

CHAPTER 1 - JULY

WELCOME NOTE

Welcome to *Facing 50 with humour* the blog that gives you laughter lines. And, clearly, very bad tag lines. I was going to call it *Facing 50 with Fear, Trepidation and a bottle of Chardonnay* but I think that title was already taken. I suppose it's like a diary only anyone with internet facilities can read it. For me it's more than a diary. This is the only way I'll stop myself from going insane, or indeed committing murder. I hope you enjoy it. Please feel free to leave me a comment.

ABOUT ME

My name is Amanda Wilson. I like chick flicks, wine, romantic novels, wine, 1970's and 80's music, chocolate and wine. I am a very desperate housewife. I live in a village in rural Staffordshire, populated almost entirely by elderly people. Even the local window cleaner is in his seventies. I used to have a life and a job. Nowadays, I seem to spend most of my time acting as a referee between my husband, Phil, who since he retired, has become the grumpiest of grumpy old men, and my son. We waved him off with a fanfare to university a couple of years ago but he returned to the nest almost immediately, having turned into a complete drop out. Life is a tad on the dull side at the moment. However, there are changes afoot, very significant changes and that is why I am writing this blog. By the way did I mention I like wine?

Monday 5th

My very first blogging entry and I for one, am rather proud of myself. It's taken five days to work out how to do it, but here I am at last. Where shall I begin? I could start by complaining about my rotten life and how last night, my revolting son brought back several of his drunken friends to our house after we had gone to bed. They made so much noise that at 2am I had to go downstairs and ask them to leave. This morning I got up to find toast crumbs and jam spread all over the

kitchen tops where they had tried to make some food and someone had left me a floating present in the toilet.

....Or, I could rant about my crotchety husband who spent breakfast reading the back of the milk carton, ignoring my conversation about what we could do for the day. He withdrew to his study without a word. I might as well have been invisible. However, that is all far too depressing.

How about beginning with the subject of birthdays? My life has been turned completely upside down this last year for a variety of reasons. To cap it all I have reached a serious crisis point this month because I am going to turn fifty. How depressing is that? The big five oh. No one prepares you for this. You trundle along merrily with your daily business, striking off birthdays as if they were cricket scores, thinking nothing of it and then one day you look in the mirror and see your mother staring back at you. You wonder how this can have happened without you noticing before. Your expiry date is just about up. You are going to be half a century. In cricket terms you are going to be fifty but hopefully, not out, not just yet.

When it was Phil's fiftieth, nine years ago, I pulled out all the stops in an attempt to celebrate the event. Part of me believes you should embrace these occasions and be spoilt by those who love you. In those days I hadn't quite realised how depressing it was to actually be facing fifty. I arranged a surprise trip to Dubai. I cajoled a free upgrade from economy class to business class on the flight by playing the *It's his Big Birthday* card at the check in desk. Actually, I think the woman checking us in took pity on him as he stood in red faced silent embarrassment while his noisy wife divulged his age to the world. I did the best I could to make it special. So, when Phil announced a few months ago that he would help me celebrate my birthday by arranging a surprise trip I initially got very excited in spite of the usual anxiety that one feels at hitting a milestone birthday.

Last year it poured down in torrents on my birthday. It rained, non-stop, from the moment I woke up to moment I sank back into my bed in a semi-drunken stupor. As usual, nothing special was planned for the day. Phil is just no good at planning birthday surprises, and as he despises

parties, I can't even plan one for myself. It was too wet to go out anywhere. It was such a shame because I used to love my birthdays and the excitement that surrounds them. Unfortunately, it's been some time since I've felt excitement about anything.

The novelty of going away and being spoiled rotten for a few days is beginning to wane slightly as the big day creeps nearer, and I consider just how old I actually am. I am as old as *Coronation Street*. I can remember miniskirts the first time they became fashionable. The problem is that I don't really believe I am all that old. I still consider myself to be fairly young. Last month though the realization hit me, well more thumped me squarely on the nose. Almost immediately, I began to feel old. I don't suppose my newly discovered depression is due solely to my forthcoming birthday. I have just realised how unimportant I have become and how dreary my life is. Still, there is no point in being too depressed about it and going away will be such a treat.

