out major structural improvements and finally, we moved in 1972. Strange in one way, because before Mum and Dad moved into Grandpa's house in Woodbourne Road, they had lived in Hamilton Avenue at number 71, on the other side of the road, not far from 62 and I had lived there until I was about five years old. It was always considered one of the nicest roads in Harborne.

The House Built by Joseph Cohen in Woodbourne Rd

I worked out all the structural alterations myself and created plans of how we visualised it all for the builders to use and Trudy dealt with all the decor. However, we really worked it all out together and were a good team!

The biggest job was creating our kitchen and dining area, as not only was the kitchen in an awful state, but that side of the ground floor consisted of the hall extending into that area with a door to the small kitchen and another door opposite into what was a study. Between the study and the kitchen *(both rooms had large chimney breasts)*, behind the hall, was a walk-in larder. The dining room was across the main hall at the front of the house, quite a long way from the kitchen, which was on the other side of the hall, at the back of the house.

Our scheme was to open all the kitchen side of the house up and remove the chimneys and fireplaces (*required very large steel girders*). The hall would then no longer extend into this area, instead just one door would lead into this open plan space that would consist only of the kitchen and a dining room. The original dining room became our television living room, and the larger lounge would remain for entertaining.

This was not all, because we built in part of what was an outside yard with brick outhouses to form a laundry beyond the kitchen. We also decided the master bedroom was far too large and so we took some of the space away to form a second bathroom.

Lastly, we moved the boiler out of the kitchen and installed a new one, in our new laundry area, as well as installing central heating throughout the house. So, for several months our house looked horrendous, but we never regretted any of our alterations and lived very happily there for some 30 years.

Our Children

We have two delightful children Michelle and Jason and we brought them up in a Jewish environment, we kept the festivals and they had a Bar Mitzvah and a Bat Mitzvah, but we were not orthodox, although they both went to the Jewish King David School for their earliest years.

They have married and made us Grandparents but neither found Jewish partners. Unfortunately, Michelle married far too soon and there was nothing we could do to stop her. We gained a Grand-daughter Melissa, however Michelle's marriage eventually ended with a nasty divorce. Since then, she has found a partner *(also with the name Jason)* and now seems to be happier.

Our son Jason married Philippa much later and so we now have two Grandsons too, Zach and Jacob. I do wonder what sort of lives all our grandchildren are going to have. But this is not going to be about our family, this is mainly about our own experiences, our friends, and my business ventures.

Trudy Worked as a Model

Trudy worked at various times as a fashion model. Through agencies she did some fashion shows, appeared on various packaging for Boots baby products, M.E.B. sales literature and was featured in a TV commercial for the Bullring Shopping Centre that was frequently repeated over a two-year period.

Trudy also did some in-store promotions work for cosmetics and perfumes at Boots in New Street, Birmingham. In addition, Trudy was selected to do translating at the N.E.C. for Gullick Dobson.

Publishing 'In Search of Netsuke & Inro'

I helped plan the publishing of Dad's book 'In Search of Netsuke & Inro' in 1974, especially the photography. In those days colour printing was expensive and there were 370 items to include.

I made several tests of group shots before deciding on how many colour pages would be needed. We spent many hours in our spare time mostly at weekends planning what should be near what. Because so many netsuke were in each shot, we decided that we would have to use a 10" x 8" plate camera to obtain sufficient detail of each netsuke on the printed page. Once everything was planned, we hired a photographer, and I positioned every piece for each photograph using my test shots that Dad had approved as a reference.

This was time consuming as every netsuke needed to be positioned and stuck in place with blue tac to show the best view of it. If only we had been able to use digital images, it would have been so much easier. But this was my first experience of professional product photography, and I learned a lot about plate cameras and lighting, it was fascinating.

What is strange is that once published it proved difficult to obtain sales, priced at £12.50, when most other specialised books on Netsuke were more expensive, we sadly did not achieve many sales. I do not know what happened to the remaining unsold stock, but I remember that Dad had found someone, I think in Guernsey that advertised to purchase unsold books - no doubt at a very low price, and I believe that was what happened. I do wonder what became of them all after that.

Many years later I have seen second-hand book sellers, offering Dad's book as a rare edition, for over £40 each, a couple were priced at £70!

Friends Come & Go, Then Come Back

Having got married and had our children, we soon realised that we had lost touch with most of our London friends, this was really because before I had always been the one to make the effort to organise how and where we would meet up. Sadly, once I had stopped doing this, no one made contact, I think this happens because once married and with children on the way, especially if not very near to each other, we all end up with so little free time.

However, most of our friends have remained friends for many years. Strange though how old friends, having had no contact for some 50 years, suddenly came back into our lives.

For example, Ronnie Hendon heard my voice in a restaurant, in San Pedro near Marbella and came rushing over to greet me, like us he too had an apartment and so we kept in touch again from then on.

Through Facebook my old school best friends Bob Herrick and David Fine suddenly got in touch, as did Martin Stern, this was more than welcome, and we hope to meet up again soon. Meanwhile we have had some video calls together using WhatsApp, all free and rather amazing to us.

We were invited to join a superb new club in Birmingham 'The Albany Club' six months before it opened, this was a very up-market sports club that consisted of; 4 squash courts, a swimming pool, sauna, very smart changing areas, a restaurant, bar, and a dance floor. We loved it and remained members for several years, going at least once a week till the late hours. This was where we learned to play squash and we got to know a lot of the members.

One incredibly special new friend, who became remarkably close for so many years, was Parvis Moayedi *(an Iranian, he later changed his name to Paris).* We first met him in this squash club. More about him will follow.

Another circle of friends came about from our love of dancing Salsa, we soon became members of 'Latin Motion' and had such a lot of fun times with them.

Keen Collectors

Trudy and I are both collectors *(we hate selling or throwing anything away)* we started collecting Edwardian satinwood furniture and our large lounge in Hamilton Avenue, bit by bit, was completely furnished with fine satinwood pieces.

Over time we have also had a collection of Jensen cars and various Asian antiques.

Classic Jensen Cars

We also got involved with Jensen classic cars, having bought a CV8 *(the fastest four-seater car in the world at the time)* to replace our MGB. The CV8 was featured on TV as the car for 'The Baron' and Sean Connery *(star of the first James Bond films)* had bought a CV8 for himself.

Eventually we had 8 Jensen 541S cars and two CV8's. We joined the Jensen club and successfully entered their concours events. We were so impressed with these fibre glass, hand-built cars which we believed were really undervalued.

Particularly the 541S, had a poor reputation, as being rather slow, but this was due to all the reviews being based on the automatic version. What was not well known is that twenty-two were made with a Moss manual gearbox and these were fast!

So, we decided to buy all the second-hand manual drive ones we could find, thinking we would promote them ourselves. Unfortunately, after many years they still failed to increase by anything like as much as certain other classics. When we emigrated, we decided to sell them, and they were all except one *(that we had given to our son)* sold to a Mr Jensen in Denmark *(not related to the Jensen brothers)*.

Part of Our Jensen Collection

Our very special CV8 was sold a bit later together with my registration number '1 JON' to someone in the Midlands.

The registration number '1JON' was an amazing gift for my 21st birthday from my Aunty Rosemary Cohen, she was very friendly with the man controlling new car registrations in Birmingham, and it was through him that she arranged for this number to be issued for my new MGB car.

After that I always retained it right through until we emigrated, sometimes it was on our Jensen 541S and at other times on our Jensen CV8

Asian Antiques

We started collecting Japanese lacquer and netsuke, mainly influenced by my father, but one day, we discovered Chinese snuff bottles *(mostly stone bottles)* and later we formed a collection of Chinese jade pendants. Fine pendants were far harder to find than fine snuff bottles, but most dealers knew we were the most likely buyers and over several years we created an exciting collection. We were told that no one knew of anyone else collecting them at the time, and it was our collection, when exhibited by Robert Hall, which caused even professionals to start collecting them.

Trudy had been the manageress of a Zurich jewellery shop and had studied various stones *(not only gemstones)* and so she was much more interested in these Chinese antiques. We continued buying throughout several years, instead of putting funds into pension schemes, now with hindsight I am so glad we did.

Having had success with the 'PhotoBackings' CD-Rom *(more details later)* I decided to make another one of our collections simply titled 'The Cohen Collection.' We sold one piece having been retired for about 20 years that Richard Marchant sold for us at an incredible price, which meant the whole collection had no longer cost us anything!

Because of these interests we got to know Jensen owners, various antique dealers, and auctioneers some of whom became good friends.

Celebration Weekend at Home

So many friends as well as relatives came to us for Jason's Bar Mitzvah, Michelle's Bat Mitzvah, my Parents Golden Wedding, and our 20th Wedding Anniversary party.

Jason's Bar Mitzvah

We organised a large marquee in our garden and threw a two-day party with live music and kosher food. We could not rely on the weather, but we were lucky it turned out nice.

My Parents Betty and George's Golden Wedding

Thank goodness it all went well, the only panic was over the food, unfortunately the couple that had done some excellent food for other events, were not performing as well as we had hoped, because of a sudden serious illness.

John & Francoise Samuels from London with Family

Such a pity because the food was disappointing, our kitchen was left in such a mess, and we had quite a job to clean it ourselves. Otherwise, everyone had a very good time.

A Tempting Offer

We went with Michelle and Jason to California one year to visit my sister Rayner and her husband Jerry Needleman. They have a lovely home at a wonderful high location in Sausalito with a view of San Francisco over the Bay.

Whilst we were together, we all went to a holiday camp at the University of Santa Barbara just for a week and because Trudy and I were members of 'The International Chinese Snuff Bottle Society' our friend Bob Hall *(a well-known Snuff Bottle Dealer)* arranged for us to be invited to Neal Hunter's home that happened to be near to where we would be staying.

They were such a lovely couple, and we had such an amazing time with them one evening, when they showed us their own fabulous collection - what a treat that was!

We went into San Francisco a few times and we paid a visit to 'Sam Bernstein & Co.' the famous jade dealer shop in the Fairmont Hotel. Where we met Mr and Mrs Ashkenazie and had a very interesting time studying their jades, when in conversation we were surprised to learn that they were interested in buying a Jensen CV8, but even more surprising *(having seen our collection)*, they told me they would really like someone like me, to act as a buyer for them in Europe!

They asked if we would ever like to live in San Francisco? We had loved spending time there and this sounded tempting, I said I would have to think about it. However, nothing further ever came from this discussion.

A Big Change About to Happen

The first difficulties that arose were that the larger cinema circuits started competing with us for the same specialised continental films. They were aware of our success and unfortunately, they had far stronger booking power.

All this at a time when videos were first introduced causing the cinema takings to go down.

Also, for the few remaining cartoon and comedy shows the main distributors were persuaded to sell the rights to television and were withdrawing our supply.

The End of The Jacey Group of Companies

This was when my grandfather had sadly passed away and my father and my uncle decided they wanted to retire. We had a directors meeting, and as most of our cinemas were now on short leases and the new rates demanded to renew were far too high for us to continue to operate at a profit, we decided to sell, whilst we could and to put the companies into voluntary liquidation.

Before taking this decision, we had diversified and tried some other business ventures.

Such as: -

The conversion of our cinema at Marble Arch into a high-class shopping centre, consisting of antique shops, art and craft galleries and a coffee bar.

The conversion of our cinema in the Strand, London into the first stamp collecting centre, full of independent stamp dealers who paid a rent for their units.

JACEY GALLERIES

OXFORD STREET MARBLE ARCH LONDON W.1. Tel. 01-629 6396

The Opening of the Jacey Galleries Marble Arch

JACEY stamps

JACEY GROUP OF COMPANIES SOMERSET HOUSE 31 TEMPLE STREET BIRMINGHAM B2 5DP Telephone 021-643 2941

The purchase of the Pathlow farm and creation of a riding school and centre at Wilmcote, near Stratford upon Avon.

It was through the purchase of Pathlow Farm that we got to know Michael Morris as he owned Edstone Hall a large estate nearby. He was an extraordinary man who lived an amazing lifestyle - everything was lavish and extravagant. He and Gloria were very entertaining socially, they had owned their own jet plane and yacht and they were really friends of my parents.

But on one occasion he invited me to his home in Hampstead, as he had a fabulous new camera outfit and he wanted a range of exclusive chocolates photographing, as they were opening a London shop to retail 'Godiva Chocolates'. I did not have my studio at that time, but what amazed me was the fact that he had all this expensive 35mm camera, lenses, and flash guns, yet had not even a basic knowledge of how to use it.

I could go into more detail about the Jacey Group, but this would then become an awfully long story *(but much can be seen on my website)*.

The truth is that all these ventures made a profit, but not enough to justify extending the leases.

So, the decision was taken to sell, and we quite quickly sold everything, enabling all the family shareholders to be paid their share.

Another Unexpected Surprise

My parents surprised us when they decided to sell Woodbourne Road *(the House my grandfather had built)* where Rayner and I grew up, after 71 Hamilton Avenue, as it was far too big for just the two of them, Rayner and I both had our own children, *(my sister was married and living in Sausalito, California)* and Trudy and I were settled living in Birmingham.

But the bigger surprise was when they told us, that they then preferred to emigrate to live in Marbella. They had found a fabulous, larger apartment in La Alcazaba, where for many years we had all been for holidays, as they had owned a nice holiday apartment in this beautiful development. At the time we had no idea that one day we would have a home there too.

My Dilemma

My share was a nice lump sum from the Jacey Group, but not enough to live on for long without continuing to earn a living. Suddenly, for the first time, I was out of work aged over forty and not sure what to do!

I felt rather panicky and worried as this was the time of a rather bad recession, which had hit the UK, Michelle and Jason were only 10 and 8 at this time. But I would never have guessed how I would end up with so many different business hats!

New Ventures

I was often involved in two, or even three things at once, because times were hard and there were even worse recessions in 1990 and 2008 *(when unemployment and manufacturing was hit badly).* Answering the phone became difficult as I was not always sure which business was appropriate. To explain I had a photographic studio, I was selling insurance, publishing CD-ROMs, whilst running a sunbed business, all at the same time!

Thinking about all I have done, although I never made any big money *(certainly nothing like my friend Paris Moayedi's millions)*, I did manage to provide enough for us to continue with a good lifestyle and to enjoy a high standard of living.

Some of My Own Handworks

I did not make many things, but I took some classes in wood carving and metal work, and I carved a couple of my own original style of netsuke.

One of them was carved out of a small piece of ebony wood, that I used to create a stylised bat, having seen an ivory stylised owl that sold in auction for over £10,000. The other one was of a horse in mahogany wood, but it was not particularly good.

I also made out of a walnut shell, a tiny lacquer box with a ladybird on the lid, just for fun.

Ebony Netsuke I Made.

Jewellery

Later, I made an ebony ring for Trudy, I also managed to make a gold ring at the metal class, with a mounted hair crystal stone, that Trudy had kept, just as a loose stone for many years.

Both of these rings were actually worn by Trudy, on quite a number of occasions, so they could not have been too bad! But I feel proud that Trudy still has the gold ring and even wears it now and then.

Hair Crystal Gold Ring Made by JNC.

Commercial Photography

I began by starting 'Creative Photography' as a commercial and portrait photographer and bought a 6cm x 6cm camera, as well as a plate camera, determined not to do weddings. I concentrated on being known for advertising work and continued with this till I retired.

