

Monday 30th June 2014

Dear Customer,

Another Sunday, another week of summer gone and another week of no sun whatsoever as the thick grey mass persists. It needs to get itself into gear and hover off quick as it's the Tour de France on Saturday, and, as we are being told by all the local media, 2 billion people will be watching the race on TV and eyeing up our 'dramatic scenery' for their next holiday. Pouring rain would nicely stub that out, which is the forecast.

I went up to Reeth today which is on the route and everyone is partying already, there's bunting out and hundreds of model yellow bikes stuck on trees and walls. People are filling up the campsites and B & B's already as no-one knows when the gridlock is coming but they know that it will. I thought the cyclists would whizz through in ten minutes and then it would be over but apparently it takes 3½ hours for the whole parade to pass through with the thousands of vehicles of associated support and the world's press.

I received a nice email invitation from my brother inviting me to a Tour de France party at his house in Harrogate which is just 150 yards from the Stage One finish line. I was very impressed and surprised with the effort he'd put into the design – little bikes on it and some pics of cocktails. It is so uncharacteristic of him, as is pursuing me for a response as he wouldn't normally give a stuff if I was there – maybe to know whether the irksome vegetarian option is required - he's always very good about that actually. He isn't offering anyone accommodation and made that clear on the invite, they hate house-guests, I just don't see how anyone would get there. All local accommodation was booked up years ago and Harrogate is gridlocked most of the time without 'the biggest show on earth' arriving.

I was in the café in The Station the other day, our ex train station turned 'Art' centre. The only free seat was on a table where a woman was penning something. I asked her what she was writing. She said everyone always asked her that - all probably disappointed it was just her diary. Richmond is a nice place to live but there's no Left Bank vibe, no Death cafes, in fact the 'Art' centre is as dull as ditch water. The 'writer' was a nice lady, told me she'd moved to Richmond from Bristol to find sanctuary. She added that she had met a man the other day had said the same.

Well I guess so did I. And take one look around and you'll see it's the same for everyone. Yep, it's meltdown town and so you may just want to make a note of that in your jotter for future reference..... in case you start slipping off the edge. There is something about living here which is very easy and comfortable – it is small enough to navigate but just big enough to be aloof and anonymous. In a panic you can slip off the Market Place down a little cobbled street and go and sit by the river, the waterfall or on the castle wal. There is only one set of traffic lights which is manageable for even the most wired - you're on your way before road rage can set in. And it is of course wrapped and cushioned in the glorious nature of the Dales. But the people of Richmond don't let it all hang out, not like they do in Hebden Bridge, they are discreet and they look normal....but they're not.

I think I'm the most normal person who lives here apart from my odd problem. For example, I can't park in parking spaces, not in Richmond – well sometimes I do if there's a space in the perfect place, otherwise I just park it in the place most convenient for me wherever that happens to be. I have an ongoing thing with the ticket warden, I'm always coming out and she's by my car, I storm over and she tells me it isn't a parking space, I say I know it isn't. She says I should go and find a proper parking space, I tell her I haven't got time. She tells me everyone else find the time, I tell her I can't spend 2 hours going to the Post Office and that I'm trying to run my business and create jobs. I get in the car, slam the door and drive off. That happens every week. Last night I had to pop to the Coop. The whole row of parking spaces was empty except for one car at the end. I hesitated a moment then went and parked it the other side of the car where there wasn't a space. I guess it's become a bit of a compulsion.

OCD, we all have that don't we these days ?? All my friends certainly have it. It's still taboo that we just don't talk about - the little 'habits' which become imperatives. We don't because we know it would be a declaration of madness. I know what my friends' OCDs are, not because they have told me, but because over time I've sussed them out. I can see when the panic sets in, when they quickly move in on me. If Ernest comes round for a cup of tea and I put the kettle on without putting fresh water in, his face lights up in terror and he leaps out of the chair, rushes over and makes some excuse to empty the kettle and refill it. To be on the safe side he prefers to make it himself which works for me. "Do you want a cup of tea Ernest ?" I ask "Yes, I'll make it" he says "do you want one ?" "Yes please" I say. I rarely listen to music these days, but if I do, I find a track on a CD which seems to be the perfect song for that moment and I play it over and over and over and over and over again. I always pray my neighbour can't hear what I'm doing. It's ok when you're on the move in the car, you can get away with it.

Right, it's now midnight and I'm off to puff up all the cushions, put the breadcrumb and the pea in the recycling bin, tell each of my guinea pigs that I love them, give them 3 or 9 french beans and check each door 3 timesotherwise God knows what'll happen.

Hope all good with you,

Kind wishes,

Isobel

