



Frances Whitaker

(known as Fran)

Frances and Noel Whitaker were married in Lincoln in 1962. Their daughter Melanie was three when they moved to Mere Cottage in Silver Street, Branston in 1968. John Ginniff lived with them at that time following the death of his mother.

The family quickly became well known through their participation in local activities and events. Adam was born in 1971 and it was not long after that that Frances became the resident village correspondent, firstly for the Lincolnshire Chronicle and later the Lincolnshire Echo.

Over the years she reported a myriad of events that took place in the village and surrounding area until she retired in 2015. In that time she was also an author, poet and social writer, public speaker and painter. Her work entailed all sorts of interesting tasks that ranged from obituaries to writing wedding speeches as well as visiting groups around the County to read her own work.

Frances was always a very observant lady and she took a keen interest in the happenings of everyday life. During the 1970s, when she learned of an incident or occasion she considered unusual or worth recording, she would create a whimsical record of the details and these became part of her own personal 'musings'. Specimens are attached for downloading. Many more are stored by Branston History Group in the Church Hall and they make light-hearted reading.

In 2011 Frances and Noel downsized and made a move to No 2 Melville Close Branston –There was sadness in leaving Mere Cottage but the new house is only 280 steps away and the chimneys of Mere Cottage can be seen from the windows of the new house. Sadly Noel passed away in 2013 and now Frances lives quietly writing as she fancies.

Musings - Original Writings

of

Frances Whitaker

I remember being in church some years ago and although the parson at that time was never particularly long winded our youngest son started to fidget and ask how much longer.

I gave him my watch to hold and whispered to him that when the long hand was on the three (11.15 am) the parson would finish.

Honestly the child sat mesmerised gazing at the time progressing and immediately the hands were in the promised position the welcome ending words 'And now to God the Father' were heard. Such faith.

I've just made my new year's resolution.

Since Christmas is not yet with us its rather early but every year my hands are in such a sorry state I must remind myself to wear rubber gloves for more chores so that they too can enjoy the festive season.

November 5th – Known all over England as the day of destruction but for us it marks the ceremonial removal of a simple wooden swing that my father made using the bamboo cane which came down the centre of our first carpet holding it straight and tort when it was delivered.

For the seventeen years that the swing hung from the beam in our present home it was used constantly.

It was with sadness and happy memories that eventually we had to admit it was beyond repair and also that it was a bit much to expect it to continue to support the children now grown up.

Adam would swing high enough to bang his head one way and touch the beam further across with his feet. We know we are the only people in the village to consider redecoration of the kitchen as urgent because of the feet marks on the ceiling!

The swing was a primitive design thought up by my father Harry Dickinson and it was made with things he had to hand at the time but the amount of pleasure it gave over the years was beyond measure.

Now reviewing these writings I can tell you that when grandson William arrived the swing was given a new lease of life by Harold Louch. My father had long since gone but Harold did a good job on replacing the seat and William has happy memories of swinging in the kitchen of Mere Cottage.

My husband is a good man really – He's not moody like me. In fact he works very hard and is always the same as long as nothing interferes with his work.

However this morning he spoiled himself.

He sulked because there was no cream from the top of the milk for him.

Usually the family bear with this little nicety and allow him to have this small luxury but today all the bottles had been opened and Adam had done the unforgiveable thing of having the last top of the milk.

The sugared rice crispies were put back into the packet as a protest.

It's a lot of bother over a plateful of cereal but any mother who reads this will be, like me, and say hubby is being rather churlish in refusing alternative milk.

There is no mother in existence that has not given to her family the best of the meat, the thickest chop and even pretended to be slimming when an unexpected visitor means you are a bit short.

Would any man watch the chop they fancied disappear with a smile and not say a word – on today's performance I doubt it.

Many years ago a well-liked uncle wrote in my autograph book 'One has to be poor to know the luxury of giving'. That same uncle has proved successful in business, travelled to far parts of the world and now faces retirement. How the tables have turned since he is now so well off that there is nothing I can give him – but he is still well liked.

I told you about my uncle – the one who wrote in my autograph book. He also wrote 'May every day dawn bright for you' accompanied by a beautiful sunrise.

Those good wishes have stayed with me all my life and it must surely be the kindest thing you could wish for anyone everything else just follows and falls into place if you face a bright dawn.

Returning home one mischievous night I drove through the village catching sight of some youngsters playing in the cemetery.

These mini-ghosts had sheets draped over their heads and each had two torches behind the eyes to give a glow.

I stopped the car up the hill and much to the amusement of my children, I crept back along the wall and when level and underneath the ghosts, I let out a loud howl.

I have never in all my life seen a quicker retreat and I hope one day they will know it was me being as mischievous as they were.

Mr Lane who helps in our garden is a caring man and has proved it in many ways over the years.

Today he has pruned the roses ready for the winter tidy up leaving one rose stuck up on a long length higher than the rest of the bush and in the winter gloom it is a joy to see.