To begin with I was simply using my home address, but later I was able to rent some space in a squash club and quite often during the day some courts were not used, and I could use one as a studio too. Much more can be seen on my website (*Design Special Effect Studio and Commercial Photography*).

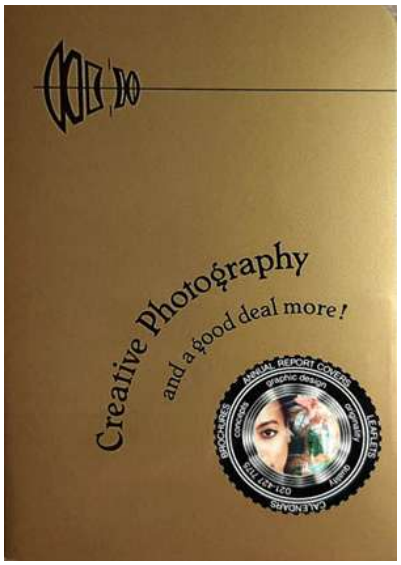
It was very slow at first, as there were plenty of established photographers about, but gradually I

obtained more regular clients and I rented a much larger studio in the Jewellery Quarter, trading as 'Actuality PhotoDigital' by then I was doing more product photography and I took on designing logos, the printing of brochures and leaflets for my clients.

I had as clients; Jeff Lewis Kitchen Interior designers, Steel Stockholders, Saville Gordon Group, Kidderminster Carpets and Lucas Car Parts, apart from a few Jewellery manufacturers.

My biggest difficulties were as quick as I obtained new clients, due to the worst recession anyone could remember, I just as quickly lost other clients as one after another were wiped out - bankrupt! Worst still some of them owing me money!

I also got involved with Kenmore producing concepts for the glass 'Worktop Savers' they made, creating the photographs that became the main part of the product as well as designing and printing all their literature and packaging.



One of the biggest problems I had, was that I soon became known as the photographer that could do special effects and ended up having lots of work that most other photographers did not want or were unable to do. This certainly gave me some headaches at times, but all my clients were more than happy with what I did for them! As an example, Willard Wigan *(a Jamaican gentle giant)* came to see me, he had tried without any success to have his incredibly tiny sculptures photographed for promotional purposes and was told to come and see me. Just to see them one needed a strong magnifier *(more about this later)*.

The other difficulty I came across was that most clients waited till the very last minute, before giving me the order to proceed and then expected everything to be done, to meet almost impossible deadlines!

I took on all the photography for Moulinex Swan Brand *(their factory was just a few minutes' walk away)* they were pleased with what I did for them and soon were giving me more and more products to photograph, so many that I found it hard to keep my other clients happy too! This seemed good for me, but they then kept making me wait longer and longer for payment, till eventually having had to work much longer hours and pay for all the large format film and processing costs, not to mention the time spent chasing the payments.

This could not be allowed to continue and in the end, I had to take them to court, as although they were using my photographs, they were delaying payment for over 6 months!

I was awarded the costs and got all that was owed, but then I knew I would never do any more work for them.

I also planned, designed, and produced a TV commercial for Jacques Vert Fashion, it was quite long *(30 seconds)* and made up of still photographs, fading in one after another, to show the complete range. Trudy and her friend Sue were the models. I was surprised how often it was repeated over about a month and sometimes at peak times too. It was a big advertising success but caused awful problems for my client the retailer Glarry's, as they were let down with the deliveries and lost so many sales.

No Secretary or Help

After Jacey cinemas, although I did my best, it was difficult to maintain the good quality lifestyle that we had become accustomed to. The recession had caused many, well established small businesses, to go bankrupt and no matter what I did, I never earned enough on a regular basis to consider employing anyone.

I had to deal with; answering the phone, write and post every letter, or parcel, make payments, send invoices, do the bookkeeping, VAT returns, and follow up any unpaid invoices. All this admin. in addition to doing the work that I was being paid to do.

Too many times I had to put in long hours, but at least I was my own boss. More importantly, because of so many different interests, we got to know some very interesting people *(most were very successful in what they did)* and we have been very lucky to count some of them as good friends.

Andrew Goldsmith

Andrew Goldsmith was one of our London circles of friends, and his family business was the most famous eyewear manufacturer 'Oliver Goldsmith Eyewear', every top fashion magazine featured their models wearing his glasses. They also made unique glasses for lots of well know personalities.

I created an image for them that they used *(they wanted an unusual eye-catching photograph)* and as a thank you, in addition to paying me, Andrew made me special unique sunglasses. They were aluminium with holes in the sides and these related so well to our Jensen CV8 steering wheel. I loved them and kept them for many years. I was so upset later when our car was stolen, because after a few days we luckily got our car back, but my sunglasses were missing and never found, so they had gone for ever!

Dr. Willard Wigan MBE

The difficulty soon became apparent, as his sculptures were so minute *(a strong magnifying glass was needed to see them!)* one of them was inside the eye of a small needle! Using a micro lens meant getting very close, but then it blocked the lighting. I found a way by using a small mirror to reflect more light from the side of the lens. I was amazed to learn that he carved everything by hand without even using a magnifier.

Unfortunately, he was unknown then and could not afford to pay me, but I liked him and so did my best and only charged him a minimum amount. About a week later, he came to see me and gave me a wooden toothpick, having met Trudy he had carved about 1cm of it as a nude sculpture of Trudy.

Trudy had not posed for him in the nude, but it was a very fine carving and the proportions looked right too. This he explained was a gift to thank me and we have it on display at our home.

Since those days he had lots of exhibitions, won awards, and is now well known.

Malcolm Lewin

One day I received a call from Malcolm asking if he could come and talk to me about photography, we knew of each other, as he was a teacher at West House School where our son Jason had been. When we met at my studio, he explained that he had resigned and concluded that he would rather clean the streets, than continue in the teaching profession.

As he was keen on photography and I was the only photographer he knew of, he wondered if I would be prepared to help him and give him some guidance.

Only too aware of all the problems I was having, I did my best to put him off the idea. But it soon became obvious, that whatever I said, he was determined to have a go.

His only experience was that he had been doing all the school photography and he had learned how to control people with authority. What he wanted to do was PR work, weddings, and portraits, these were the areas I wanted to avoid, with the only exception of the portraits that I always enjoy doing.

He was willing to learn and having had a look at his photography *(he had with him a selection of what he considered his best pictures)* I quickly realised that he did not know much about lighting.

I decided that the best way to help him, was for him to see how I set up my studio for portraits, which he did, as I had a portrait session the next day. This way I was able to demonstrate the effects of lighting and how to control the shadows, at the same time my thoughts on posing and composition and how important it was to make sure the sitter was at ease.

Malcolm was a really nice fellow and reliable, so I agreed to send any of my clients enquiries for Wedding, or PR photography to him, on the understanding that if any of his contacts needed product shots, or literature he would send them to me. In such cases having completed the work, we would pay an introduction fee. He was delighted.

I also let him use my studio if needed and helped him with his literature, prices, and sales techniques. I did not benefit from any introductions from him, but I knew it was a hard time to get through for everyone. He did do some weddings and I could see that he did them well, so we asked him to do our daughter's wedding which he did nicely, without charging us *(he explained that it was the least he could do in return for all my help)*. Since then, Malcolm has been doing well and I know he enjoys his business.

What later was invaluable for me, is that whenever I was away, I could rely on Malcolm to deal with all messages and post at the studio, keeping me informed. This way I could keep my photography business, whilst involved with selling insurance, or going to the University courses.

Malcolm also helped in several ways with our Jewellery redevelopment project. So, in the end I was very grateful to him.

Attending University

Having left school as soon as I could, never thinking I would ever attend any University, it is strange how such unexpected things happen. I did attend two courses, by invitation that both fascinated me. The first was all due to Paul Morby, who after leaving the BBC became head of TV, Film, Video Production and Photography at the Edgbaston Birmingham University.

Paul invited me to 'sit in' for two terms and as I had very little work coming in at that time, I decided it was worth doing. I found it very interesting, especially to have hands on experience with all the superb equipment they have there.

Another very interesting time was spent at the University of Central England. Again, by invitation! Tim Harris although unknown to me, had been to some of my exhibitions.

I was very intrigued about the new digital photography I had heard about, and I wanted to find out more about the possibilities. I think it was Paul who told me to contact Tim.

I did eventually, it was difficult as he travelled extensively, but once we met, I was surprised to learn that he knew of me. I was soon invited to spend some time with him on Campus. Again, I was amazed at the equipment they had there. Tim was the head of the department and involved with Kodak on research into digital systems. I ended up spending several days with him, explaining to me all that was new and about Photoshop. This was when I first learnt too about the PhotoCD product that was soon to be released.

Neighbourhood Watch

I was involved in the formation of the Neighbourhood Watch Committee for two of the most sort after roads in Harborne; Fitzroy Avenue and Hamilton Avenue, consisting of nearly 200 houses. I was elected and served as the Chairman for a couple of years, and we had a good relationship with the local police, we were very successful, as we reduced robberies dramatically and the other benefit was that we enjoyed meeting each other. Before this, we had only known our closest neighbours, since most of us lived in large houses where everyone simply drove in and out without meeting each other.

Selling Insurance

But when times were really hard, I joined Sun Alliance selling insurance for a while *(on the basis that I would only work part time)* this was not something that I was keen to do, but I needed to find a way of saving my studio, whilst times were so hard. There had been talk about the fact that lots of businesses had started, or had come to the jewellery quarter, which were not jewellery related.

There was an active business club in the area, which did not want any members that were not relevant to the jewellery trade, so, to help build up more clients, I started *(with a few others)* 'The Jewellery Quarter Business Club' and we soon had 450 members *(I designed the logo)*.

My insurance manager soon realised I did not like 'cold calling' so he let me off the hour's others spent, just phoning people hoping they would eventually get an appointment or having to walk the streets trying to find someone that would be interested.

He agreed to my suggested approach for finding clients, by using this business club and agreed that the Jewellery Quarter *(as I was based there)* would be my area.

On one occasion I was the fourth highest salesman in the UK also I was the very first salesman to sell a new product - the Capital Protector Bond. Having studied all about it, I decided to take a chance and talk to our neighbour, who had never been very friendly, but I contacted him and explained quite honestly, that I had been trained about inheritance tax and would like to present an idea to someone I did not know well, before speaking to people that I did.

I pointed out that I would appreciate it, if he would tell me what he thought of my presentation, all of course without any obligation. Not only did he congratulate me for making the whole problem simple to understand, but he indeed became my first customer, such a big one that I was the top selling insurance agent in the country for that month.

This neighbour, David Wood was to prove to be very important to me later too! Soon after this I was selected as one of only seventeen people throughout the UK to go on a special corporate course, to deal with companies rather than individuals.

None of this was easy, as there was no salary only commission, but the commission fees were very good. It certainly helped to save my business *(the only reason I had to leave, was because of a new manager who simply would not tolerate anyone working part time!)* so just after a year with them, I then had one hat less!

During this time so many businesses had gone bankrupt, times had been so hard, but thanks to Sun Alliance I had overcome my fear of computers and gained a basic knowledge of how to use them, I had also learned through other courses I went on during this period how to use 'Photoshop' and how to create websites. My son Jason also was a big help to me, overcoming numerous computer problems.

In addition I gained some new clients for my studio, and I became a trusted friend of David Wood, even though he was many years older than me *(I subsequently learned that he held a very senior position within the Masonic movement).*

Quite extraordinary, how much I gained by joining Sun Alliance, because I was very reluctant to do this at first!

Publishing

I decided to publish a book about my 'Special Effect' photography, as I had been approached by a Hong Kong book publisher, who could publish the numerous colour photographs needed, at a very reasonable price, for far less than was possible in the UK and as he was very enthusiastic, we agreed a favourable 'Royalty' basis.

This failed to come about, after I had done such a lot of work planning, photographing, and writing all the text for what I titled 'The Magic Lantern', I learned that this publisher went bankrupt, just before I had completed it all!

Dunns Imaging

Dunns Imaging in Cradley Heath was the lab I had used for many years, and they were the first in the UK to install the Kodak equipment to produce the then new PhotoCD. It was a very cheap way of making digital images from film *(that Tim Harris had described)*, so I was able to quickly learn of the advantages and the problems it offered.

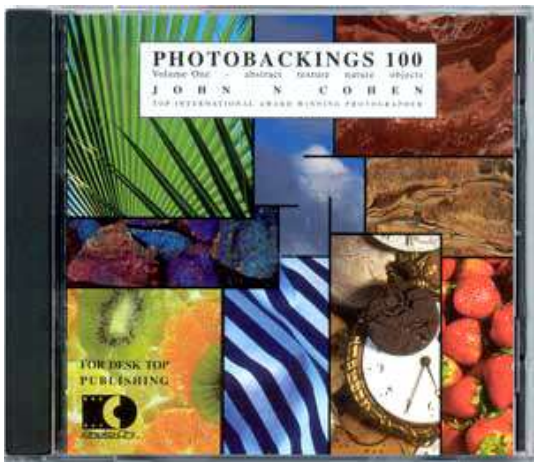
Originally the Kodak sales drive was for amateur photographers to enable them to have lots of images saved and they manufactured a small player to put these images on home TV screens, instead of relying on prints. This did not do well, and the quality was not that good. They then changed the system to enable superb quality large digital images to be stored at a low cost and aimed this at the professional market. They had a problem because the PhotoCD had already earned a poor reputation, especially as printers had not found that they could achieve the desired prints from the images either.

I spent a lot of time working with a printer, who was prepared to experiment with Dunns to get good quality prints from this new PhotoCD and we succeeded, my method was to take a photograph of a colour printing test chart, I had it scanned on to the PhotoCD which the printer then was soon able to print correctly. Later Kodak added some software that made colour balance and printing much more reliable.

There was a great advantage because once an image was on the PhotoCD it could be used any number of times, any size, without ever having any scanning costs again. For my photography it opened up, a big advantage for product shots, as I could photograph items individually and then with Photoshop create a better group shot, for little extra cost.

The Kodak PhotoCD & Actuality PhotoDigital

I was the first person to use the PhotoCD as a sales tool; by having one hundred high quality large background photographs on a PhotoCD, Dunns then made a master CD-ROM of just the largest images and these I had mass produced to sell. The CD-ROM 'PhotoBackings 100' had 100 copyright free photographs, ready for immediate use, priced at 175 pounds plus VAT representing quite a bargain, since photo libraries charged anything from 100 to 600 pounds for each copyright free photograph.



This was a product for any designer, it was practical to use even small parts of an image, plus the easy option to alter the colour balance, and best of all my pictures would not date.

I was able to produce each disc for a cost of twenty pounds by ordering five hundred copies and after that each would only cost 2.50 pounds.

I redesigned all my literature and decided to trade under 'Actuality PhotoDigital'. So once again as a photo library distributor I had yet another hat!

High resolution digital photographs on Photo CD
ACTUALITY *Photo Digital*
Studio 211B
120 Vyse Street
The Jewellery Quarter Birmingham B18 6NF UK
TELEPHONE or FAX: 0121-233 0055
V.A.T. Registration number: 655 0155 52
http://www.custard.co.uk/jncohen/

Dunns were very impressed, and they took on distribution of it too! I was really honoured when later they chose me to do some promotional pictures for them, as a top well-established film processing place, they had numerous other professional photographers as clients, yet they came to me.

