

Special Feature

Gunter and Henriette: A Milton Love Epic

The Wychwoods is a place that reaches out and grabs people by the heart. This fact is proved again and again by people who return after many years to find their roots, people who have moved away and call their new home 'Wychwood', people who log-on to the village websites but never more poignantly than in this story told by Graham Canning.

The story begins back in September 1944, when Gunter Hader, a seventeen year-old German sailor, was rescued after his ship had been torpedoed and he had been swimming in the North Sea for nine hours.



Married in Milton

Her family were not at all pleased at first but she packed her bags and moved to Milton, working for the Batt family in Jubilee Lane. On December 27th, 1947 the couple

were married in the church of St Simon and St Jude, Milton.

Just a month later Gunter was repatriated to Rostock in Eastern Germany and Henriette followed him soon after: "*I collected her from Hamburg and we drove across the black border to the Communist side.*" Gunter recalls.

For more than 40 years they were unable to leave East Germany but as soon as the frontiers were opened in the winter of 1989 they started planning a return trip to the Wychwoods. Somehow, they found the telephone number of the vicarage in Shipton and in June 1990 they spent a week staying there with Pat and me. During that visit they were able to meet up with many of their old friends, including Christopher Fry, Lesley, widow of Charles Batt, and Harold Baldwin. They were happy to retrace their footsteps along the favourite walks they used to take together.

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The Barracks in Frog Lane

As a prisoner-of-war he was taken to Colchester and then Oxford and, in 1945, was moved to the barracks in Frog Lane, Milton-under-Wychwood, where he stayed until repatriation in 1948.

Gunter worked on Holloway's Farm and, because he spoke some English, acted as interpreter between the farmers and the other prisoners.

Gunter had met his sweetheart Henriette when he was on leave in her home town of Amsterdam in August 1944. He lost touch with her in the early years of his captivity, but in 1947 he wrote to her asking her to come to England.

The playwright Christopher Fry had befriended Gunter and he, along with local solicitor Charles Batt, helped him to bring Henriette over. Rose Stoter, whose husband Norris worked with Gunter, wrote asking Henriette to visit England.

The Haders have such happy memories of their time here and of the kind people they met. Gunter remembers:

“The barracks where I lived was nice; it was clean and we were well treated. We did not have to work in the evenings, on Saturday afternoons or Sundays. At first we had to remain ‘behind the wire’ but later were allowed out within a five-mile radius, so we could get to know people. At Christmas the local families were asked to invite us into their homes and I went to the Batts.”

Henriette says, *“After Gunter left and I was here alone the people looked after me. The Batts invited my mother to visit*

from Amsterdam, because we knew that when I joined Gunter in East Germany it would be difficult to see her.”

Diamond Anniversary

On Friday, December 21st 2007, Gunter and Henriette returned from Rostock. During the week, they celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary in Milton Church, by kind permission of our Vicar, to give thanks to God for their marriage and to renew their wedding vows that they made so long ago. They also renewed many friendships and made many more!

Graham Canning

The Waiting Game for Tim and Emma

Tim is waiting for a new home. Tim, age 11, has been with short-term foster carers for over a year. After it became clear he could not return to live with his parents and that his Nan was too ill to care for him, the search began to find him a long-term permanent foster home. Tim needs someone who could foster him until he can live independently, ideally as the only or youngest child in the household. So far, after several months, sadly no-one has come forward.

Emma has been living with foster carers for three months. She originally went there on an emergency basis but it soon became apparent that the problems at home would take a while to fix and that Emma would need to remain in foster care for some months. Emma has settled quite well with her current foster carers but is unhappy to have been placed so far from her home. This makes it difficult to see her family and friends and she positively hates the 20-mile each way journey to school each day. She is hoping

to move to foster carers who live nearer to home but each time her social worker visits the news is sadly the same, “Sorry, but there is no-one available”.

Local independent fostering agency, **familyplacement.com**, is working to help Tim and Emma and other children like them by recruiting foster carers for children in or near to their home area and by encouraging people to consider fostering as an alternative to work outside of the home. Our foster carers are paid a professional fee in addition to a child maintenance allowance. This allows some people to give up work to start a new career in fostering. Proper rewards do not stop foster carers from loving the kids. All of the agency’s foster carers are also provided with high level support and ongoing training. If you think you might be able to help. Please call: 01993 201514, email:

info@familyplacement.com or check our website www.familyplacement.com

Andy Clipson