

## TWO DOWN, ONE TO GO!

Written by Debbie Millard (nee Bell)

My journey with Farms for City Children began many years ago and recently I have had the opportunity to make two very thought provoking and emotional visits to two of the three amazing venues.

Nethercott and Wick Court are the two down and the one to go – Lower Treginnis

How and why did I come to visit both the farms? How has Farms for City Children come to be my chosen charity and why does it mean so much to my family and I?

During my early teenage years Farms for City Children was a charity my father spoke about, but I really didn't know very much about – in fact my misconception was that I believed the charity to be based in London – how wrong could I be! My father, Peter Bell, worked for the Tallow Chandlers Company, London who supported the charity and Farms for City Children held a special place in his heart.



My father Peter Bell hard at work in his office at home

I still miss not receiving Farms for City Children's very distinctive Christmas card from my father each year – I used to so look forward to seeing the Christmas design when the card landed on our doormat and it would have pride of place amongst our cards.

In the last few years of his life my dad and I talked about Farms for City Children in depth – I know that he would periodically phone the Exeter Office and chatted with the staff. The kindness and consideration of Tracy and her colleagues is deeply appreciated. These chats were so important to him especially after the loss of his beloved Wiggin – his wife and our dear mother.

My visit to Nethercott came about due to my father's wishes. My father made it clear to us that he did not want flowers at his funeral. He made the emphatic request that donations be made to Farms for City Children and this we complied with. My siblings and I were very touched with the donations received and I liaised with Tracy Izod to discuss how the monies be best utilized. She and I agreed that a new incubator be purchased for Nethercott Farm. Following its purchase and installation at Nethercott I have received regular updates and photos from Tracy.



Andy, Katherine and I by the incubator

In August 2014 I was invited to make a special visit to Nethercott and was joined on the expedition by my son, daughter and close friend Lynn (she was our chauffeur to Nethercott). I will never forget that day! I was excited to be visiting Nethercott but as I was missing my

father it was an emotional trip – to be honest there were times during the journey that I quietly wiped a tear or two away. Shortly before arriving Tracy messaged me saying that Michael (Morpurgo) was waiting to see us at Nethercott – then the tears really did flow (and yes as I write this they are flowing again

Whilst our visit to Nethercott was during the school holidays, having no children in residence on this occasion didn't detract from the magic of the day. It is difficult to express my feelings about the day, however everyone at Nethercott was so welcoming and inclusive and loving that I felt as if I had known them all for a very long time. All day my senses were bombarded and the walled garden so reminded me of my favourite book *The Secret Garden* that I fully expected to find Dickon and the robin around the next corner.



Lynn – our chauffeur for the day leaving the *Secret Garden*

We walked around the farm, collected eggs, picked fruit and vegetables and enjoyed wonderful food and hospitality...But..... the most emotionally charged part of the day for me had to be the trip on the trailer to see the War Horse farm.

I was glad I had taken my sunglasses and that I was sitting opposite my family. The remote, stark beauty of the area, reminded me that I deeply missed my father, his deep love of the natural world and why Farms for City Children had meant so much to him. I felt the presence of both my parents during this precious day and it has assisted my grieving and healing process- Thank you to all who facilitated this day.

Visit two coincided last summer following my 'big birthday'. Whilst having a celebratory gathering I suggested to my treasured friends and family that they might make donations to Farms for City Children in lieu of any gifts. I was touched with the gifted donations received. I contacted Tracy (Izod) and she suggested that this donation would be appreciated at Wick Court.

I was contacted by Heather at Wick Court and she gave me two options which would be appreciated by Wick court –relating to the ponies or the orchard. After careful thought, and another trip down memory lane to when I remembered my own pony, Queenie, I asked for the donation to be used for purchasing equipment for the ponies. Heather kindly invited my husband and I to visit Wick Court when a school was in residence so I could see how the children would benefit from the purchases made.

Early September 2015 found my husband Paul and I heading to Gloucester – an area not so far from our home but one we had not previously visited.



The welcome at Wick Court, as at Nethercott, made me feel we were back amongst friends and the entire day will be remembered for years to come. Our day started with a welcome coffee, we then were taken on an extensive tour of the house being shown round by two very enthusiastic children from the visiting school and we then

were shown around outside by the Farm Manager. At lunch we joined the staff from Wick Court enjoying a wonderful meal - the majority of the ingredients being home-grown or produced locally. Then we were invited to join one group of the school children in a formal outdoor activity – little did I realise how much learning, laughter and happiness could come from the weighing of a group of very obliging pigs! A huge thank you must be extended to the children and staff of Baguley Hall School for making us so welcome and allowing us to join them. The sun shone and the bats even graced us with appearance – It was a delight to see the children enjoying the countryside and being able to observe the learning taking place – often without the children even realising this.



Some of the equipment purchased with my “Special Birthday donations”

The sensorial experience of this wonderful day has left me with the most vivid memories. In fact we both loved the experience so much my husband and I are planning to return to Wick Court very soon and we have already returned to Gloucestershire revisiting the lovely hotel we found near Wick Court.

Thanks must go to Heather and all the amazing staff at Wick Court – Paul and I can’t wait to find an excuse to re-visit you soon – if we lived nearer I would be volunteering every week!



My husband, as the Chair of Governors at local primary school, was so impressed by the learning facilities, the attention to detail and the care given to the safety of the children taking part in all the activities at Wick Court. However the memory we both treasure the most and will hold close to our hearts was the love and laughter everywhere.

This leaves one farm school to visit - Lower Treginnis farm. I have wanted to visit this third farm following my visits to Nethercott and Wick Court. The farm has been featured in a recent TV programme and it has reconfirmed my determination to visit – Pembroke is an area I don’t know so I cannot wait to visit it, hopefully accompanied by our eldest daughter Nicole who has yet to visit a Farms For City Children farm – maybe I can think of a fund raising event I could hold so that I can make a donation to this farm as well. Now I wonder what wonderful equipment they may need.

So this is my story of how I came to support the Charity Farms for City Children and what this charity means to me. Maybe you could share your story too?

Debbie Millard