I did a deal with a Chinese distributor he paid me up-front 1,000 pounds plus an agreed royalty payment of one pound for each book sold, but I did not think I would ever see any royalty payments! This was for permission to publish 'PhotoBackings 100' in print, all the background images were printed A3 size as high-definition prints, in a hardbound cover for the Chinese market.

Apparently, most of the Chinese were not able to use CD-ROMs. I duly received a few complimentary copies and after a year, to my surprise, he sent me 1,500 pounds more as Royalty fees.

The Cohen Collection

The Cohen Collection CD-Rom

I then decided that I could also publish our collection 'The Cohen Collection' of Asian antiques on a CD-ROM, to do this I set about persuading Neil K. Davey of Sothebys *(I knew Neil well and we agreed a*

fee) to provide me with catalogue style descriptions of each Japanese piece and he also kindly wrote an introduction for the Japanese part of the collection too.

Once completed he told me that if we were to let him sell our antiques at Sothebys, he would not charge us!

Having obtained everything from Neil I then asked Bob Hall to do the same for the Chinese collection and he did so and wrote an introduction for the Chinese part, without any charge. Lastly, I asked other dealers we knew if they would like to participate by writing about our collection and I ended up with some nice articles all provided free of charge.

My Father had published his collection of Netsuke & Inro in book form and it was expensive in those days to publish in colour. So, I knew my publication in a CD-ROM form would cost a lot less. My motivation was that if ever we wanted to sell any of our collections, I knew that any published items in auctions, always sold for far more than had they not been published.

I am now so glad I did go ahead, because now provenance has become so important. 'The Cohen Collection' CD did not sell very well, but at least I did do more than recover all the costs involved.

Building and Designing a Website

I got to know a website design team within the 'Custard Factory' this was a new development in Digbeth that quickly became a centre for creative and digital designers. So, for a set fee they made my first website, and I was able to control the look of it.

The trouble was that it was listed under 'The Custard Factory' name. I did not know enough about it all at that time, so when they disappeared so did my website!

I really needed to have an Internet presence for my studio and so I set about building my own website.

I had been fascinated with the potential of the Internet as it was improving dramatically once the search engines were created. The biggest problem was how to be found with millions of new websites constantly being added.

So rightly, or wrongly unlike all the others, where the website is devoted to only one subject, I decided to make mine show all my interests. This way if found for 'Jensen classic cars' for example, the chances are that people will look at some of my other items. So gradually I added everything I could.

I included my Commercial Photography, 'Special Effects' photography called 'The Magic Lantern', 'PhotoBackings 100', 'Jensen Classic Cars', 'The History of Jacey Cinemas, 'The Cohen Collection' of our Asian antiques and more. Later after I retired and we were living in Marbella and Winterthur I added the 'Painting with Light' limited edition prints section, more about this later. This meant that the search engines had me listed for quite a lot of subjects.

I also made another website for 'The Cohen Collection' but this one requires a payment of only 25 Euros for unlimited access to view the collection *(most auction catalogues cost a lot more than this)* and I now have a good number of collectors and dealers signed up to it from all over the world.

Having completed these websites, I added some articles that I had written for Ezinearticles.com for free publication by other websites providing they included a link back to mine. Most of them have been published in a lot of other websites and always with the links back.

ezinearticles.com/John_Cohen

The only problem, is that since I created my websites so long ago, there have been many changes to the way websites are now written, mainly because of the new mobile smart phones. Websites had to be redesigned to be user friendly on such small screens and a new HTML language was created.

I confess that I have not learnt how to use it and instead I have managed to make some changes that at least seem to make it work on phones. But to change everything is a very big task as I have so many pages.

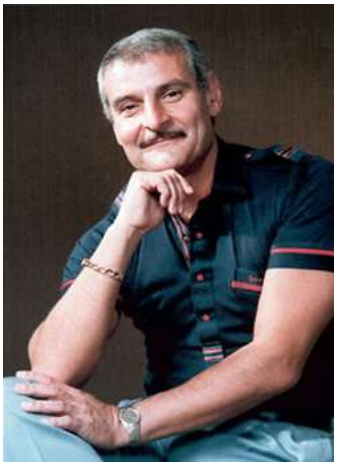
Paris Moayedi – Sun Tan Promotions

Together with our close friend Paris Moayedi *(when young he was a very good-looking Omar Sharif-lookalike),* we formed a partnership and ran a sunbed business, providing sunbeds to various sports clubs. Our scheme was to offer to install superior sunbeds with a coin operated meter free of charge, thus providing the clubs with an added facility, and then to share the takings with the clubs at an agreed percentage *(aiming at about 25% to the club)*.

We then bought several sunbeds *(at a reduced purchase price for quantity)* once we had some clubs signed up for them.

This was successful for a year, or two, but then there was some bad press about a Cancer scare and we quickly sold everything, most of them were sold to the same clubs for nearly our original purchase price!

When we first met Paris, he was a manager in a large construction business, living in a small apartment in Bradford. He had to spend a lot of time in Birmingham where we met him every week, we got to know his wife Jenny and his son and daughter well. He was a larger-than-life character, full of fun and a fondness for Champaigne.



Paris Moayedi

He introduced us to really good Chinese food, even after our little business venture, we remained exceptionally good friends, he seemed to have unlimited expenses that the business paid and he considered us as his best friends and insisted on taking us for expensive meals out, I found it very hard to reciprocate. He became remarkably successful and moved to live in a wonderful large old, thatched roof cottage with a magnificent garden he created.

Family Visit to Paris's Beautiful Home

He set up a company called 'Team' that went bankrupt when he left. He then took over 'Jarvis', a company valued at about four million pounds and with his magic, within two years it was valued at over six hundred million pounds! Paris was also voted 'Entrepreneur of the Year' for the UK.

Every year Paris and I went skiing, using his lovely home in Annecy as our base, from there we drove to a different ski resort every day.

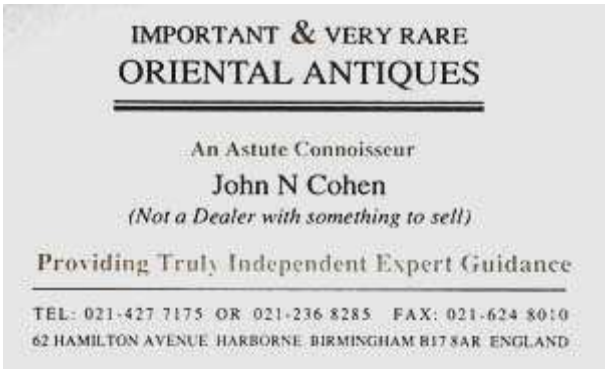
It was great to go skiing on so many different runs every day, and I really enjoyed discovering French ski resorts that I had never heard of before, we were able to check the conditions before deciding on where to go next, it was exhilarating, and we had so many laughs together. Such wonderful times that lasted for many years.

Important & Very Rare Asian Antiques

Showing a Chinese Snuff Bottle

Another venture I tried, was to offer my services to Asian antique collectors, particularly those who having started their collections, reached a stage where they wanted to add a really important piece. My idea was to offer to help select and buy only the finest quality in return for a flat rate fee.

From my point of view this would enable me to keep my hand in. I would enjoy keeping an eye on the market, because it is very frustrating finding the odd, good buy, when one simply is not in a position to buy.



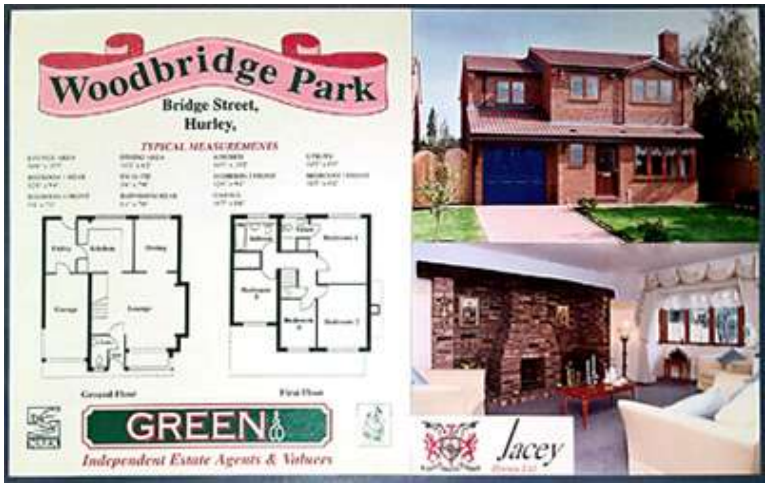
I could *(as a well-known collector)* offer unbiased advice and help them avoid making a costly mistake. So, I formed 'Important & Very Rare Oriental Antiques,' but this did not take off!

All that really happened was local antique dealers kept coming to ask me to value what they had found *(mostly from house clearances)* and because every single time, I had to tell them the item was a worthless modern copy, I did not feel I could charge them.

Edwin Horne & Woodbridge Park

Edwin Horne came to see me asking if I could help him *(Edwin had done a lot of work for my grandfather, he had his own construction company, but ended up bankrupt when he was cheated on a very large project)*.

I agreed to form a new property development company, Jacey Homes Ltd with him. I designed our logo and stationery, then together with my wealthy neighbour Mr Wood, who agreed to finance us for our first project, we built a cul-de-sac road with ten four-bedroom homes.



They were in a good village location close to the motorways, but because of the recession we had great difficulties selling them, even though they were high quality buildings offered at an extremely competitive price.

They did all sell in the end and as each house sold, we split the profit, there was a good profit margin to be shared, but unfortunately Mr Wood passed away, just before the last sale went through.

Jacey
Homes Ltd.

Mrs Wood turned out to be a very different type of person and she reneged on our deal, leaving us without our share due for that last house. Not a very large sum involved, and we were far too busy with our next project to consider starting legal proceedings.

Hong Kong & Phuket

For our 25th wedding anniversary we went to Hong Kong and Phuket, this was an expensive holiday as I decided we should do it in style, I booked us in for a week at the famous Hong Kong hotel 'The Mandarin' and it really was a fabulous hotel.

Luckily, around the same time that I was wondering what to do for our 25th, Bob Hall informed me that one of our snuff bottles, which had an Imperial seal on the base, was suddenly worth what seemed a fortune at the time, even though the general opinion was that the mark had been added much later!

Relaxing in Phuket after a week in Hong Kong

Apparently, there were collectors in Singapore that would buy it and value it as being genuine, so I agreed to sell it. This particular sale realized more than enough to cover our celebration holiday.

Hong Kong was still British then and we enjoyed so many aspects there, the jade market was full of fakes but never-the-less fascinating, we had clothes made-to-measure for us, the shop was full of such beautiful high-quality fabrics that it was hard to make our choice, and there were some interesting antique shops to visit, in addition to the usual sights to see.

We were invited to Hugh Moss's home while we were there *(he had been the leading snuff bottle dealer in London, but was living in Hong Kong)*, he had published so many books on snuff bottles and I had bought some bottles at his London gallery, where I first met Bob Hall, who was working there.

Jewellery Quarter Development

Lastly, we gradually purchased what was quite a large development site *(consisting of old factory buildings)* in The Jewellery Quarter, after I purchased a factory in the middle. A wonderful location on a hill just a few minutes' walk from the centre of Birmingham, but this involved having several investors.

This is still unresolved as our investors turned out to be far too greedy and failed to honour our agreement. Over the years we had purchased eleven properties at a total cost of 2.5 million pounds including all management, lawyers' fees, and planning costs.

The basis of our agreement was that the investors provided the funds, and we negotiated the purchases, organised maintenance, security, and the planning applications that were all charged at cost, the investors did not have to do anything.

Once sold they would all get their funds back first and then we would share the profit.

It took much longer than we thought, because the planning department kept changing their minds and moving the goalposts, in addition we had an added problem of a dangerous professional squatter *(a known criminal with a gang of thugs)* in our largest property.

Our lawyers were unable to get them out for over a year. Stupidly, when we eventually had the opportunity to sell for 7.3 million pounds representing a substantial profit, our investors refused to

accept the sale *(claiming they could get more).* They never did!

We now believe that they had no intention of honouring our contract and instead devoted their time in finding ways of cheating us from our share all from quite early on. The first method was one of them constantly failed to pay their share of the maintenance and planning costs. Causing us some serious cash flow problems.

I specially flew back to Birmingham and arranged a meeting to try to resolve everything and I was really relieved, as we did all come to an agreement on how to proceed. Yet within a day of my return to Spain they had changed their minds! I held three meetings with them, and each time having achieved an agreement before flying back, the same thing happened yet again!

My last attempt was to offer to buy them all out, I was sure we could get the funds, but although my offer would have given them a particularly good profit *(nearly as much as they would have received had they accepted the 7.3 million offer)* but they refused to sell. Since then, I have done my best to forget about it! No more news to date, except there are now lots of large redevelopments going on all around our land and the Jewellery Quarter is now considered a desirable place to live.

After this I decided to let them do whatever they like, as I knew that sometime this area will be redeveloped and my property would have to be bought, so I would wait and let any developer come to me.

Quite soon after they turned down the offer, the property market slumped, and the Investors fell out with us, and we suspect with each other! jncohen.net/current

Retirement and Selling Our House

There were three reasons why Trudy and I decided to sell our home; (1) the value of houses in our road had suddenly increased beyond belief, (2) having 5 bedrooms for just the two of us was far too much, (3) I was ready to retire.

There were a lot of traumas involved, we had so many viewings and thought we had a buyer several times, then at last a deal was done. But our buyer delayed the completion date a few times, making us feel uneasy.

We had found an apartment that we really liked in La Alcazaba, and we knew it would not be available for long. Ideal, as it was close to my parents, but before we could proceed, we had to have sold Hamilton Avenue.

What made the move even more complicated, was that we also planned to buy Trudy's parent's home in Switzerland from Josephine *(Trudy's mother)* where Trudy had grown up. This was to help her, as she was finding the house and garden too much for her to cope with and she wanted to buy a flat, additionally Trudy really wanted to have it.

The price we were getting was sufficient to buy both properties and finally we had a completion date by 1st December 2002. By then unfortunately, the flat we wanted had been sold within 2 days of our seeing it. Needless to say, we were terribly upset!

Strangely, we learnt that the buyer's main interest had been to buy apartments at La Alcazaba, with the sole intention of improving them before selling them on, he had already done this several times. Luckily for us, he found another larger apartment that needed a lot more doing to it, and he preferred to buy that one, so we were able to negotiate the purchase again.

Buying Our Spanish home

The Agent contacted us *(knowing we really wanted it)* to tell us we could have it, for the price we had agreed, and that we could take over from the buyer's solicitor as most of the legal work was completed and this would mean we could have possession far quicker.

We agreed immediately, but our concern then was the question of the timing of the completion of our own sale.

Everything looked good, but we received a call on the day of completion, to say our completion would have to be delayed a further 4 days, as there was a chain involved and the first-time buyer had simply given his solicitor a cheque instead of a banker's draft.

So, the delay was to allow time for that cheque to be cleared. But we had committed ourselves to pay the next day for our own purchase and could not proceed without having the funds. At that time, no sale could be considered certain until the after the completion, and our buyers had worried us earlier about the completion date.

I was so annoyed, I took a chance and told our solicitor to inform our buyer, that if they failed to complete on that day, I would withdraw our house and put it on the market the following Spring. Our solicitor said he thought we would lose the sale, as he believed it was no longer possible to be done on that day.

