

## WOULD YOU LIKE TO GO TO GIBRALTAR?

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"Would you like to go to Gibraltar?" the University of Sheffield professor asked me - right out of the blue - on a visit to the Channel Islands recently. The Education Centre in Guernsey recently linked with the University of Sheffield for Nurse Training Courses and the Library has received the stamp of approval. It turned out that the Gibraltar Health Authority has also gone down the University of Sheffield path, but needs to upgrade the Health Studies resource.

Of course, I said that I would love to go, in my own remaining annual leave, if necessary. However, my line manager saw the assignment as being of credit to our institution and was happy to treat the days away from work as part of my Continuing Professional Development. A couple of months later I was on my way to the Rock in a force 8 gale, losing height in a series of stomach churning descents, down from the clouds to just above the whipped up grey waves, as we touched the runway and the engines roared in our ears as they cut back power rapidly. Loosening my strangled seat belt and unpeeling my hand from the brace position on the seat in front, I joined in the applause of the passengers and prepared to meet my host, Kevin Pizarro, Principal of the School of Health Studies.

Cheerful in the drenching rain, my host saw my forlorn face outside the tiny airport and tucked me into his car - parked in cavalier fashion - outside the main entrance. This was my first contact with Gibraltarian hospitality and straightaway I knew that everything was going to be all right. I was taken to Gibraltar's finest hotel - The Rock - overlooking the

Botanical Gardens and was left to recover my senses. The room was luxurious, with a balcony on two sides, complementary whisky, for which I was truly grateful, and a rubber duck to play with, in the chin-high bath I poured to restore my cramped limbs.

The following morning dawned still rainy. From the balcony I could see a large, industrial harbour, naval craft and Spain across the water. After breakfast, Kevin went through the programme with me and we set off for the current location of the School and Library, at the aptly named "Bleak House" on a cliff edge overlooking the African coast and the Straits of Gibraltar. As the rain cleared away, Bleak House looked a lot less Bleak and more Des. res. We admired the view of the shipping lanes between continents and the place where the dolphins pass through although unfortunately - not while I was there.

Bleak House is built around a courtyard, a haven for a flock of sparrows that nest in every crevice, safe from predators. Wrenching myself from my new hobby (ornithology) I looked over the classrooms and met some of the 12 nurses on the Registered Nurse course. The Library was tiny and I started to make notes as to its needs and development. A long interview with the College Librarian, who is currently giving a day of his time every week to the Nurses' collection, resulted in a clearer picture and a list of tasks that I could undertake back home to help him for the interim, until a Health Studies Librarian can be appointed. There have been frustrating delays in setting up an ISDN line. Good ICT (Information Communications Technology) seems to me to be the only way forward, for the School in general, and the Library in particular. I then went through a number of ideas with the Principal and went to formulate the skeleton of an Action Plan over lunch.

While I was occupied with this in the Nurse/Tutors' office Kevin, the IT Technician and the departing Librarian finally had a meeting and resolved their problems, with the promise of Internet connection within 24 hours.

We then drove to the town centre at the other end of the Rock and I was invited to sit in on interviews for the post of Library Assistant. To and from the office where the interviews were held, I had fascinating glimpses of old Spanish buildings, with luxuriant foliage hanging from balconies, dark green shutters and dragon trees in courtyards. The little streets leading off the main street are aptly called "ramps" and my calf muscles can testify to the accuracy of that description. On the way to the job interviews, we ran into Kevin's English wife and their daughter. They met in Cardiff as students and she has adapted to life in Gibraltar with few reservations. It must help to be able to cross the border to a villa in Spain every weekend and have healthy, happy, bilingual children who have a good educational system and plenty of water sports and fun on the family boat at the Yacht Club. Not a bad life! The family home is a converted Methodist School with terraced gardens overlooking the town and harbour. Having admired this lifestyle, I got back to business. We saw three candidates and all agreed on a clear choice. Then I was taken back to my hotel to spend a few hours before the evening part of the programme.

On the way I spotted the Cable Car station by the Botanical Gardens. Leaving my heavy briefcase and swapping the laptop for sunglasses and camera at the hotel I ran down to catch one of the last cable cars of the afternoon up to the top of the Rock. From there the views are breathtaking. People who suffer from vertigo should not go to Gibraltar. In warm sunshine, by this time, I felt elated and in high spirits to be exploring on my first day.