I've been in preparation for four months, cutting down on food and cutting out chocolate. I tried cutting out the odd glass of wine too but that made me fractious. I have been a slave to sit-ups every night in an attempt to look good in my newly purchased Karen Millen shorts. I know it may seem as if I am making an enormous deal about it but it is such a novelty to be going away let alone making a trip abroad.

We haven't been away since Tom dropped out of university a year ago. One minute we were looking forward to Phil's early retirement, doing some travelling and having 'us' time and the next, Tom had returned from university with a hillock of debt (thank goodness he didn't stay the full four years or it would have been an Everest sized mountain of debt), and a huge attitude problem.

He has transformed from a nice young man into a hideous selfish oaf. He spends most of the time lazing about in bed, down at the pub or on his mobile phone. I almost don't recognise him as the dear boy he used to be. Whatever he learned at university in that year will certainly be of no use in today's job market, unless there are vacancies for young men to test out free beer and cigarettes. I'll certainly be glad to abandon him for a few days.

Phil won't tell me where we are going but he looks very pleased with himself and keeps whistling, *Oh! We're going to Jamaica*. He also whistles, *Tie Me Kangaroo down Sport* so maybe I'm reading too much into that especially as we are only going away for six nights. However, he knows I do not want to get rained off this year and that I love the sea so he'll surely have booked a trip to the South of France or Spain. In fact, anywhere sunny would be acceptable.

Posted by Facing50Blog.com - 0 Comments

Wednesday 7th

This morning I woke up at four am to find Phil's side of the bed empty. He normally gets up early but even by his standards four o'clock is suspiciously early. I wondered if he was feeling alright as he's been having trouble sleeping recently and so got up to make sure he wasn't being sick or indeed, nothing worse had happened. He wasn't in the bathroom, or the office where the computer lay dormant blinking its sleepy little red light at me. There was no sign of him in the lounge or the kitchen, and by the back door I discovered his slippers. No, he had not left home. I knew immediately where he would be. I made him a cup of coffee, got a coat and boots on and made my way down to the bottom of the garden to the paddock.

Phil was sitting on his haunches dressed in his old blue anorak and pyjama bottoms. In his hand he had a large shovel. He saw me and motioned for me to be quiet. I tiptoed as lightly as possible to where he was squatting. He pointed nearby to a mound of earth which was moving slightly. It stopped and then the earth moved again. Phil leapt up and smashed the mound with his shovel passionately, yelling obscenities but I think we both knew that the mole causing the destruction of our paddock with its molehills had disappeared into the labyrinth of tunnels and would be back to torment him later.

The mole arrived four months ago. If you could see our garden you'd think there were at least twenty moles in residence, not just one. It started one Sunday afternoon. Phil had just spent his usual two hours walking up and down what we call the paddock; three quarters of an acre of grass

overlooking fields. It was meticulously trimmed with smart green stripes resembling a well kept bowling green. He'd cleaned his mower, oiled it, placed it back in the shed in its space between the ladders and the leaf blower, and gone for a shower.

When he went out to admire the field after his shower, and to hang out his towel to dry, he discovered a large mound of earth right in the middle of the paddock destroying the neat illusion he'd created. He immediately got his spade and neatly replaced the earth, jumping on it all to make it flat again and attempted to replace the grass which had also been pushed up. Twenty minutes later and the mound had been pushed up again. Phil fetched his spade and flattened the earth. All was quiet until the next morning when he discovered not only was the mole hill up again, but so were two others at the far end of the paddock, and so he flattened them all and replaced the grass with ferocity and much cursing.

Since then it has become a battle of wills. The mole is definitely winning. We now have a paddock with so much tunnelling under it that Phil can no longer mow it properly. The lawnmower lurches from side to side in a drunken fashion as it falls into the dips. It is impossible to make the grass look tidy. Each morning he or I go out and flatten the hills. By lunchtime they are all up again. We repeat the process in the evening. Wednesday, I put back twenty-six hills before he could see them and rage even more. The garden has been annihilated.