Trudy and I spent the rest of that morning walking around Puerto Banus feeling rather on edge. By about 2:00pm we decided to have something to eat, Trudy suggested I should check my mobile phone as we had not heard it ring.

To my surprise I found about three missed calls from our solicitor, so I immediately called him. He told me he did not know how, but our buyer had completed! We then had a couple of weeks to leave Birmingham and a few days longer to move into La Alcazaba. The relief was enormous, and I ordered some Cava to celebrate.

We had spent a lot of time planning what possessions should be for Spain and these were transported to arrive about 4 days after we moved in.

All the other items for Switzerland were put into storage.

This was because Josephine had not found a suitable flat and we did not know how long it would be before we could complete our Swiss purchase.

The next shock was that having got the keys for our flat we found the last owners had left everything in it, even their personal things, like wine, food and even their toiletries were still in the bathroom! Our large delivery from Birmingham of furniture and various possessions was due in a couple of days and there was nowhere to put it all.

Panic set in, we had to get rid of so many things we did not want and quickly! We did it just in time and we were then able to unpack and enjoy being there. Mum and Dad were so pleased we had come to be so near to them, as we were too.

Emigrated to Spain & Switzerland

Because we eventually emigrated to live in Switzerland and Spain, we gradually found ourselves a new circle of friends. Some came about from attending Spanish language schools, where we had so

many laughs because of what are called 'false friends', these come about because so many Spanish words are very similar to the English ones and most have the same meaning, but there are some that do not mean anything like the same and can be embarrassing *(for example embarazada does not mean what one would think, it means pregnant!)*.

Buying Our Swiss Home

Eventually, Josephine found the flat she wanted, and we bought her house in Winterthur this was in March 2003, so once we had moved in, our possessions from Birmingham arrived safely and we then had to deal with all the paperwork required by the Swiss to allow us to live there. It was such an ordeal even though Trudy is Swiss, so many documents had to be produced and verified *(we had no idea of what many of them even were!).* We succeeded eventually, but it did take several weeks.

Changing Homes Every Two Months

Once we were settled, we decided we would spend two months in each home, dividing our time with our parents. We purchased a second-hand Audi A6 allroad car *(it was just six months old and had run only 6,000km)* having sold our Jensen CV8.

After driving our Jensens for so many years, it was such a big learning curve to learn all about the new technology, our car had all the extras possible, and I found it was rather amazing to find out just how much had changed since the 1960's. But it was nowhere near as fast as our CV8 the acceleration from a standing start was sluggish and this disturbed me, once past about twenty kmh the car then responded well.

Our plan was to drive back to Spain to see how we felt about it, as against flying. I planned our route and booked two hotel stops, this turned out to be quite an adventure that we really enjoyed. The views were spectacular, we had the mountains and the coastal views all the way, the roads were particularly good, plus we found lots of interesting places to see and stay in.

These trips were done so that we could spend equal time to be with and to help our parents, as we were aware of them getting older. From then on, we have driven every time, with the different seasons, each trip was a distinct experience and was more like a little holiday for us.

We did have some incidents, unfortunately when driving along the Spanish coast there was a risk, especially if in a nice car, that someone would put a knife in one of your tyres. The plan was that they would follow your car and point out that you have a flat tyre and then offer to help you, whilst really at every opportunity they would steal from you. We had about three such happenings! But luckily nothing got stolen, we just had the inconvenience of getting a new tyre.

The worst time was the last time because we were driving back from Spain and still had our winter tyres on. We had got to Valencia, and no one could find winter tyres for us *(never needed this far South)* our insurance company tried their best, but it took three days, and the only solution was to have two new summer tyres fitted. So, we had three days in Valencia and had to change our hotel booking in France.

The heat in Valencia was scorching so we spent one day in 'Sea World' and the rest of our time in Stores, or our hotel anywhere with air-conditioning.

After 14 years our Audi had been wonderful, but to continue with this lifestyle we exchanged it and bought the BMW 3 series Grand Turismo, this car is faster and responds well.

Helen and Andrew Waring

We got to know such a lovely couple Helen and Andrew, because we had met and liked Helen in our Spanish class, and soon got to know them both and their family.

Trudy, Charlotte, John, Andrew, and Helen Waring

Since then, we meet up whenever we can and always have an enjoyable time together, even though they are many years younger than us. We were so delighted to be invited to their son John's wedding in England that we attended.

Montana

We also have some new Spanish friends, who are much younger than us *(they are about our son and daughter's age),* and we feel privileged that they have chosen to keep in touch, ever since we met them during our first few years. I first met Montana Tosina through the law firm that acted for us to buy our flat. I soon found out that she is a qualified accountant and that she was the one that did our tax accounts.

She informed me that she was leaving this firm and was planning to work independently, I immediately asked her if we could be her first clients, which she agreed to and would charge us far less than we had been paying. During our chat I mentioned that Trudy and I were trying to learn Spanish and Montana explained that she had taught Spanish before and would be more than happy to help us.

We arranged to meet in a cafe, near our home, so that she could meet Trudy and we would see how we all get on. Trudy liked her too, so this is how we got to know each other well. It was lucky that Montana had left the law firm, because not long after all the lawyers were arrested over dealings with the late Marbella's corrupt Mayor Gil.

We pay around 1,000 euros tax every year *(it varied each year)* for our apartment, but for some reason we were not in Spain when it was due, this was one of the early years and I had overlooked this payment. Once we were back about a month later, I brought it up with Montana and she said no need to worry, she had already paid it for us, as she did not want us to be fined and charged interest! Of course, we quickly paid her and thanked her.

After all my years of business, I have only had two accountants *(each one for many years and we knew each other well)* but I am certain, that neither one of them would ever have done anything like that for us.

Montana

Over the years we have known Montana, she has acted for us in buying and selling the odd car park space, as well as for the sale of my parents' apartment *(which was complicated as it was purchased through a company in Gibraltar),* because she assured us that having worked for years with lawyers she was capable to save us the lawyer's fees and would charge us far less.

Not only did she do everything well, but she also found so many faults the other lawyers made, that we were extremely impressed and glad to have her looking after us.

Montana comes to see us every week, sometimes twice a week, whilst we are in Spain. She has been doing her best to teach us Spanish. We feel guilty and sorry for her as we are such slow learners, but when we mentioned this to her, she simply told us not to worry, as she really comes to have a good laugh and enjoys being with us. This is true we do have a lot of laughs and enjoy her company.

'Painting With Light' Limited Edition Prints

Seven years later, whilst we were living in Marbella, my sister Rayner contacted me to say she was excited by my photography and thought I should market my pictures as limited-edition prints, because having looked at them again she felt they still looked great after all these years.

I had found a particularly good printer nearby and I then decided to see how big and how well he could print one of my photographs. I was pleasantly surprised how good the results were. We also soon learnt that there was going to be an international art festival in the centre of Marbella and people were asked to make contact if they wished to exhibit. So, I decided to take the plunge and booked a tent for myself.

Not knowing how well my pictures would sell, I decided to offer a limited edition of 250 of each picture and offer three sizes of each, signed, and numbered. As the printer was able to print to order and deliver really quickly. I offered three assorted sizes priced at between 140 euros, and 450 euros for the largest size.

But expecting that if I did sell, during the weekend the buyers would probably want their print immediately *(as so many would be tourists and might be leaving the next day)* so I ordered quite a few prints of different sizes of each picture that I had chosen to show and had one of each framed to display hanging in the tent.

Marbella's first International Festival of Art

The fair was on for a long weekend from 11:00am till 11:00pm every day and for safety, we had to take everything home overnight and set it up again the next morning.

It was quite hard for us to cover the hours involved, but we met our neighbours, who were very friendly, and we also had many visitors which helped the time pass quickly. Sadly, it was a dead loss - not one sale! But I got to meet the owner of a well-established gallery, in the golden mile, that invited me to have a chat later.

The outcome was that I was told they would be interested in my pictures, but only if I scrap my marketing basis and instead make much larger prints at least 120cm and limit the edition to a maximum of 8, then to price them at about 5,000 euros each!

I was shocked, but as none had sold, I could consider doing this.

About a month later, I was invited to see an exhibition at that gallery, so I went, and it was by a photographer I had not heard of, all the pictures were huge and priced even higher than 5,000 euros each, and a couple were shown as sold *(hard to know if they had really sold)*.

They wanted me to provide them with a few very large prints preferably sandwiched between aluminium and a thick acrylic sheet for them to see *(these were expensive to produce and could not be done by my Spanish printer)*. Although on metal they would still be very fragile and if scratched, or if an edge were dented, they would no longer be saleable, so I did not proceed.

Instead, I decided to create a new part of my website to offer these large prints, as limited editions, that I would only create to order. The gallery had told me that I could have them printed and mounted the way they wanted in Germany. Luckily, I did not desperately need to sell them and thought this could be the best way of testing market.

I listed them at 4,700 euros for the biggest size, signed and numbered, with the edition set at 8, no matter what size they would like to have. Later I created a new separate website devoted to my limited-edition prints. Like most artists, these might sell better once I have died . . . But I am not in any hurry!

Juanje Nunez

We have also had a good special relationship with our financial adviser Juanje Nunez *(with our Spanish Bank)* unlike managers that keep changing we have been with Juanje from the beginning.

He is no longer the Manager of the Marbella branch, but now acts for clients all around the Costa del Sol, and he has promised us that he will be prepared to always look after our banking requirements.

Juanje and Eva Nunez

We were surprised and so pleased to be invited to his wedding, it was a lovely affair in Malaga, and we were made so welcome, this was our first Spanish wedding!

Our impressions so far of the Spanish people we have got to know, is that they are so kind and helpful, very tactile and a pleasure to be with.

It is true to say Trudy and I have never had difficulties in making new friends, wherever we are, even though we are no longer so young.

Golden Wedding in Venice

For our Golden wedding, we did not want to go so far, instead we flew to Venice as Trudy had never been there and stayed in a lovely hotel the 'Nani Mocenigo Palace'. We did the usual tours and enjoyed an opera evening, in another palace where after each interval, we all went into another room, it was quite an experience, so much more intimate than in an opera house.

We were lucky to have gone to see it before the awful floods that happened a few months after our visit.

Our Hotels and Marmalade

We have really enjoyed living in Marbella where the weather is sunny and hot most of the year, and the Spanish are so friendly.

We love our new kind of lifestyle, it did not take us long to adjust to the different way of life in Spain and in Switzerland, it was certainly not difficult, as the climate at both locations, is so much better than living in Birmingham. We now have so many bright and sunny days in our lives.

Our three-day drive between our two homes has involved two hotel stops each way and over the years we have stayed in a lot of different places. I always searched the Internet to find the most interesting small hotels *(like old, converted chateaus)* with the best guest reviews that are not far off our motorway route. I made sure they included breakfast, have a pleasant restaurant *(or with plenty of restaurants nearby)* and private parking. Over the years we have stayed in some wonderful places, and because we often go out of season, we have always been upgraded to the best room, or suite without any extra charge.

One hotel deserves a special mention, we only found this one because of our return to Switzerland at the beginning of August 2018, nearly everywhere was booked, but we had a provisional booking at a hotel in Denia where we had stayed many times.

But when I tried to confirm the reservation, I was informed that they were only accepting bookings for a minimum of two nights! This was of no use to us, eventually I found a room was available in a little village called Villalonga that met all our requirements called 'Casa Babel'. We were so impressed with the decor, the food, and the friendly staff, that we have returned every time ever since, the owner, who has become our friend, Fernando always gives us the best rooms *(one of them has a magnificent gold four poster bed)* and from the very beginning, just before leaving, he has always given us a gift.

We learned that he inherited this beautiful mansion, that had wonderful tiled floors throughout and stained glass windows, from an Aunt and has spent a fortune making it into a fabulous hotel.

Fernando used to come to have a chat with us at the end of our evening meal, and one time we mentioned that we did not understand, why we could not buy really good mature orange marmalade in Spain, every type we tried was far too sweet, yet we know all the best mature marmalade is made with oranges from Seville. He explained that the Spanish do not like bitter things, they far prefer everything sweet.

The next time we stayed, we were presented with a jar of homemade bitter marmalade for breakfast and it was so delicious we asked if we could buy some, but the chef had only made so much, and apparently did not want to make anymore. Fernando told us he had grown to like it too, yet just as we were leaving, he gave us a full jar as a gift. We each get a hug every time we see him.

We have been surprised again as at breakfast the waitress always presents us with marmalade, made especially for us, we have also noticed that no one else is given this marmalade! And we get given an extra jar to take with us when we pay our bill.

In addition, Fernando has given us the hotel perfume, after shave and a special walking stick with his compliments. Sadly, we do not always see him, as he has family commitments, and sometimes we learn that he arrived just five minutes after we had left, but we then exchange a few messages during our drive.

We have met his lovely wife and two young daughters and we guess he must be around the same age as our son Jason.

We now always take a Swiss speciality to give Fernando. We both really do not know how this friendship began, we liked him from our first meeting, but I did mention more than once, that he does not need to keep giving us gifts and his only comment was "some people are very special!"

Our Bedrooms

What Next?

There has been a need for us to adapt a lot as mealtimes are really different from those in the UK. For example, in restaurants lunch is around 14:00 in Marbella, but in Winterthur by that time the chef would be going home, as the Swiss have lunch around 11:30 to noon and then they close at 14:00. In Marbella lots of shops close at 14:00 to open again at 17:00 then they stay open till about 22:00. In Winterthur they close at 12:00 and start again at about 13:30, but then close at 18:30.

I was 79 when I completed this part and found it hard to believe that I was that old, whilst writing I had enjoyed looking back over the past, and it seems amazing that we left the UK so many years ago (*the beginning of December 2002*), but sadly during this period, both of my dear parents passed away. I am so glad we were able to be with them for many years.

Trudy's mother Josephine was still doing well at the grand age of ninety-eight, and at that time had only suffered a little from short term memory loss and some confusion.

Everyone imagines that we spent most of our time relaxing, but we seem to be so busy, and we hardly ever have time to just take things easy.

Apart from having done as much as we could for our parents, we have to take care of our own two properties, keep track of our bills, bank accounts and correspondence at each location.

But I am not complaining, the only problem has been the inflated cost of living in Switzerland, that means we have not able to have much help for cleaning, or in the garden. As we are older, we do find it harder to do everything ourselves.

Whenever we feel that our funds available are becoming low, we will sell an antique from our collection. So, we have kept in touch with certain dealers and auctioneers, especially those that we have had a special relationship with. Some are friends that we have known for many years and each of them are so interesting and helpful *(in no particular order)*; Neil Davey, Richard Marchant, Robert Hall, Clare Chu, Hugh Moss, Roger Kerverne, Douglas Wright, Paul Moss, Suzannah Yip, and Asaph Hyman.

I thought I had completed this story *(January 2020)*, and I would have a rest from writing at the computer and concentrate on the future. Who knows although I am eighty this year, one day there might still be some more to add, I do hope so!

But I have started again! Sooner than expected, as more extraordinary unforeseen things have happened. I started in March 2020 to gradually write this second part, about our 'Retirement Life.'