The famous apes and their babies were in evidence from halfway up the Rock, but people treat these wild animals as cuddly toys at their peril. A few people had their lunch bags snatched. They were delightful animals to photograph from a safe distance. After a pleasant walk halfway down the mountain on a winding country road I explored St. Michael's caves, a vast subterranean network lined with stalagmites and stalactites, formed from the soft limestone. Blasting during the last war revealed further

caves (the Rock is hollow!) and an underground lake. Concerts are held in the Caves, although, unfortunately, not while I was there.

That evening I attended the Annual General Meeting of the Gibraltar Health Authority. Dr. Vijay Kumar, the Director of Public Health, to whom I talked afterwards, made the report presentation. It transpired that Vijay knows the Guernsey Director of Public Health, Dr. David Jeffs, and gave me a message and copy of the report to take to him. I took another copy, planning to put it into stock in the Guernsey Health Studies Library, as it could be useful to use as a comparison between health services, for students on a public health or community nursing assignment.

The architects who are planning the conversion of a huge empty new office block on reclaimed land at Europa Point presented their plans which showed a new general hospital with the top two floors planned as an Institute of Health Studies, having a Library on both floors lit by a glass atrium and stunning sea views. I felt that I would kill to work there. Afterwards, several useful meetings occurred informally, as they can so easily in a small community.

The architects were interested in the needs of a new library. The IT Technician, who works for the Gibraltarian telecommunications firm Nynex was also at the meeting and the hospitality afterwards. He reported that he had just connected the hardware to an ISDN line, which was cheering news. We discussed the need for an IT technician to be trained by Nynex in ICT, and particularly in Sirsi-Unicorn, the software library package bought for the Library. I felt that the Gibraltar Health Authority would soon need a fledgling IT department to sort out the glitches and gremlins which are such a feature of the IT on which we all depend! I had checked out Sirsi-Unicorn before my visit and it seemed like a good choice for an offshore Library Resource.



After both the formal and the informal meetings Kevin and a few friends took me out to a pub up the road where we sat outside in the full moonlight drinking red wine and eating tapas, in high spirits, with a sense of progress made towards getting the Library on its feet.

Next day I woke early, too excited to sleep, and worked on the Action Plan while the moon slowly set over Spain and the sun rose reluctantly behind the Rock. Kevin met me early over breakfast where I showed him the bones of the Plan, and we worked on some ideas and amendments. I felt that there were major benefits to be gained by developing close links between our two health communities, sharing resources and ideas. The Action Plan falls into three phases: laying the foundations, the move to the Europort building and a vision for future development.

We drove to Bleak House to collect some documents I needed and then on to Europa Point to see the new site. The building is very fine and should make a wonderful hospital. The lifts could not be used as we were alone in the building and did not fancy spending a weekend there, in case of electricity failure. The top two floors were worth the climb up seven flights of stairs. We planned out the Library layout and visualised the beautiful new Institute of Health Studies that would be developed in such a perfect location.

After that, we parted at the hotel and I was free to wander into town and explore the shops and restaurants. Chinese silkwear is very cheap and every other shop seems to want to provide you with night attire. I bought an emerald green silk kimono, embroidered with dragons for £12.99 and some silk pyjamas. During a conversation with the Pakistani shop owner I heard about the grievances of those like himself and the Moroccan community, who cannot easily get permission to cross the border into Spain. Sensing a sympathetic ear he asked me out to dinner, but I suspected that in this case, it was less my charms and more my passport that was the attraction, so I said regretfully that I didn't eat

dinner. This was true anyway, as the hotel breakfast was enough food for a day's march!

That afternoon the sun was warm enough to sit out on the balcony and sunbathe while working on Reports and Plans on the laptop. Not too much of a hardship! That night the sun set with a very satisfactory display of the green ray that can be seen by the lucky few on a perfect evening just as the sun slips behind the mountains.

Next morning I finished packing and explored as much of the rest of the Rock as was possible. In the town there was a wedding in the Cathedral with guests dressed to the nines, as for a glamorous nightclub. Soldiers in white uniforms formed a large part of the male congregation. It was a dazzling and heart-warming spectacle. Further along there was a military parade outside the Governor's Residence with a brass band and a lot of drill, enthusiastically copied by the children among the onlookers.

The journey back was calm and trouble-free. I missed the hospitality and charm of the Rock as soon as I left, even though I love my home and always feel glad to return to my island. The job of Health Studies Librarian will shortly be advertised and I advise anyone who could be happy living in a small community and taking on a really worthwhile challenge with like-minded colleagues, to check out the advertisement, when it appears. If anyone is interested they should contact me and I will let them know when the job is advertised.

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