In my husband's job it is not unusual for him to be asked to be an executor of a Will if the people concerned have no family or anyone suitable to see to their material needs once they have popped off.

A Polish chap asked my husband to stand.

He was a prisoner of war here and stayed on leaving his family in his home country.

He never married and therefore it was his wish that any monies should be sent to his sisters and brothers in Poland on his death.

I asked my husband if all this was likely to be complicated. 'Well' said my husband, 'let's just say I hope I die first!'

June 5th – We are having a heat wave. Glorious though it is it has brought problems in so far as my car plays the sillies if it gets overheated.

The annoying thing is that it is not following any particular pattern and will start beautifully ninety nine times out of a hundred but the hundredth time.... well.

Today I went across town to visit a friend.

On the return journey the car did take a bit of starting but half way home, in the middle of town in the midst of all the lunchtime traffic, it stopped.

I knew if I could wait a while it would start again and after a few unsuccessful pulls I trampled off to a nearby garage.

No mechanic there during lunchtime.

My husband's office was within eye shot of the double yellow line I was stuck on but he had gone to some fancy lunchtime function.

Best suit do – so no help there either.

A sympathetic gent offered the use of his office phone but he knew no more than I and again no real help.

Traffic kept rolling by with me parked directly in front of the lights on this double yellow line.

There was nothing for it but to sit it out.

Of course the car would start given a rest but YOU try not having another hopeful pull in those circumstances.

In desperation I put in my head into the Reader's Digest for a little read whilst I was waiting to stop myself trying again too soon.

Then it happened – a Police Constable arrived at the driver's window.

His words will remain with me until I die 'I'm afraid I shall have to ask you to move'.

I just started laughing and replied 'I am stuck here. My car has overheated and I shall have to wait then it will start'.

He said 'All right love – you sit there until you can get going. Bye'.

And with that he rushed back to his own car and drove away.

The car did start after a while but I am left wondering how many people read a book, in the middle of town, on a double yellow line, between a road junction and traffic lights and the policeman apologies for asking them to move.

Aren't our policemen wonderful?

June 7th – I am not really sorry to be attending the last of the junior sports days at school.

I always feel as though there are the whizz kids who walk away with every prize and get bigger headed with each one.

And then there are other poor little souls who haven't a hope in hell of stepping up for a beribboned cup.

This has prompted me to present a shield type trophy to the Junior School as a small thank you for the happiness my children have known there.

I want the shield to be distributed round the school for trying - not just for being good at something enjoyable to that pupil.

If someone has tried hard then there should be reward.

My little shield is only a small start but it is nicely engraved with the words 'Presented for Effort' and the names of my children and the dates they attended the school.

Last of all at the bottom is the word 'Persevere'.

As the engraver remarked old Persevere was at school when he was and none of us can do a lot without him.

I remember going on a picnic on the common with the children when they were small.

We were entertained during the afternoon by a tramp who insisted he was a Russian from Hong Kong.

In his mind he was wealthy and his money was tied up in foreign countries.

Poor chap was completely mad.

We gave him two sandwiches and a portion of orange to quench his thirst.

He moved politely away and sat quietly to savour this unexpected treat.

I still remember the careful way he proceeded to eat.

No gobbling it all quickly as one would expect a hungry person to do. He ate slowly, carefully wrapping a little and putting it in his pocket for later.

Then he turned to the orange – he took one segment and sucked contentedly, again reserving the other portion. I often see that man around town still with his sleeping bag under his arm. I would like him to know that he in fact taught me how to eat.

During a chatty conversation on the telephone my mother reported to my sister who lives three hundred miles away that my father had been running round after the lawn mower all morning.

My sister's little lad insisted that he wanted to run round after the mower like Granddad.

So Jan let the youngster cut the lawn – he returned to the house a while later insisting that she should come and look immediately.

He had cut the lawn 'like they do on the telly' – all stripes. To get the striped effect he had done one row, then missed a row, leaving buttercups and daisies, and then cut another to complete his pattern.

You didn't know that's how they got the stripes on the adverts did you?

What a topsy turvy world we are becoming. Noel attended a fancy lunch this week.

Excellent food and drinks all provided free by a building society in the hopes of fanning favours and improving the prospects of obtaining further new business.

That sort of thing has gone on for years but today Noel received a letter thanking him for attending and for the pleasure of his company.

There is an expression used in Lincolnshire but I will have to leave you to guess as it's not printable but the second part is creeping!

There was a procession in town.

Two men in the pub however did not intend losing any drinking time whilst they waited and they hung out of the window talking and sipping their cool beers.

The Mayor's car was parked nearby - a gleaming black limousine complete with flags and ornaments for the occasion.

The two fellers eyed it.

One said 'With a car like that you wouldn't need a woman'. I couldn't help but wonder what they would do with a car – be it Rolls, Silver Cloud or similarin bed!