Selling a Few Antiques

Some interesting and rather strange things have happened with selling some Asian antiques. We have sold the odd jade item, as we have been amazed at how much the value of certain antique Chinese jade have increased in value. Looking back, the sale of the first piece we sold, had made us a sufficient profit to cover the cost of our entire collections, including the cost of keeping them safe all these years. This piece was a green large table screen that we had bought for about 3,000 pounds and our friend Richard Marchant, a well-respected dealer, sold it for us, and we received 120,000 pounds, after his commission. So, we could now regard all the rest of our collections as a gift!

What we had decided to do in our retirement was to sell an antique, as and when we needed extra funds, so far, we have sold only a very few jade pieces, chosen because of the current exceedingly high values. Our selection has been based on the fact that most of our treasured collection are pieces that were used and handled, rather than what we refer to as cabinet display pieces. The ones we have now sold, were all originally jade pieces that my father had given to be sold in 1987 at Sotheby's auction in London 'Chinese Decorative Arts, Export Porcelain and Snuff Bottles' but all of them failed to reach the agreed low reserves. One item, failed to reach the reserve of 350 pounds, yet we received 80,000 euros for it, so we were awfully glad that it had not sold so many years earlier!

On the other hand, another piece that we included in the same year, failed to reach the agreed reserve of 20,000 euros, so it was unsold. This piece had also been in the same Sotheby's auction in 1987. But what is strange, is that we were advised to put it in another auction about a year later, but this time with an exceptionally low reserve of only 3,000 euros. The thinking was, that having such a low reserve would attract far more interest, and the expectation was, that it would easily sell for over 20,000 euros. Yet again it failed to reach the reserve! So, it is exceedingly difficult to anticipate what will happen in the auction rooms, when even the top auctioneers can be proved so wrong. We are happy to have kept this piece, as it would have upset us to let it go for just a little over such a low reserve, which might have happened.

Ivory Restrictions

Netsuke have been collected for many years, by so many collectors, there have been lots of publications about them, and the craftsmen who carved them. The most desirable ones have reached extremely high prices in the past. But now suddenly to save the elephants, all ivory objects have become difficult to sell. I agree that everything possible should be done to protect all our endangered

wildlife. But there are some wonderful and important antique ivory netsuke, that have been eagerly sought after by collectors, that could now become valueless! One wonders what will happen, as we know auctioneers are refusing to sell ivory.

The problem has arisen because of the substantial number of fake netsuke *(modern copies of the best antique pieces)*, and most people are not able to tell them apart from the genuine ones, so that is why the current ban has included all antique netsuke too!

Brexit

We had been so tired of the constant news about Brexit, which seemed to go on forever, and we were not sure it would be a good thing for anyone. As the uniting of Europe had successfully put an end to wars, but now once it all breaks up, who knows!

Dangerous Virus, More Like a Plague

We had done our usual shopping on a Thursday, but we bought far less than usual, knowing that we were going to drive back to Switzerland in under a couple of weeks. However, we needed some toilet paper, and found that if we bought a pack of twelve, they were on a special offer with quite a saving, so we bought two packs.

We also ordered *(using WhatsApp)* enough of our medications to last till we would return here from our usual chemist. We did not want to have to buy these in Switzerland as they cost so much more there, and we were able to collect everything three days later.

Everyone had heard of the new Coronavirus and that there was no cure. The news of it spreading throughout the world and the gradual increase of the number of deaths was worrying. But we thought we were reasonably safe in our part of Spain and we had not realised what was going to happen.

There were so many rumours about how to avoid getting it, some people started wearing face masks all the time, but we soon learned that this horrible virus could remain dangerous on metal, clothes, almost everything that we touch! So, everyone was told to keep washing our hands, with soap and hot water, more frequently, and for far longer than was usual. People started greeting each other by bumping elbows.

On the following Saturday, we were told not to go out for at least the next 14 days. This was when we found out that we belonged to the higher risk group, because of our age! Apparently, supermarkets were running out of everything, because of panic buying, particularly of toilet paper! At least we were lucky to have bought plenty, and we still wondered if we would be allowed to travel.

State of Emergency

A few days later Spain and most other countries suddenly announced a state of emergency, all shops, restaurants, and events were closed and cancelled. Only supermarkets, chemists and hospitals were open. People were told to avoid as much contact as possible and to stay at home. No more kissing, handshakes, or hugs. Since then, we were all told to keep three meters from each other. The awful fact is that this virus could be spread by people, for quite a few days, before they ever had any idea that they were infected.

So, without having a lot of food, we had to stay put and cancel our return to Switzerland, as the borders were all closed. We also learned that the care-home in Switzerland would no longer allow any

visitors, so there was no way we could be with Trudy's mother for her 99th birthday, which was the main reason for us wanting to travel.

Luckily, Trudy's mother was not concerned and told us she would rather forget about celebrating her birthday, as she has had so many, she could not care less about it.

Thank goodness she is perfectly happy where she is, and not feeling lonely. We can only continue to speak to her several times a week on the phone.

Soon after this, the news was that this problem is likely to be with us for at least 3 months. How everything is going to be in the future no one knows.

So many businesses closed and most of the Spanish population had to stay at home, all stocks and shares dropped dramatically, and money was become a big problem for everyone!

What is disturbing and causing so many problems, is not only that people can be spreading it before they know that they have it, but this virus can remain live on various surfaces for much longer than we had been told. It is active for at least twenty-four hours on cardboard and days longer on metal, or hard surfaces.

Strict Emergency Measures

In Spain the police are very strictly enforcing the new emergency measures. After we had kept ourselves confined to our apartment and gardens for ten days, we decided to go for a walk, just around the perimeter of La Alcazaba and then to cross the bridge and back for a change of scene.

We thought we could do this, but having come back over the bridge to return, a police car stopped by us, and a couple of police officers told us off, in no uncertain terms. They demanded our passports and completed forms with our address and identity details, these we had to sign, then they insisted that we go straight back. They told us this was a warning and if we were found doing this again, we would be fined and could even be locked up. The police are using drones to keep an eye on anyone leaving their homes. Big brother is watching is now a fact!

We quickly got back and as we got near our entrance; we met a friendly young neighbour from the flat below us. We have spoken to him a few times before.

After we told him what had happened, he told us about his friend who had gone in his car, with his girlfriend *(they were not living together)*, to buy some food. But just as they were nearly home, the police stopped them and fined them six hundred euros each, for being in the car together!

They are only students and have hardly enough money for food, but no more than one person is allowed in a car, unless there are exceptional circumstances, backed up with official paperwork! Poor young lovers are unable to be together!

Rumours

There have been many rumours and one of them suggested that the Chinese, having had to agree to new trading terms with Donald Trump that they did not like, released this virus. Even if a certain number of their own people died, the result was that all other countries were put out of control and all financial markets worldwide dropped considerably.

However, whilst things were getting so much worse everywhere, the Chinese managed to keep their

public isolated and they were the first to have completely stopped the virus spreading. Some suggested they knew how to treat it before it was released.

Since then, the Chinese have become the owners, by buying up lots of the cheap shares of many major international companies that had established within China. All without any money having to leave China!

Mallard Ducks at La Alcazaba

On Wednesday 1st April 2020, our seventeenth day of being confined to our apartment and garden, there was a lovely surprise that ended as a drama! Although our walks round our garden are really pleasant, because of all the flowers and colour, on this day we found in one of our ponds, a Mallard duck with her nine ducklings, such little bundles of fluff, so sweet!

So, we ended up not walking as many times around as usual and instead we enjoyed watching them go from one pond to another. This was such an effort for the little ducklings as each time to get out, they had such a struggle, to jump high enough out of the water.

In the past we have seen a couple of Mallard ducks in our garden and in our swimming pool, often the female had two males with her. About two years ago, we saw ten little ducklings with their mother, happily using our ponds and the swimming pool.

Helping the Ducklings

After watching them for some time, I made a video of them all getting out of one of our ponds *(with quite a lot of difficulty)* and we were then intending to carry on with our walk, but we got a bit concerned when five of the ducklings followed their mother into another small pool with a waterfall, that is near to our swimming pool. Four of them remained watching and the mother soon came out, but the five remaining ducklings could not manage to get out, because the surrounding wall was that bit higher above the water.

YouTube Video of the Ducklings Struggle

After a while I decided they really needed help, they must have been exhausted, so I found the exceptionally long handled net, that our gardeners use to fish out anything that gets blown into the swimming pool. With this I very gently lifted them out and thought all was well.

Trapped in the Swimming Pool

But within minutes a bigger problem occurred, because before we realised it, they had all jumped into the swimming pool. We think their mother was looking for their dad, who was nowhere to be seen. We had seen him some days before, a few times asleep on one leg, at the edge of the swimming pool.

The problem then, was that all round the pool, the wall was much higher above the water, than at any of the other ponds. So, their mother had obviously not realised that they would be stuck, worse still, she was afraid of me and the net. Our swimming pool is a large one and she easily kept herself and the ducklings well out of reach. We watched them swimming all round, but there was nowhere low enough for the ducklings to get out, and we believed the ducklings were tired. By then it was late afternoon, and the sun was going down.

I went in search for something that could be put on the top step to provide a way for the ducklings to get out more easily, and I found an offcut piece of plaster board about 15cm x 70cm long.

I took this and put one end on the top step, and the other end resting on the wall, forming a ramp for them to go up. I was not sure how long this board would remain solid in water and decided with Trudy's help to try to send them towards it.

We spent a lot of time trying, but the mother duck, even though we got her to go quite near that part of the pool, never seemed to look at it, and instead was always watching us, keeping her distance!

Trudy had seen somewhere that one should feed ducks with peas, as these are much better for them than bread, so she went to get some from our flat.

We hoped to attract them to the ramp with food, but they just did not seem interested. Our swimming pool then had some half-frozen peas at the bottom, as they did not float!

The Ducklings Discover the Ramp

I managed with the net to keep them within a meter of the ramp, for quite a while, then decided to back away to see what they would do. Every time the mother started to move away from the ramp I returned, then having got her back again I retreated. This went on for at least quarter of an hour, but then the mother got out of the pool quite near the ramp, the little ducklings soon ran up the ramp safely, all but two of them.

The last two were not very clever, and kept swimming under the ramp, eventually they too ran up and out, much to our relief! They soon returned to the largest pond where we think they sleep at night.

As we had not had much excitement in our gardens, since this plague started, this was a big thing for us and that is why I decided to include it in this story.

We went in the garden the next day *(again late afternoon)*, and we were so relieved that they were not in the swimming pool. I had taken the makeshift ramp away and put it at the side of the pool just in case it might be needed again. What amazed us, was how much more independent they were, they were swimming in all directions, exploring rather than staying close to their mother and they had certainly grown quite a bit larger. We so enjoyed watching them!

Some weeks have passed, and all those ducks and ducklings have gone, probably to the nearby river under the new bridge.

Two Orphan Ducklings

A while ago we saw another mother duck with four tiny ducklings and we do not know what

happened to them, because for quite a few days we did not find them again.

But about ten days ago, we were surprised to find just one little duckling in one of the ponds all alone, it was hiding under a rock, at the edge of the pond out of our reach.

Then a bit later, whilst walking around our gardens, there is a little stream and some ponds on the other side of the buildings, between the old age home and La Alcazaba, that we also walk around. It was at one of these ponds that we found another little duckling all alone too. So, our first thought was to try to get them together, but we were not able to do more that evening.

That night I did some research on the Internet and learned, that if the mother duck is really frightened, it is not unusual for her to fly away, and then never to return to her ducklings.

We also found out that they should not be fed with breadcrumbs, but that oats are good for them.

The next day we were so surprised to find that they had managed to find each other and were both happily keeping close together.

Orphans found each other.

How they managed to end up together is a mystery, as we found them both at the stream side. This meant the one we had seen in the main garden pond, had somehow, had to walk up and down steps, through a long passage under the buildings, to get to the other ponds. Or perhaps one of our gardeners had caught the one in the garden and taken it to the stream *(I think this is more likely)*.

Feeding on our oats.

Since then, we have been feeding these two orphans, every early evening with oat flakes, and they love them, they quickly eat them all up in no time. Then they find a dark place on the riverbank and groom themselves, shortly after that, they snuggle close together and go to sleep. They are so well camouflaged.

Sleeping nestled together.

During these weeks, we have made several home improvements and spent a lot of time on long phone calls *(usually around 90 minutes on each call)* with our children and with Trudy's mother, apart from calls to friends.

Although we could go for walks outside our gardens, we most often preferred to remain within the gardens as we hated having to wear our masks!

A Quick Look Around the Beautiful Exotic Gardens at La Alcazaba
YouTube Video

Two Orphan Ducklings Born at La Alcazaba
YouTube Video

I decided to add this and my videos *(filmed and edited on my phone)* to my story, as these ducklings will never know how much pleasure they provided us, whilst we waited to be able to return to Switzerland.

The Swallows

Another delight were the swallows, who visit several times a day, so whilst having breakfast we watch them flying at high speed around the trees. Quite often they fly in tight formation and perform an amazing aerobatic display! They frequently came quite close to our balcony, as if they were checking us out. We had noticed that all the other birds suddenly stop flying every time they came. The seagulls are the only ones that were not frightened by their speed!

YouTube Video of The Swallows

Apart from not being able to be in Switzerland for Trudy's mother's 99th birthday, we were also unable to do much about our own 51st wedding anniversary, or my 80th Birthday. We were unable to see our children too, as they had to cancel all their travel plans!

Our Return to Switzerland

Eventually we learned that all the borders would be open on the 6th of July, so we booked our hotel stops and organised our drive back and we left on 7th July. We were concerned as a couple of days before, a lock down had been imposed again, not far from our route, near Barcelona. But we decided still to go, and we arrived safely back in Winterthur three days later.

I had a silly accident on our way, after our first night, as I was bringing things down to the car, to be ready to leave after breakfast. Stupidly, I miss-judged the stairs and managed to fall down quite a few of them . . . They were extremely hard tiled stairs! I already had an injury on my leg that was almost better, but it was hit hard once again, in the very same place on my shin! A few days later I had bruises in several other places too! The worst was my ankle which swelled up about three days later, yet luckily, I was able to drive, without realising there was any problem with it, I was much more concerned about my shin that remained the most painful. I was healing rather slowly.

We had such a lot to do, particularly with our garden, which was in such a dreadful state. We had to pay for gardeners to come and deal with it all - awfully expensive here in Switzerland! But I could not have coped with it myself, it was such a relief once it was made more presentable.

News of Maxi and Lexi

We were so pleased to hear from Georgia and Rosa that Maxi and Lexi (*the names we had given the ducklings)* were still doing well, about a couple of weeks after we had left. Especially after reading on the Internet, that wild ducklings sadly, are often neglected by their mother, and once left on their own at an early age, 90% will not survive! Apparently, they cannot fly until they are about 50 days old, but happily they were last seen to fly away.

About Our Pets

My parents always had dogs and cats living together with us, for as long as I can remember, and over the years we had quite a variety. The most elegant dog we ever had was called 'Cloudy' he was a beautiful white Saluki and full of fun!

Cloudy

Another of many attractive dogs was 'Honeybunch' a long-haired miniature Dachshund.

Honeybunch

All the cats and dogs always slept together in a big basket in the kitchen/breakfast room, but quite often the cats found their way into my bedroom, in the early hours, and slept with me. I loved having them next to me and I found the cats purring so relaxing. One time, we had two cats *(twins)* and they would sleep on either side of me. My only problem then was that I was afraid to move in case I would hurt one of them. They would snuggle up close to me, completely under the sheets, and often slept with their heads pressed snuggly against my neck.

