

Where is my hand?

by Lesley Dawson

“Hi Jack. You are looking very smart.”

“I have just had my hair and beard cut, so am feeling really good.”

“That is good news. It makes you look younger.”

“Come on, we have known each other long enough for you not to tell me untruths” he grinned, his expression belying his words. I had obviously made him feel even better.

As I looked at him I thought how far he had come, even if he still had bad days. On the whole, he was able to look after himself and eat regularly. This was much better than a year ago when he had been just skin and bone and walked around in a daze most of the time he was sober.

“I hate to change the mood of the conversation but, have you heard that Carole died?”

“Really? When?”

“About three weeks ago. It was cancer.”

“Wow. What a shock. I think you two lived together at one time, didn’t you?”

“We did, but I couldn’t cope with all her phobias. It made ordinary life very difficult and even affected going shopping for food.”

“I remember her as a lovely lady, always smiling and interested in other people, but of course, I didn’t live with her.”

We went on to share our memories of Carole, both good and bad. I remembered that when she was off her meds, she couldn’t keep her hands still, that they shook all the time. That made it difficult to hold cups and deliver them full to guests who had requested them. She was very angry when Freddie suggested that it might be better to help out in the shop, rather than serve food and drink in the drop-in centre.

Working in our charity shop worked for a while until she began to harangue customers about their lives and faith.

Jack shared good times with Carole and her son when he was young.

“I remember that his favourite story was Peter Pan. He loved all the flying around and the appearances of Tinkerbell. He was convinced that one day he would be able to fly himself.”

We chuckled and shook our heads at the gullibility of children as John finished up his bangers and mash and started on the jam sponge and custard.

“When the crocodile bit off Captain Hook’s hand, Pete was very upset and started to have nightmares so often that we stopped reading the book. He would wake up in the middle of the night screaming, “I can’t feel my hand. Where has it gone?”

It was a long time before this stopped and even as he grew older he would stop whatever he was doing, from time to time and peel off his left glove to check that all his fingers were present on that hand.

As John reminisced about those times with Caroline and her son and events that had happened more recently, he smiled wistfully “ I suppose it’s like the ticking crocodile, isn’t it? Time is chasing after all of us.”