

## As I See It by Joan Barnett

### The Bucket List

Jeremiah 31:9. NIV. I will lead them beside streams of water on a level path, where they will not stumble.

I am unsure as to how the idea of creating a list of things that must be achieved by the end of one's life came about. It certainly appears to be of great interest to many people. Even more so I do wonder how buckets came to be used to describe the list. I thought buckets were for carrying whatever you wanted to put in them. Perhaps it was considered because you could put your hand in and bring out said item on the list in order to enjoy it then discard it. The bucket holding the rest of the list.

Lists of any sort of things I had to do before it would be impossible have never entered my mind. Wanting to visit various places if the possibility arose was another thing.

Before my sight loss journey happened, we had been making comments about visiting Bath. Our daughter obviously listened, A joint Christmas present in 2001 was a weekend in Bath for the end of February 2002. What a lovely present. We were booked into a guest house well within walking distance of all the various interesting tourist attractions. The Crescent, the post office, the abbey and the Roman Baths. Lunch at the Pump Room where a pianist entertained the diners. As it was the late Queen's Golden Jubilee there was a special exhibition of some of her gowns in the Museum of Costume. We were all given audio gadgets rather than having a guide. These were very useful because you could listen to extra information without offending other visitors. Similar gadgets were available when going round the Roman Baths. My first experience into the world of audio technology, one I would come to find most useful as the years have passed.

The following year the suggestion was made that a week inn a self-catering cottage could be booked. We said Cornwall would be ideal as we wanted to visit the Eden Project and the Lost gardens of Heligan. Once again it was the end of February. Daffodils surrounded the Eden Project, the biomes all two of them then were most interesting. Very warm in one of them, I did find it funny to be walking round wearing a winter hat while carrying my coat. Well, we are not responsible for the temperatures. The visit to Heligan was the most enjoyable of the two places for me. We spent the day there but still managed to miss one of the gardens. I discovered this when reading the book, I had bought in the gift shop. The Italian Garden, with the Thunder Box. This was the place where the gardeners had written their names on the wall while doing what was necessary. Having enjoyed our trip, we went back in the summer making sure we did not miss anything this time. Just as well, my sight loss happening a couple of years later ended any desires I had to revisit.

Remembrance Day is this month, it is worth mentioning that I received an interesting book sent from Listening Books, The Lost years. A fictional account of how life might have been in Heligan house during World War One.

A few years on, it is Christmas 2004 and we are presented with another week's holiday. This time a cottage in Wales. Bodnant gardens and Port Merion had been suggested to us by a friend that they were well worth a visit. We looked forward to our holiday in the first week of May 2005. How were any of us to know that halfway through the months from receiving our Christmas present and going away for our holiday, I would undergo what turned out to be a life changing experience. My sight loss journey began on March 12<sup>th</sup> 2005 when I woke up with no vision in my right eye. I had no idea at the time what was ahead of me because the subsequent operation for a detached retina should have been successful.

The sighted assistant had to cope without his usual navigator for the journey to Wales, no SAT NAV either. Despite not having the luxury of any assistive technology I managed with what useful vision I was left with. Negotiating Bodnant gardens left me with memories of going up and down endless steps.

Managing life with sight loss did not spoil our holiday.

Looking back over the years, visiting gardens has been one of our favourite pastimes. Geoff Hamilton's Barnsdale garden, in Rutland was another place we visited many times when I was sighted. Living near the RHS garden at Wisley enabled many visits over the years.

The verse from Jeremiah reminded me of the visits, being led along the path beside a stream, stumbling is the last thing anyone would want to spoil what should be an enjoyable occasion.

I enjoy listening to Gardener's Question Time. BBC radio Four. The programme often visits a well-known garden either for a visit and post bag questions or a shorter visit during a programme. If it is a garden I have visited, the memories come flooding back once again.