I have always been fond of both cats and dogs, and I believe they sense that I like them, as on many occasions, both dogs, and cats that have never known me before, easily come to make friends.

Our last pet was a ginger and white cat we called Winnie; he was with us in our home in Birmingham for 19 years. He was very affectionate, and he always knew when we were about to return home.

Our babysitter used to tell us that at least five minutes before we arrived home, late at night, he would suddenly wake up and jump up onto the window ledge looking out for us.

Winnie

The other funny thing, that we had never seen before, was that we used to lean back together on our settee to watch TV and Winnie would join us and would lean backwards against the settee copying our position!

We decided not to have any more pets after Winnie, because of our new lifestyle, that involved so much travelling by car and then two months spent in each country, it just was not practical. However, we have had a lot of visits by local neighbour's cats in Switzerland, they came to have some affection, and often for a little nap on my lap.

We only fed one with little treats, the other two still came *(even though we never fed them)* just less frequently.

A Wild Baby Rabbit

Whilst at La Alcazaba, a few years ago we found a wild baby rabbit in the gardens below our balcony, our neighbour Johanna had seen it and told us about it, so we went down to have a look. It seemed completely lost, so we took it in, and decided to make enquiries to try to find the owner. But no one knew anything about it. So, for a couple of weeks we kept it and fed it. It was so affectionate, and we decided we would have to try to find a loving home for it. The only work he gave us was finding and removing all the little droppings in our flat! Our daughter Michelle and our granddaughter Melissa were staying with us and all of us took turns at having a cuddle, also my mother Betty loved having him too.

A Wild Baby Rabbit Called 'Cuddles'

As we would be driving back to Switzerland, we eventually found out that a friend of ours Desmond, had a few rabbits that they kept in their garden, and he agreed to take ours on.

He decided to put Cuddles in a separate area, so that their larger rabbits would get to know him gradually. We heard later that our little Cuddles had become the boss and was quite a cheeky one! So, all ended well.

Swiss Garden Free Help

We have had a problem with our Swiss garden. Every time we arrived back from our couple of months in Spain, we had to tackle our overgrown garden that was full of weeds again. We had arranged to have the lawn cut now and then whilst in Spain, but that was all that we had done, because of the remarkably excessive cost of labour! We were quoted well over 7,000 CHF per year, to keep part of our garden in reasonable order, but this was not to look after all the garden and was also restricted to coming only whilst we were away! I decided this was far too expensive and then Trudy had a particularly promising idea.

We had discovered that there was a long waiting list for garden allotments, and there were not any near to our home. The demand came about, because there are so many apartment blocks without gardens, and more are being built all the time. We decided to put a free card advert, in the two local supermarkets, to advertise 'Free Garden Land to Grow Your Own Vegetables', in return for maintaining the rest of our garden. Within 3 days a lady came who was so keen she wanted to start right away!

We explained that we have a separate part of our garden, which had often been used for vegetables, and we would allow her to use this large piece of land free of charge and she can come as often as she likes. But in return we expect her to look after the whole garden for us, she can use our garden tools and there is electricity and water available in our garden. We are lucky to have a back-passage access to it, so there was no need to come through the house.

She seemed genuinely nice and was so delighted, so we introduced her to our neighbours, who told us they have never heard of such an idea, and they agreed that this really is a "win, win" situation!

This has been such a relief to me, as before this happened, I was finding it such a back breaking job *(partly due now to being older!)* and I was thinking that we would have to sell and buy a flat instead, which I knew Trudy did not want to do.

A Great Friendship that Sadly Ended.

The last time that we were with Paris and Jenny, we had a lovely time together, Champagne was flowing as usual, and it was wonderful to have Helen and Andrew with us too. We all stayed at Paris and Jenny's amazing home overlooking the lake of Annecy with the mountains forming the background.

But after what happened on the last night, our friendship with Paris would never be the same. So much time has now passed without any kind of contact, we often think of them, as Trudy and I thought we would always be the best of friends with Paris forever, having had so many great times that we both will always cherish.

We were so lucky to have him as a close friend when we did, we have so many good memories, he made life so exciting, and we had so much fun together for so many years!

Together in Annecy 2009.

Since then, we have found other new incredibly good friends as well as some from the past that have come back into our lives. We do enjoy seeing Helen and Andrew, whenever possible. So, our lives are still very interesting and we still manage to have plenty of fun, despite Covid-19 that continues to impose too much social distancing.

Salsa Dancing

I have only just realised that I neglected to write about our love of salsa dancing. Trudy and I enjoyed dancing together from the first days we met, but I never considered myself to be a good dancer, as when I was younger to learn new dances had proved quite difficult for me. I really seemed to have two left feet! So, years later, after the Albany Club was taken over and changed, and we had stopped playing squash and our children were older, Trudy told me she had heard about Salsa classes and wanted to go so much, that she said if I did not want to go, she would go on her own!

Trudy went to sign up and enrol without me, and I decided I had better go and have a look. A sample class began, and I had a go, it turned out to be good fun, I loved the music, and although it was quite a challenge for me, I was hooked! So, we both joined, and after a while we discovered 'Latin Motion' who gave lessons and then some time to practise with really great music. These were run by Mauricio Reyes and Zain, and they made learning a lot of fun, I could not believe how many different ways they devised to spin a partner and the footwork was complicated at times.

The method of teaching was to gradually teach one routine by breaking it down into short parts, each part was demonstrated and then we all tried to copy it, usually we had to repeat it a number of times, but each time we had a different partner, and only after everyone could do it correctly, were we shown the next part. This was great as we all got to know everyone in the class. What was not so great, was the embarrassment when with a new partner, one got something wrong - this happened a lot with me in the early days. Especially, after having reached the last part, when we were asked to put it all together, I often found I could not remember everything! Trudy was much quicker at learning it all, I believe she had quite an advantage having studied ballet for many years before.

Thank goodness after persevering over a considerable number of lessons, I eventually began to feel at ease and was able to enjoy it even more. We met some interesting people from all walks of life and thoroughly enjoyed those evenings. We both loved it and we remained active members for many years till we emigrated.

Once we had moved to live in Switzerland and Spain, we hoped to continue dancing salsa, however we were shocked and could not believe how extremely late at night any dancing begins in both countries. Before midnight, not much happens, and it can be nearer two in the morning when the dancing really becomes popular. Much too late for us.

For a while we found some Spanish classes that began much earlier, so we went quite a few times, but our Spanish was not good enough and we kept getting things wrong. Before dancing as couples there was usually a warm-up, rather like line dancing, to learn new steps, and now and then a spin turn was involved, but not always a complete spin turn, sometimes it was only a half turn. So many times, Trudy and I found ourselves looking at everyone else, as they surprised us by only doing a half turn!

Later, we joined a class in Estepona that was also amusing, and we were made so welcome, *(we were the oldest and the only non-Spanish there)* and having been a few times, we were amazed at how friendly they were towards us, even with our language problems.

Jive

We found a jive dancing group in Spain, and they held more frequent classes as well as dancing dinner party events, so we joined them as they started so much earlier.

It was much easier than salsa, but not as exciting! However, we liked the organisers Colin and Natalie, and we did have some fun times with them. Sadly, Covid-19, plus a few minor ailments, due to the aging process, have put a stop to our dancing.

Improving Our Apartment

Having spent much more time at La Alcazaba than usual, because of Covid-19, we have managed to make a number of improvements this year. We changed our decor in the lounge with; fresh painted walls and ceiling, new curtains, all our chairs were upholstered with new fabrics, and we have new cushions for our settees. We also changed our guest bedroom with; new bedspreads, curtains, the antique armchair was re-upholstered, and we had a new toilet installed in the bathroom. We decided to keep some of the original patterns in our guest bedroom, so to find new fabrics and designs that would work well was quite difficult, but we are now happy with the choices we made.

I painted and repaired the balcony walls, I also spent a lot of time grouting our marble floors, as quite a few areas had lost the original grout, so water could seep down under the marble, every week when our cleaning lady mopped all the floors often with quite a lot of water!

I also managed to get the plumber, who fixed our new toilet, to change the outflow from our trough on our balcony. The problem had been that whenever we watered the plants, dirty brown water would flow onto our marble floor and form a puddle that left a nasty brown stain on our grey marble floor. The outflow was always very dirty looking too! About two meters away there was an internal drain for all the flats above us and I suggested that it would be much better, if within our balcony walls, a pipe could be connected from the trough to that drain. This was done and has proved to be such a great improvement.

Lastly, I purchased a large flat pack cupboard, to put in our garage space, this I assembled on my own which I considered to be quite an achievement, as I never imagined how many ridiculously small items would be involved, it turned out to be complicated as the instructions, I eventually realised were not even correct! Once completed and fixed, it has been worth doing and provides us with useful storage space for tools, paint and various odd items not easily stored in our flat.

2020 a Disastrous Virus

This Virus caused so much disruption, all over the world, the year 2020 was such an awful time for everyone, we all had to get used to wearing the face masks *(not pleasant)* and the loss of personal contact - no kissing, or hugs, and having to try to keep about two meters apart.

Politically some good things happened, for although there has been so much criticism of Donald Trump *(as a man there was not much to like)*, but he unlike all the previous presidents, stood up to North Korea, exposed the totally biased UN, and imposed a tough stance against Iran. Amazingly, he achieved a peace settlement between some of the Arab states and Israel. This was extraordinary and a crucial step towards a more stable Middle East that had proved to be impossible before.

Most of the time we stayed home, and only did food shopping once a week, all shops, restaurants, and night life were closed, only chemists could remain open. We did our best to remain cheerful, by keeping in touch with family and friends, thank goodness for the Internet allowing us to make video calls and to have a much wider choice of films and entertainment, whilst unable to go out.

We really missed dancing and being with family and friends, remaining isolated for so long was not much fun.

Vaccination Problem

At last a vaccine became available, but only available to governments *(who bought as many as possible)*, we both have always had Private Health Insurance, so we never tried to sign on with the Spanish national health, as we never used any of the national health services, even when we were living in the UK. But, for the first-time private health has let us down, as it has proved impossible to get vaccinated privately.

In Spain, as in most of Europe, there were not enough vaccines, so they were only doing those at considerable risk, the oldest and those involved in medical care first. Trudy and I should have been included in this high-risk group, but as we were not registered here, we had been missed! So, I contacted the UK and Swiss embassy for help, but was only informed that they would let us know if something could be done for us.

I obtained the S1 document from the UK to allow me to register with the Spanish National Health, but it seems to take a long time for the registration to be completed. However, the UK will not issue the form for Trudy, without obtaining a lot of difficult to get information, from the Swiss. We have both decided to become Spanish residents and have started the process, but once again it takes time.

Brexit and Driving

Because of Brexit, I found out my UK driving licence would not be valid within the EU, so I quickly applied to change it for a Spanish one, as after the end of December it would have been far more difficult to do. What did worry me is that I would have to pass a medical examination first.

It was a quite extraordinary experience, first they checked my sight the usual way, then I was told to sit in front of a screen at a table with two small handles, about twenty-five centimetres apart.

The screen, which was white had about a quarter of the screen, on the left-hand side, which was grey. There was a button on the table, and I was told to watch a small black dot that moved at a constant speed, from the right towards the left, but once it reached the grey area it disappeared from view. I was told to press the button when I guessed it would have reached the far edge of the

screen. This was done about three times, but each time the speed was increased.

Next there were two white columns *(on either side of the screen)* representing two roads within each was a black line, nearly as wide as the column, this represented the car. Once started each column snaked in all directions independently, and by turning the handles the idea was to keep both black lines within the columns. Each time the black line touched the border edge of the white column, a buzzer sounded. I was allowed a short trial run. Then I was told it would run for a good two minutes and could go faster towards the end.

I confess I was nervous because the buzzer sounded about five times, and I thought however will we manage if I fail, as Trudy was no longer at ease driving our car. It was such a relief when I was told I had passed. I mentioned my concern, having heard the buzzer so many times, but was told I had done well as many others had it buzzing far more often!

Travel - Closed Borders

Covid-19 virus continued to get worse early in 2021, as those infected had risen higher than ever before! The complications with the state borders of Spain, France, and Switzerland, made it too difficult for us to plan our return to Switzerland. Even within the various regions of Spain, very tight restrictions were imposed locally, some of them closed their municipal borders, and these could change at a day's notice, the decisions were made according to the number of deaths.

Whilst the borders were closed, anyone that was allowed into a country *(only possible with the required documents)* would then have to stay 10 days quarantined in a hotel close to the border. This would be expensive, and there are three virus tests that had to be done, on specific days, all at a lot of extra cost! No one was allowed to leave, and all meals had to be taken in the bedroom.

Unfortunately, the Covid-19 virus had been evolving into new strains, some were more easily transmitted! So, we had not been able to drive back to Winterthur for such a long time, and we had been afraid to do so, without being vaccinated.

We were registered as residents in April 2021 *(it had taken 4 months)*, we were then able to be vaccinated by the Spanish National Health Service and we had the first one in May, the second, in early June. It had been quite impossible to have it privately.

Josephine's 100th Birthday

The home where Trudy's mother lives, was restricted to all visitors. Worse still, there was no indication of for how long this would last! We kept in touch by phone frequently, even though we had to persevere, as unfortunately Josephine so often did not hear the phone ringing. Sometimes she was a bit confused, but generally she was amazing.

Josephine had her 100th Birthday on the 3rd of April, and she was in good form, even though we could not be with her. For example, we had a long chat with her on the phone, and she was still even able to talk to me in English!

She really did not want too much fuss, as she said she has had so many Birthdays! Trudy's brother and his wife were only allowed to be with her for 45 minutes. The home made a special meal for her, and she had lots of presents and good wishes. She told us she was overwhelmed. Ten days later Martina *(from Bad Ragaz)*, together with Edith *(relatives not seen too often)*, went to make a visit which was so lovely for her.

Our 52nd Wedding Anniversary

We at last managed to drive back to Winterthur and arrived a week before our wedding anniversary which we celebrated with Josephine.

So glad to be together again at last.

We had cakes, some fizz, Cherries, Raspberries, and blueberries.

Our Time in Switzerland

So many hours were spent, either on phone calls with Jason and Michelle, or with Josephine each week. We visited her spending several hours twice a week and Trudy spoke to her every day. But sadly, quite often she was very confused. Yet, on other occasions she was bright and even able to talk to me in English.

It is arduous work for us in Switzerland, having no help - we clean our house ourselves as any kind of labour here in Switzerland is expensive and our garden is a constant problem. Life for us, is much easier in Spain, as we have a cleaner every week, the maintained gardens are lovely, and we can afford to go to a restaurant each week, with so many available nearby.

Our Garden

We had decided to reduce some of the lawn mowing, by making certain sections of our lawn to grow wildflowers, as we had not been able to control the amounts of weeds in our lawns, also we changed our front garden lawn into a flower and bush bed.

Our new gardener Christine was fully in favour of this, and we left feeling pleased that she would enjoy growing her own plants and keep our garden under control.

However, when we arrived back from Spain, we had such a shock when we checked our garden, as it was in such a mess! It turned out that Christine had spent a lot of time in our garden, whilst we were in Spain, but her idea of maintaining our garden was quite different to ours.