There is never anything nice about death but I liked the ending to this little story.

Mr and Mrs Martin of Bolsover, Derbyshire were married 75 years and had five or six children.

At the age of 97 and 96 respectively Mrs Martin was taken into hospital on a Wednesday

Mr Martin died at home on the Thursday from a broken heart no doubt since they had never been parted.

No one told Mrs Martin and she died peacefully on the Saturday. Both were buried together on Monday – and neither knew the other was dead.

One of my nicest birthday presents was Hetty, a lovely hen and four chicks.

When Harold and Nellie delivered Hetty there was great excitement and as they left Harold said – ‘Let us know when they start laying, it will be a few weeks’.

When the first egg did arrive I was over the moon.

I carefully boiled it hard, stuck a label with Harold and Nellie’s name and address on it, stamped it and popped it in the letter box.

What fun that caused.

I heard later that as it travelled along the conveyor belt at the post office the stamping clerk could not believe his eyes as it rolled past him.

The egg was duly carefully stamped and delivered in tact to Harold and Nellie. The only message on the egg was the word ‘received’ and the date ... and everyone knew when the chickens started laying including the postman and the local newspaper who took up the story.

It must be acknowledged that we all get fed up with routine but I reckon my mate came up with a simple way out. She admitted to provoking a row so that her husband made himself some bread and cheese and then he cleared off out. She wouldn't tell him she didn't want to cook but a few techy words got her out of it. I think that's cheating!

We have had builders on our premises for at least six weeks doing a job that should take one week. You know the set up – work one day and have three off or go somewhere else fitting two or three jobs in together – and not really mastering any of them. In the past we have had great difficulty in getting our caravan out of the gate. Literally there were only inches to spare and how we have not managed to scrape the side is nothing short of a miracle. So we asked the builders to remove a side pillar making the gap a good foot wider which should make the manoeuvre easier. The only problem is that the lads who undertook the work have dismantled the gate-post and dumped the lot directly in front of the caravan.... and cleared off. We shall be lucky to see them again – meantime we cannot get the caravan out at all.

It was raining hard when I went into the chemist to collect a prescription for our coughing child (yet again),
It was raining even harder when I came out again so I ducked my head down and ran like the clappers to the waiting car – plonking myself in the front seat.
The area around my feet looked clean and uncluttered as I stared at my wet feet and a voice kindly said ‘I think you’ve got the wrong car love’.
It was the same make of car, same colour, same everything except the surprised man in the driver’s seat was definitely not my husband.

My Gran – Saran – short for Sarah Ann – had a pleasant nature.
She was the sort who would sit rocking in her chair mulling things over and twiddling her thumbs – to the annoyance of Granddad.
I can honestly say I never ever heard Gran rant and rave at all.
However she had a sure way of letting everyone know when she had had enough – she wore her apron inside out.

Ken our milkman always gives a cheery call but one day he arrived in a panic with no time to chat at all.
It was most unlike him but the reason was revealed the following day – he had put his trousers in the laundry basket

for wash along with £7 worth of insurance stamps in the back pocket.

He rushed home on the milk float which will only go at the aggravating speed of 10 miles an hour to retrieve the trousers from the waiting heap in front of the washing machine which was just finishing the last rinse of the programme. Phew.

I must watch the holly bush.

It's getting a little high for comfort.

When it gets bigger it stops the boiler from working and the air is forced backwards so that the boiler malfunctions, belting smoke and soot out into the kitchen.

The first time we removed the holly bush I had started to saw it down when the gallant man in my life returned from the office in his good office suit and tie get up.

He took the saw from me with a helpful gesture and carried on where I had left off.

This tale has remained a favourite one for the children to repeat – what was so funny about father removing the holly bush – he promptly sawed his tie in half!

We all agree there is a lot to a name. We talk about a child who was given a name that was had several s's in it and so had the surname. Imagine the dread for that poor child when giving her name at school. It was such a mouthful.

My mother always says how much she dislikes her name – Alice.

I feel it is unjustified since apart from the Wonderland connection it is a kind and simple name and at least one doesn't connect anything horrible to it.

I would even say my mother should be proud of her name since it brought great joy when she was born.

My grandmother took in laundry and the lady of the manor called at the house to leave some to be done.

Gran wouldn't let her know that she had no money to buy soap and blue to undertake the task.

She always lived by the principle 'The Lord will provide'.

As the well ribbed lady left my grandmother she approached the pram where my mother was sleeping.

She was the last of eight children and another mouth to provide for adding to the problems large families create even though they are much loved.

The laundry was left with a promise that it would be done and as the lady floated by the pram she enquired if this was the latest addition to the Williamson family and she asked her name.

Pride swelled as Gran said the perfect dimpled child under the spotless covers was Alice.

'What a charming name – we shall have to cross her palm with silver for luck'.

And that half crown was lucky because it provided the soap and blue needed to do the washing which in turn kept them all going a bit longer.