Naturally, we've tried to get rid of it. At first, I thought we could simply discourage it from coming into the field. We put anti-mole products on the lawn and a sonic tube that emitted a noise which moles are supposed to loathe. Our mole put a hill up right beside it, so it must be deaf. We dropped moth balls into the tunnels as apparently they are sensitive to certain aromas and dislike the smell of moth balls. The mole continued to put up its hills. A neighbour suggested that moles hate the smell of blood and volunteered to get me a few buckets from the local abattoir but I couldn't face pouring it all over the garden. It would look like something from a horror film. I read moles were haemophiliac. Phil cut down small branches from the pyracantha bush to shove down the hole

and prick it to death. I ripped my fingers to bits shoving them into the tunnels and bled all over my white top. When Phil wasn't looking I pulled all the pieces out again. It was too horrible a death, even for an irritating mole.

Eventually, what with the devastation it was causing, and the annoyance factor I became worried about Phil whose blood pressure was going sky high, and called in a pest controller. It cost a fortune but he put gas pellets down all the tunnels, assured us we would be rid of the mole, and he'd come back to check progress in a couple of weeks. Two weeks later the mole was more active than ever, presumably it was hyper on all the gas it ingested before it put on its own little gas mask. The pest controller declared it a mystery. He gave up after the sixth attempt.

Phil the hunter, is determined that he will catch this mole. He is often to be found sitting with his shovel in one hand and his fork in the other. Each time he sees a shudder of earth he spears the mound with his fork, and hits the hill with his shovel. The mole is almost a metaphor for what is happening in our lives. We are stuck in a repetitive, frustrating pattern. Phil is getting increasingly irritated by it. I know how he feels.

In the meantime I'm looking for a mole catcher, one of those individuals who'll catch it and transport it away, preferably to Greenland. You'd think living in the country there would be hundreds of mole catchers but apparently it is a dying art due to pest controllers who now deal with moles. I think I'll have my work cut out to find one. On the bright side, at least it's given Phil something to do other than check his share portfolio all the time.

Posted by Facing50Blog.com - 2 Comments

SexyFitChick said...Hello! You sound like a desperate housewife alright. It gets to us all in the end. I'm a fan of chick flicks and wine too. I thought I'd leave a comment and hope you get the little varmint sorted. I mean the mole, not Phil, although it sounds like he needs sorting out too. Next door's dog seems to keep critters away from my house. Good luck with it all. I'll be checking back

to see how you are getting on. In the meantime I'm raising a glass of Australian Shiraz to you. We have some great wines here.

Facing 50 said...I am so pleased to meet you. It's so nice to know there is someone else out there who understands my frustrations - and pleasures – cheers!

Friday 9th

Yesterday, I received a card and a cheque for twenty pounds 'to indulge myself' from my mother. She is a widow and struggling on a pension. She grows her own vegetables, brews her own repulsively strong wine which she insists on glugging straight from the demijohn before it is ready, and only spends money on cigarettes which she absolutely refuses to give up.

I've noticed that of late she has become increasingly like one of Marge Simpson's sisters: Patty or Selma. She's always got a drink in her hand, a cigarette in her mouth and growls rather than talks. Actually, to look at her, she looks more like Grandpa Simpson or one of those wrinkly dogs - a Shar Pei. Still, she is my mother and I remember her when she was very beautiful and looked like a glamorous Joan Collins. I saw a photograph of her taken when she was a young twenty year old and she was an absolute stunner.

Feeling very fond of her at that precise moment I decided to spontaneously telephone her instead of waiting for the usual Sunday call.

The telephone emitted a sickening screeching noise. I almost dropped the phone trying to cover my ears.

"Hello? Mum?"

"It's you," replied a rather disappointed gravelly voice. "I thought you were one of those nuisance calls. I've had nine in the last forty-eight hours so I nipped next door this morning and borrowed an old chalk board from Bernard who teaches Art. I've been waiting all day for them to

ring again. When I answer the phone I drag my nails down the board to put them off. I've been dying to know if it works.

She demonstrated again and I experienced another ear deafening screech.