Christine's ideas

We found out later that she is very fond of weeds and also of insects, mice, and hedgehogs that she wanted to encourage. So, she had made little piles of sticks, in various places around our garden, hoping hedgehogs would use them. She also added a large piece of a tree trunk, by our hedge, in which she had drilled a number of small holes. She explained that by encouraging all these creatures we would reduce the slug and snail problem.

She had organised very tall sticks for the bind weeds to grow up, as she thought that these would stop the bind weed from attacking our rhododendrons. But that didn't work. Christine is very friendly, but sadly not very well mentally and unable to work. But she had been told gardening would be good for her and would help her, so, that was why she reacted quickly when she saw our advert.

After we explained what we really needed from her, she decided it was too much for her and she would like to give up. Once again, we advertised but without any success, we think it was the wrong time of year. But Christine kept coming and said she would help till we find someone else, probably not till the end of winter.

Unpleasant Times

Sadly, Trudy had to have a minor operation, and all went well. But the day before, Trudy had a fall, and managed to hurt her feet, knees, and one arm that had a very nasty bruise that lasted a long time. Soon after this we were heading back to Spain, I know it is hard to leave Josephine, but we needed a break and a rest, and it is not like we are going too far away. We had a number of things to do in Spain that could not be left much longer.

Such tough times we all are going through. We all have to hope for a less worrying future. We are learning about the ageing process, and we are finding we are no longer able to do lots of things that we used to enjoy, and we still have to avoid being near too many people. We will have to have the booster jab soon - not sure when yet.

Trudy recovered well, but we both have aches and pains that we never had before!

Robbery

We had a traumatic time on the way here. We were robbed, Trudy's handbag was stolen at a service station in the Catalan area whilst I had needed the toilet.

We were not aware of it, until our next stop, which was the next service station. I could not use the toilets, as they were out of order, and I would have had to cross over the motorway to use the toilets on the other side of the road. I preferred to drive on to the next one instead, but the robbery happened during that brief time I was away.

Trudy had decided to do some driving and had left her bag on the floor, in front of the passenger seat, and shut the door. One of us always stayed and guarded the car, as we know it is dangerous at these places.

The robbery must have happened when Trudy decided to put some food back in the cool bag, which was on the floor behind the driver's seat. So, while she was reaching in, to unzip the cool bag, the thief must have taken her bag and even shut the passenger door again, without Trudy hearing anything. I was quickly back, and Trudy drove us to the next service station. Only then did Trudy realise her bag was missing!

It happened so quickly, but unfortunately Trudy had her Swiss Passport and Identity card, her Spanish Residence card, keys to our Swiss and Spanish homes, the BMW car key, money and credit cards, jewellery, her glasses and so many other valuable things that cannot be replaced!

We were delayed for an hour waiting for the Police, *(no fun when only halfway on a long drive).* Once we arrived, we had so much more to do than just our usual unpacking and settling in. We had to organise changing the locks at both homes, organised new glasses, fill in forms for the Swiss authorities, and the Swiss police, to inform them about the stolen driving licence, Passport and Identity card and forms for our insurance claim. More form filling will be required once back in Switzerland, to get replacements that cannot be replaced till we are there.

Trudy can travel without them, as we have copies, as long as we have the police report with us, even if we had to fly back.

Also, we had to organise changing the BMW system as the thieves have Trudy's key and our addresses and the BMW registration number that were also in the bag. We had to wait a week for the parts to be sent from Germany, so every time we parked near our home, we wondered if our car would still be there when we returned.

We were exhausted and upset by it all, but soon were feeling happier, as the weather was wonderful, and the gardens full of colour, we had come back to Summer, escaping the Autumn drop in temperature.

Trudy's Birthday

We have continued to avoid being near too many people and have only eaten out occasionally but for Trudy's Birthday we did go out for a fabulous meal at 'El Cortijo de Ramiro' in Guadalmina.

It was great to find Ramiro again, he had catered for some of Mum and Dad's large parties, and it was nice that he remembered them after so many years. Having not eaten out much over the last two years, this was even more of a treat, and we shared the Chateaubriand, which was superb as was everything we had.

I confess that I did mention that it was Trudy's Birthday when I booked our table, so after the main course the staff came singing 'happy birthday' and they had put a candle in the middle of the Creme Brulé, which was to be my desert, but presented to Trudy first. We were also surprised by the number of people, that we did not know from nearby tables, which came to wish Trudy happy birthday before leaving.

Had to Cancel Our Return

Trudy had to have an operation as a small lump in her breast had to be removed, it was done within a week of discovery just before Christmas. So, we had to cancel our plans to go back to Switzerland. Trudy healed well and was in good spirits, even though we were mostly on our own. We had to wait till after the New Year, and the Three Kings to find out what other treatment would be needed and we could not make any travel plans. But we were so glad the worst was over so quickly. We just had to make the best of our time, it was no good to worry, since doing so would make no difference.

We spent a lot of time on video calls with Josephine, Michelle, and Jason. It was the next best thing as we were not able to be together, we had also been kept busy with lots of messages with good friends. Sadly, it has now been two years without being able to be with our children and grandchildren because of the virus.

After the New Year Montana came to see us, also Helen and Andy managed to come over for a five week stay nearby, and it was great to see them as we always have plenty of laughs, never a dull moment.

We were told Trudy was so lucky, and only needed a short amount of radiotherapy, about a month after her operation, completed within a week. After that only regular check-ups will be required.

We eventually returned to Switzerland and were relieved that Josephine was doing well, and we celebrated her 101st Birthday together. We were looking forward to seeing our daughter Michelle, she was going to visit us soon after Jason came to see us, but sadly the day before her flight, she tested positive for Covid and had to cancel. If all goes well, we will be able to get together in August in Switzerland.

A Sound Recording for the Birmingham Museum Archives

Making a sound recording about Jacey Cinemas

Whilst in Switzerland, I received an email asking if I would agree to being recorded whilst talking all about Jacey cinemas. I agreed to do it, and I soon had a visit by Felicity McWilliams, Curator of Science, and Industry for the Birmingham Museum Collections Centre. She specially flew over, with equipment, to make the oral history recording to be kept and made available, in the Birmingham Museum Archives. It was an interesting new experience for me, and the transcript ended up being about 20 pages long!

The Transcript pdf

Get Together After 50 Years

On our way back to Spain we had two nights, instead of our usual overnight stop, in Orange because we managed, at last, to meet up with Martin and Madeleine Stern from London. Like us they drive to and from London to Antibes, where they have a place, and they also stop sometimes in Orange.

Together with Martin and Madeleine

So, we organised to all stay in the same hotel, and it was a wonderful time - it really seemed like we had not been apart for so long and we had so many laughs, it was great! We agreed that we must do it again.

EuroNetsuke Magazine

I was pleasantly surprised when I received an unexpected email from Rosemary Bandini who is the chairwoman of EuroNetsuke, they publish a quarterly magazine for the European members of the International Netsuke Society. She explained that it was not easy to find people that can write well about netsuke, and that she liked my articles. So, she wondered if I could write a new one for the magazine based on my existing one about buying in auction or from dealers, which she particularly liked. Sadly, there would not be any payment, but she promised that there would be a link and a QR code to my website.

I agreed to do it, and I was very pleased that it was published in issue 62 that coincided with Asian Week in London. Also, I was delighted that a photo of Dad with Luigi (*at Eskenazi*) discussing a netsuke, was included (*This was a photo that I had never seen before*). From Dad's expression I suspect this was when he showed Luigi the ivory Eagle clawing a monkey netsuke No:69 Masatami described in his book 'Surprise Netsuke' page 20. https://www.jncohen.com/_antiques/George/16Page.htm

Michelle's Visit

When we arrived back in Switzerland, just after enjoying Jason's visit in Spain, Michelle arrived. We were both feeling very tired which we thought was from the packing and the travelling, but Michelle decided we should do the test for Covid, and we were both positive! Such a shame for Michelle's visit,

and worse still, three days later Michelle was positive too! This meant we could not go anywhere. But luckily, Michelle was negative just about three days before her flight back home. So, thank goodness, she was able to see Josephine before leaving, and we were able to take her for a special meal out.

New Interest in My Photography

Recently, there has been what I consider a surprising change, serious photographers have preferred to go back to using traditional film cameras, rather than the digital system. Because of this, there has now been a renewed interest in how I created my special effects.

Projection Photography

I have seen on the Internet that there are lots of sites about 'Painting with Light,' sometimes under 'Light Painting,' but also often under what was a new phrase to me 'Projection Photography.' This certainly seems to describe what my techniques were all about, so, I decided to edit my webpages to make sure they included the terms 'Projection Photography,' and 'Light Painting,' hoping that the search engines would also then list my pages under these headings.

Over the years I had not really tried to promote my photographic special effects, as I thought no one would be interested, because of all the digital software, the digital cameras, not to mention all the new mobile phones having digital cameras, I did not think anyone would want to go back to using film, especially as film had become expensive and hard to find. But because of this new trend I have been interviewed, and published in a few websites, and I have approached a few photographic museum curators who are showing some interest.

The National Science and Media Museum

The Photography and Photographic Technology section of the National Science and Media Museum based in Bradford is closed for redevelopment, but Claire Mayoh *(the archive and library manager)* has confirmed that a public reference has been added: -
NSMM *Research Library Book database.*
Reference: *770.05.COH*
Author: *Cohen, John Neville*
Title: *Painting With Light By Projection Photography: Pure Photography Using Light & Film.*
Description: *Essay and references to the pioneering technique developed by John Neville Cohen, which enabled the creation of '**Spirit of Spring,'** the first ever Kodachrome transparency that had both a portrait and a negative image of a tulip, on the same emulsion. [E-Resource]*

Disturbing News Ivory Banned.

In order to protect the elephants all ivory could no longer be sold, or cross borders. It could only be sold if you were able to register your item and successfully obtain an exemption certificate. Most auctioneers and dealers have decided not to accept any ivory items, even if known to be antique! So, we thought that our ivory netsuke collection suddenly had lost its value.

Surprising News Ivory Netsuke sold for €1m.

I was amazed to read the following news in the Antiques Trade Gazette, as I had understood that Bonhams would no longer sell any ivory!
"No fanfare as ivory netsuke sets a new record. A new auction record for netsuke – over three times the

previous high – has been set in France. An ivory netsuke of the monkey king Songoku by Matsushita Otoman which sold for €1m (£860,000) at Bonhams Cornette de Saint Cyr."
https://www.antiquestradegazette.com/print-edition/2023/july/2601/in-the-news/no-fanfare-as-ivory-netsuke-sets-a-new-record/

This auction had not been shown online and not advertised, it was only announced that some ivory netsuke would be auctioned immediately following a really important wood netsuke and inro auction, and the main buyers were only informed, whilst they were there.

One of our ivory netsuke is by Otoman and according to Neil K. Davey it is a very rare and a unique subject by him. So, we started to consider selling our Ivory Zodiac netsuke collection.

The World was Becoming a Dangerous Place

We have been shocked and depressed by the 7th October 2023 brutal attack by Hamas in Israel, resulting in war. Also by the amount of antisemitism around the world, and the obvious bias of the press, who broadcast lots of Hamas lies, without any attempt to verify the truth. Generally the press has been showing Israel in the worst conceivable way. The surrounding countries all have terrorists brought up and taught to kill Jews, which have been controlled and encouraged by Iran for years.

Russia invading Ukraine, Gaza attacking Israel, whilst various other parts of the world all seem set on becoming war zones.

An Amazing but Difficult Trip

We started our usual drive back to Puerto Banus from Switzerland, feeling rather concerned about the farmers in France and in Spain, who have been blocking the motorways at random for quite some time, all we could find out is that they suddenly move hundreds of tractors at various points to completely block all movement from 10:00am for the rest of the day. They are doing this as a demonstration against cheap imports, and the low income they have to try to survive on.

We had a good first day's drive to our usual hotel in Orange and were relieved at how well our day had gone, but on our second day we got on the motorway heading to Spain but were suddenly trapped, unable to get off the Motorway, all three lanes were at a standstill and for over a couple of hours and a half we could crawl short distance only now and then. Some of the many lorries had parked in the nearside lane and the drivers were trying to sleep. We tried to leave the motorway after the Narbonne exit but this was blocked, luckily, the next exit was open and we took it, the nearest place was Carcassonne.

The Start of Our Adventure

We parked the car and I phoned our hotel in Villalonga to explain we were not able to come and to cancel our room, as the owner is a friend he cancelled our room without charge and saved us the same booking for the next day, without any commitment, only that we let him know if we can make it. Then I did some checking and as it was Valentines day we knew most good restaurants would be fully booked, but I found that hotel DonJon in the centre of Carcassonne had a room available and a special Valentines evening meal, it was very expensive, but the reviews were good, and I decided we would book it.

We had difficulty finding the hotel carpark, even with our navigation system, because to get to it we eventually found out that we had to go down a 'No Entry' road! The sign was misleading because the no entry sign had a small notice that indicated that it only applied about 80 meters further on.

From there we had a curtesy ride to the hotel in a very small car, Trudy bumped her head whilst getting in. We soon learnt why such a small car was needed, as the route into the castle was through very tight arches and very narrow cobblestoned passages.

Our hotel was in the middle of this amazing castle *(it is the biggest in Europe)* and there are streets of little shops within the castle walls. Sadly we had no time to explore, I tried to find out what the roads would be like the next day, but without success.

Valentine Meal

It was soon time to go for our special meal which was at Chez Christine, next door to our hotel, and it was certainly very special, we had a wonderful evening. We were greeted with a glass of Champagne and Trudy was presented with a red rose. Then the only choice we had was to have the meal with wine, or without, and we decided to have the wine. But we didn't know what we had agreed to!

We were presented with five courses and each one was delicious, but with each course they brought us a different glass of wine *(that were so good)* we enjoyed them all. We agreed that we had never had a meal like this before, it was wonderful.

Thank goodness the next morning after a good night we had an excellent breakfast and neither of us had any headache! Because I dreaded being stuck again on the motorway, I chose to set the navigation to avoid the motorways, and we set off on what turned out to be the most incredible drive across the Pyrenees mountain, we were nearly in Andorra at one time, the views and rock formations were breath-taking, the roads were narrow, lots of zigzag lanes and hair pin bends, it was spectacular and we eventually crossed the border into Spain.

We then altered the navigation back to include motorways and were so glad to find the road was clear so, we were able to carry on with our usual route, we called our Villalonga hotel and confirmed we would come and we had a nice stop-over. Lucky for us, the fourth day on our usual route went well, we had a useful place, where we always stop for a snack, past Murcia and we know it's a place where the police often go, and we thought we would find out from them how the motorway would be nearer Malaga, there were four policemen there when we arrived, but they were not able to give us any information, which we struggled to find out, as not one of them spoke English.

The only thing that spoilt our arrival, was as soon as we got our luggage into our apartment, I had diarrhoea and was sick at the same time! We must have caught a bug as Trudy suffered too the next day. We soon recovered, but both of us have to have regular check-ups; Trudy for Cancer and I for Leukaemia, thank goodness Trudy has the all clear, and they found that I have a very mild form, which does not need any treatment, but has to be monitored.

Otherwise, we had a nice time in Marbella and enjoyed a visit by Martina *(a cousin of Trudy from Bad Ragaz)* and Reto who stayed a couple of nights with us, so that we could show them around, as they had never been before. They then carried on staying near Cadiz for about a week, and we started our drive back to Switzerland a few days after they left us.