“I can assure you if I were a salesman, I definitely wouldn't phone you again after that row.”

I waited for a response. There was a lengthy pause while she dragged on her cigarette.

“They always seem to ring when I'm upstairs in the bathroom. I have to rush down the stairs only to be greeted with: ‘Congratulations, you have won a prize,’” she drawled in an American accent which brought on a fit of coughing. “I'm sick of them. I thought I'd managed to get them stopped by using that telephone service but these calls are coming from abroad.”

There was another pause while she coughed, not just a cough; a revolting hacking stomach turning cough. She starts every day like that. It's like an old engine coughing into life each morning. It's horrible.

The tirade about cold callers continued for a further seven minutes, at which point I began to wonder why I was even bothering to phone, when she suddenly barked,

“Anyway, why are you phoning? Did you get my card and money? I sent it yesterday so it should have reached you today. I hope it hasn't got lost in the post. I sent it early so you would get it in plenty of time and be able to take it away with you...”

That was that. She was in full flow. You can't get a word in sometimes with her. She barely pauses for breath. Steam filled the kitchen as the kettle boiled. I put the phone down on the top and poured hot water over my tea bag. I let the flavours infuse and removed the bag. Cup of tea in hand, I retrieved the phone.

“...I put a first class stamp on it too so it would get there in time. What a price they are. I remember when it only cost six old pence.”

I seized the opportunity as she paused to take another drag, to break into her monologue.

“That’s why I’m phoning. I thought you’d like to know I’d received it. Thank you for the money too.”

“Well, it’s not enough for a toy boy or a yacht,” she chuckled throatily. “Mind you, you’re too old to know what to do with a toy boy now. You’d probably just sit him down with a cup of tea.” There was more raucous chuckling followed by a coughing fit.

“Anyway looking at your last photograph you sent of yourself I thought you could probably use it to get some of that buttocks stuff. After all, you’re not getting any younger are you?” What was she waffling on about? Jennifer Lopez had had her buttocks lifted. Is that what she meant? Mine need more than a lift. I think they reach the back of my knees. No, she couldn’t mean a buttocks lift. I mused about it while she launched into a further monologue about the past.

“Do you remember that time when you broke the door handle and we couldn’t get out of the lounge for hours?”

“Oh and what about that time you fell down the stairs and landed on the vicar who had just popped around.”

“I’ll never forget the time, you’d have been about fourteen, you got stuck attempting to climb though the tiny open kitchen window because you had lost your house keys and couldn’t let yourself in. When we came home from work, there you were, bottom in the air. Ha, ha, ha!”

I just added the odd ‘yes’, still curious as to why I needed stuff for my buttocks. I’ve always had a large backside. No one has ever suggested I needed it enlarging. It was sufficiently large, hence I got stuck all those years ago trying to get through the window. Her ability to recall events from thirty and forty years ago astounds me. I pondered further on what she might have meant. Maybe old age had caught up with her at last and she was just talking gibberish. She continued her personal trip down memory lane

“Mum, what do you mean ‘buttocks stuff?’” I asked as she inhaled deeply on a freshly lit cigarette.

“For your wrinkles. You know, injections that freeze your face and stop your laughter lines from becoming too pronounced, buttocks injections ” she emphasised getting back on to the subject in hand, which at that point was my inability to cook and how I had boiled a pan dry trying to cook an egg when I was a teenager. She really does live in the past. I hope I don’t get like that. Mind you, I can barely remember what I did last week. All the days seem to blend into one dull and pointless one

Posted by Facing50Blog.com - 2 Comments

SexyFitChick said...What a character! Is she for real? My mother spends all her time on the beach wearing a large hat and worrying about her SPF cream. Still, she doesn’t remember much about what I was like as a teenager – thank goodness. I was a bit of a tearaway.

Facing 50 said...Yes, she’s always been like that. She loves to criticise me. I’m suppose I’m used to her put downs now. She can be quite funny though when she’s had a few drinks and is telling a story. My mother used to put olive oil on her skin to get a suntan. She looks like a walnut now. At least your mother is sensible.