A Cat Delays Us

Our Drive was a particularly beautiful one as we had blue skies all the way and there was so much snow on all the mountains, this together with the wildflowers near the motorway that included red poppies amongst lots of yellow and mauve flowers were such a delight! Our hotel and restaurants were excellent, but we had one amusing incident on our last day.

We tend to stop every couple of hours to stretch our legs, go to the toilet, or to have a coffee and a snack. It was at one of these stops, having crossed the border into Switzerland, that we sat at a table where a black cat had made itself comfortable on one of the chairs opposite us. it looked very healthy and quite a few people seemed to know it and came to make a fuss of it.

Anyway, I went to buy us a couple of Mille Feuille and whilst I was away Trudy had talked to it when suddenly it got up and walked across the table on to her lap, and snuggled against her and ended up lying on her lap and then promptly went to sleep!

The staff came over to have a look and were quite astonished, they told us the cat was female and had been with them 3 years and they had never seen her do that before. Apparently, she allowed everyone to stroke her, or to feed her, but never let anyone pick her up, and certainly never went to sit with anyone.

We didn't like to disturb her, so, that lovely cat caused us a delay, and we couldn't get on our way! But we were also sad to leave her behind.

Trudy with her new friend

New Problem in Selling Antiques

We have been informed by Bonhams that we should consider selling this year because of the increasing level of EU regulatory interference, due to come into force in June 2025, (*hugely limiting the importation into the EU of objects of non-EU origin*), such limitations will have a serious cooling effect, as happened with the prices of ivory, (*sale of which is either significantly restricted or in many cases forbidden*).

This import ban into the EU, is to strengthen the fight against terrorist financing and will be in force by 28th June 2025. It is also to stop the trade in illegally excavated cultural goods. So, all cultural goods taken out of the country where they were created can no longer be imported, unless proven to have been outside the country of creation from before 24 April 1972.

Auctioneers will require that all owners of Asian antiques provide evidence (*that each of their antiques have been outside Asia from before 24 April 1972*) and that they have been in the last country, from which they are being imported, for at least 5 years.

We had not intended selling all of our collections at once, our plan was to sell as and when we needed funds. But we would not be able to provide the evidence required so we think we will have to sell this year.

Bonhams Paris Office

We had an interesting day as the Bonhams Japanese department decided to come and have a look at our Japanese collection of inro and netsuke, because if they were impressed with our inro and we were prepared to sell them, they might be able to sell our ivory netsuke too in Paris. So, through our friend James Roberts he arranged for Suzannah Yip *(head of the Japanese Department Worldwide*) to fly in from London and for Johann to come from Madrid.

We enjoyed meeting them especially as Suzannah was so impressed with our collection, and as it was her first time in Marbella we spent the rest of the day showing her around and we had a nice meal together in the evening, she flew back the next day. They might sell for us, but it depends on how many inro are needed to make it worthwhile for them to deal with all the regulations involved. But we have since heard that they will not proceed after all.

A Surprise

I received an email from the editor of an online newsletter called 'New Light on Old Media' for the 'Magic Lantern Society' asking for permission to include my 'Spirit of Spring' photograph with an article. It turned out that my photography was the lead article. Also The Magic Lantern Society publishes a magazine and the editor has decided to feature my work too. I have learnt that this is the UK society and there is another separate one in America and Canada that are likely to be interested too.

Israel and Terrorists

I am proud to be part of the Jewish race, even though I do not keep many traditions, I feel a strong connection to Israel and believe it is essential for all Jews who have suffered so terribly throughout history, that Israel exists.

It is important to speak out against radical Islam terrorists encouraged by Iran and Turkey. Arabs unfortunately have been unable to live in peace with each other, but they all seem to hate Jews. They have had tremendous wealth from oil, that could have been put to far better use to benefit their own people if they could learn to live in peace.

Sunni Islamists have been the cause behind the largest terrorist movements around the world. They have killed hundreds of thousands in; Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, Nigeria, Yemen, Egypt, Pakistan, Libya, and Mali.

They believe they have the right to torture, rape and kill all who do not bow down to their Allah. Islamists call this Jihad, and they enjoy doing it. Their goal is world domination.

They are ignorant cowards and must know they are evil, as they dare not show their faces. Such barbaric killers of innocent unarmed mothers, children, babies and old men. They take hostages who are treated terribly and they have consistently violated the international law, by using hospitals, schools, mosques, to fire rockets, store weapons, and use the civilian population as human shields. The huge number of rockets have always been aimed at Israeli civilians. The blatant disregard of international law should have raised serious ethical and legal concern!

Israel has always been surrounded by Arab countries who openly state their intention to wipe Israel off the map! Israel has had to defend itself against them many times, thank goodness they won every war, and in return for peace, Israel even gave back land and returned to their borders. Yet all the Arabs did after that was to prepare to attack again, building tunnels, rocket launchers, and teaching their children to hate Jews. Note Israel had never started a war.

Pay to Slay

The Arab shocking 'pay to slay' amounting to several hundred million dollars per year. The terrorist's families were receiving a minimum of $400 per month in 2016, much more if many Israelis or Americans are killed, or if they provide martyrs such as suicide bombers. Lots of terrorists are extraordinarily rich once released, as they are paid on a sliding scale depending on how long they are in prison.

The 7th October 2023 was a particularly barbaric surprise attack by Hamas on unarmed civilians, where apart from taking over 200 hostages, they delighted in killing over 1,200 mothers, babies, and old men in terrible ways.

So for the first time Israel then attacked Hamas. Over 19,000 Rockets, Missiles, Mortars, and drones have been fired towards Israel from Gaza, West Bank, Iran, Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen. Egypt has amassed an army near Israel's border, even though they have a peace agreement with Israel.

So many countries have been accepting all the lies Hamas kept spreading, and failing to mention the hostages held by Hamas, or about the horrific, evil, sadistic murders by Hamas that started this war.

Significant tunnels, big enough for large lorries to drive through, have now been discovered under Rafah, which were used for smuggling arms into Gaza from Egypt.

Stupidly, some European countries, such as Ireland, Spain, France, Norway, and Sweden, have recognised a Palestinian state, even though it does not officially exist. This act does no more than reward and encourage terrorism!

Charity Organisations

USAID have been funding terrorists on a huge scale. The Red Cross never made any attempt to see the hostages.

The UNWRA hospitals and school facilities in Gaza have been found to contain tunnel shafts, weapon storage, and books teaching hatred and incitement against Jews and Israelis to even very young children. Hamas had a high end electronic control centre with communication and electric cables directly from under the UNWRA's Gaza headquarters. None of this could have been done without their knowledge.

The UNWRA refugee camp schools are where they bred Palestinian murderers. Lots of evidence of hundreds of young children having been brain washed and trained how to kill at Askar are on record, but there are 19 more!

Hamas Propaganda

The BBC World News have disgustingly only spread Hamas propaganda! They failed to do any research, or check the validity of their information before broadcasting, and the result has been very detrimental for Israel and for Jews everywhere.

There have been lots of demonstrations in support of Hamas by thousands of very ignorant people (*in Europe, UK, and USA*), including lots of women, chanting slogans against Israel. I think these demonstrators should all be deported or forced to go and live in Iran for at least a year. (*Iran and The Qatari regime, support the vicious Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas, the Taliban, al-Qaeda, Hezbollah, Jihadis, and the Houthi*) they would be in for a shock, especially the women when they learn what life style they are supporting!

Qatar has been supposedly involved in organising the ceasefire, yet they host Hamas leaders in luxury hotels and finance Hamas! Revelations about Qatar's financial entanglements have shown that they are also a major financial contributor to US academic institutions over $6 billion so far, and there is evidence of anti-Israel propaganda at all the universities that received these funds.

Al Jazeera, Qatar's state-funded media network, has also been used for the promotion of anti-Semitic, and anti-democratic narratives in US universities and elsewhere.

The dreadful sadistic acts by Hamas have been even worse than the Nazi crimes because at least some of the Nazis were ashamed and tried to hide what had been done. But Hamas filmed everything and then celebrated with their families every Jewish death.

Why is it that other Muslims are not expressing their disgust at what has been going on in the name of their religion? Hezbollah also attacked Israel to support Hamas.

But Israel managed very quickly to damage their leaders and their communications, by blowing up their pagers and hundreds of radios, this way they decimated its top Hezbollah military command including their leader Nasrallah and bombed over a 1,000 of their missile stocks.

Efforts to mediate a lasting ceasefire have been ongoing, with Trump and the United States, Egypt, and Qatar playing key roles.

The situation in Gaza is dire, with the rebuilding process expected to take decades.

The US Justice Department and FBI continue to build a case against Hamas and its financial backers, while Israeli organizations pursue legal action against countries and entities supporting Hamas.

The Lies

The international community must address the root causes of the conflict and work towards a sustainable peace. The lies and misinformation perpetuated by the extremely biased UN and the Arabs, needs to be exposed and the truth made better known.

Israel has Christians and Arabs living in freedom without any restrictions, yet all the Arab countries persecuted the Jews, and they deny their own women access to education and do not honour them.

The Jews never forced the Arabs to leave the land that became Israel. They were told to leave quickly by the surrounding countries; Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon because they were about to attack Israel. They did so on May 15th, 1948, and Israel won.

Accused of occupation, but there is plenty of archaeological and historical proof of Jews having always lived in Israel, especially the Western Wall in Jerusalem, built by Jews 2036 years ago, this was over 600 years before Islam was founded!

1956 Egypt caused the Suez Crisis by nationalizing the Suez canal. Israel won and held territory on the western bank of the Suez Canal.

1967 The Six Day War again Egypt, Jordan and Syria attacked Israel, this time Israel won and captured the West Bank, Gaza, Golan Heights and the Sinai Peninsula.

1973 The Yom Kippur War. Egypt and Syria attacked Israel on the Jewish holiest day hoping to get back lost territories. Israel won again.

1982 Hezbollah and the PLO attacked Israel. Israel won and kept a security zone in southern Lebanon and the PLO were expelled from Lebanon.

Note Israel returned all the territories in exchange for peace treaties; in 1979 the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt, in 1994-1995 the Gaza strip and West Bank, in 2000 southern Lebanon, and lastly in 2005 Israel pulled out of the Gaza strip.

Gaza Was Not Being Occupied

Gaza has been free since 2005! So, for 18 years it was not occupied, but instead of improving life there, they built tunnels and prepared for war, whilst constantly firing rockets at Israel. Hamas have also openly stated that they will repeat the 7th Oct massacre as soon as they can.

This has to stop; Hamas must be wiped out and the Gazans need to be removed from Gaza.

The Palestinians have their own country it is Jordan! If their DNA were to be checked that is where most of them came from, and the others would have been from Egypt.

Lastly, danger grows as Iran (*who financed and armed all the terrorists*) is getting nearer to having a nuclear bomb. Israel must not allow this to happen.

Since Trump announced his proposal for Gaza, the Arabs have accused Israel and America of planning Ethnic cleansing. Yet nearly a million Jews were brutally forced out of Iran and all Arab countries. So many Jewish people were living in these countries long before the Muslim religion ever existed, now there are hardly any left!

It was the Muslims that were guilty of ethnic cleansing. They encouraged attacks on Jews and Jewish institutions and confiscated their bank accounts and all their assets. Nearly 100% of Jewish people were removed or killed since 1940 from; Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libia, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia and Yemen.

Unlike the so-called Palestinian refugees that all Arab states refuse to allow in, today there are no Jewish refugees, they have all *(over one million)* been looked after properly in Israel.

Every day I have to look at the news, especially the Israeli news, to see what is happening. Hoping the hostages will be freed and the war will be resolved once and for all.

Selling Our Jade Pendants

As the cost of living is going up faster than anyone imagined, especially in Switzerland, we have decided it is time to sell our Pendant Collection.

We met Asaph Hyman through James Roberts *(who was the Bonhams representative in Marbella)*, sometime around 2012 and ever since we have become friends. Whenever Asaph was in Zurich, or Malaga he would get in touch and we would meet up for a meal and a chat. We were aware that there was also an ulterior motive, as he always asked if we would consider selling. We had sold the odd piece of my father's and a jade screen we had bought in Zurich in the early 1980's that Asaph handled for us.

This year we decided that we would show him all our pendants, he confirmed that he had never seen a collection of pendants from this period before, the only other collections were of the early jade carving period, and he thought this was a wonderful unique collection.

He was really delighted at the idea of offering the complete collection and he promised us that he would produce a special catalogue, and that he would make sure to vigorously promote the auction for us. He certainly has done so; the catalogue is beautiful and it is destined to be a reference work for many years to come. We have seen on the Internet *(in LinkedIn where Bonhams have 72,927 followers)* Asaph stated *"It is exceptionally rare to see such a superb collection and a testament to the taste and eye of Trudy and John Cohen, and their perseverance in seeking only the very finest. It is a great pleasure to offer this collection at Bonhams Hong Kong on May 5th, 2025."*

Auction Surprises

Because of the time difference we did not think we would manage to watch the auction live, it started at 10:00 am in Hong Kong which in Spain was 04:00. However, that night I woke up and needed to go to the toilet at 05:30 and I thought it might be all over, but I decided to have a look.

Once connected I was delighted to be able to watch about 30 of the last lots being sold. Most of the bidders were in the room and the auction was certainly fascinating and exciting to watch, so much so, I couldn't go back to bed!

84 (*out of the 88 lots*) were sold at well over the estimates, but what surprised us most was that one buyer paid nearly 12 times the highest estimate!

Another surprise was that in this auction the highest selling piece was not for a jade item!

There were some exceptional jade pendants, including some Suzhou pieces in our collection that sold well, but nothing like as well as an agate one, lot number 40. This was a favourite of ours, a beautifully carved Suzhou agate 'Quilin' pendant.

We are also feeling proud to know that this catalogue will be regarded as the reference work for Chinese Pendants of this period, for many years to come.

The 12 Day War

At last Israel decided to take action as Iran had thousands of hidden rockets and drones aimed at Israel, but worst of all they were very near to secretly creating Nuclear bombs, whilst openly stating their determination to kill all Jews and wipe Israel off the map. So, '*Operation Rising Lion*' against the Iranian Ayatollah regime began,

Very quickly air superiority was achieved, the chain of command was eliminated, and with Trump's help the Nuclear facilities were destroyed. The myth of the powerful Iranian regime was shattered and the Ayatollah remained in hiding under ground. Over sixty of his senior military commanders, Nuclear scientists, and other officials were killed and Khamenei did not dare to go to their mass funeral. All the other Arab states have now learnt not to mess with Israel.

A Ceasefire

Now the IDF should have been able to concentrate on finishing Hamas, but instead a ceasefire was agreed. This was to release all the hostages dead and alive, also for an international force to disarm Hamas, so that Trumps plan to rebuild Gaza can start. But after far too long there is still one dead hostage that has not been returned, and Hamas now have declared they will not give up their arms! Meanwhile, around the world the Muslim brotherhood has infiltrated so many countries, planning murder and disruption organised by Iran, with huge funds from Qatar and Turkey that are also used to influence education against Jews, spread propaganda, and fund large demonstrations supporting Hamas. Approaching the end of 2025 and I wonder what 2026 will be like.

I hope to continue, so please do check back to see if there is anything more.