



Suburb Style

Suburb Style editor, Deborah Warland talks to local residents

NO STRANGERS

featuring Sarah and Peter Falk, by Mirren Gidda and Deborah Warland

Sarah and Peter bring fellowship to the Suburb – and help to guard its ancient trees.

Recently we met with long-term Suburb residents, Sarah and Peter Falk to discuss what the Suburb means to them and how they have become involved with the community.

The Falks did not come as strangers to the Suburb. “I was born here and lived on Hampstead Way until, aged one and a half, I was evacuated to Cheltenham following the outbreak of World War Two,” explained Peter. His home was taken over by the RAF, who used it as a base during the war.

He married Sarah in 1967 after asking her to be part of his crew attempting to sail across the North Sea. He knew Sarah’s brother from school, but she was far too sensible to accept the offer.

The crossing was nearly a disaster with the old boat almost breaking up on the voyage. Despite this misadventure Peter and Sarah got together and later married. The Suburb was not an area, however, that they considered moving back to. With Peter working as a management consultant and Sarah a hospital social worker, moving to ‘a quiet backwater’ did not appeal.

“But in 1969 we were looking for some green and pleasant space for a new baby,” said Sarah...and they moved back. Having originally left because of the dramatic outbreak of war, Peter’s return was by no means uneventful. Sarah was in labour when they viewed their house, then priced at a daunting £10,500. Peter was anxious to find a home for Sarah before the baby was born, a goal which was looking decidedly uncertain. Fortunately for the Falks, the buyer ahead of them was advised by her surveyor that the property was overpriced, and she withdrew. With the baby born and the house theirs, the Falks immediately moved in after Sarah left the maternity ward.

Their professions and their three children preoccupied them during the ensuing years. They loved the community spirit of the Suburb, which was warmly demonstrated by their neighbours: the

ex-headmistress of Henrietta Barnett’s junior school as well as the school’s gym and music teachers, the former of which lived in a house with a green door, an old indicator of a rented property in the Suburb. The couple, and their dog, all keen walkers, fell in love with Big Wood, the walk to Kenwood across the Heath Extension and the nearby Farm Walk Tennis Club, where they both play regularly.

Following Peter’s retirement, a chance encounter with the head of Fellowship House prompted Sarah to suggest Peter as treasurer. Fellowship House was originally set up by Dame Henrietta Barnett to provide Suburb retirees with a social centre. Badly bombed during the Second World War and with its funds depleted, half of its land was sold. Determined to restore it to its past glory, Peter started yoga, zumba, pilates and IT classes as well as a film club and music series. These are still open to all ages with the aim that every day there is something going on at Fellowship House.

As well as these activities and the free events for members who are over 60, Peter has also brought his love of music to

Fellowship House. Every autumn he has hosted three concerts with the mission statement of ‘bringing Wigmore Hall to Suburb residents’. This year the concerts will celebrate the birthday and works of composer and Suburb resident David Matthews, who will hopefully be in attendance.

Love of the arts is shared by the couple, who both play with the Barnet symphony orchestra - Sarah plays viola and Peter the violin. Sarah is a singer with the North London chorus and performs at Fellowship House as part of their Friday afternoons of music. She also holds the distinction of having played the part of Dame Henrietta Barnett twice - in the millennium pageant and in Colin Gregory’s play about the Suburb.

Away from Fellowship House, Peter is on a mission to save the Suburb’s trees, a challenge which he does not treat lightly. He took on an insurance company in a bitter two-year legal battle after they threatened to remove a resident’s tree because her home was showing signs of subsidence. As Peter explained, such removal can place the property at risk of heave and so does not make sense from a structural or ecological point of view. Suitably cowed, the insurance company underpinned the house and the tree presumably breathed a sigh of relief.

His work not yet done, Peter joined the Residents Association campaign to save the Suburb’s trees alongside many fellow enthusiasts such as Deborah Calland and Barry Millington. Supported by 50 volunteers and a grant from Barnet Council, he focused his efforts on preserving the ancient trees in Big Wood, an area which dates back an incredible 2,000 years.

Big Wood is important to both Sarah and Peter. Their favourite season is spring when Big Wood is an exciting place to be. “Everything is waking up and there are scores of bluebells and woodland flowers,” says Sarah. It is the couple’s perfect place to walk and many of the beautiful wildflowers are found there as a result of the labours of Peter and his volunteers who have created six glades in the wood to promote their growth.

Speaking to Peter and Sarah, I was struck by their enthusiasm for the Suburb, their belief in community and their passion for preserving Suburb institutions like Fellowship House and Big Wood. It can be easy to take the greenery of the Suburb for granted and to assume that Big Wood will go on standing for another 2,000 years. Yet were it not for volunteers like Sarah and Peter, so much of the beauty we see around us might diminish and the very essence of the Suburb would be under threat.

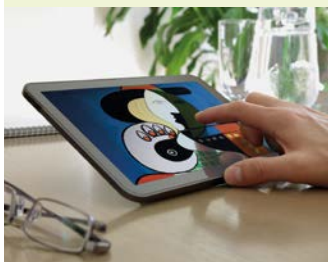
*Big Wood is an ancient woodland site, designated as a nature reserve by English Nature in 1999 largely due to the very high number of wild service trees – sometimes known as chequers trees – of various ages. Barnet Council now owns the wood and manages it together with the Big Wood management group of volunteers, which is a sub-group of the Trees and Open Spaces Committee of the Residents Association. There are currently over 50 volunteers who help in the wood on Big Wood working days following an agreed management plan. Information on Big Wood can be found on the Sylva My Forest website (www.sylva.org.uk/myforest), which will continue to be updated throughout the duration of the management plan. Highly recommended is ‘Big Wood History and Nature Trail’ available from the library. **S**

ADVERTISING FEATURE

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As The Institute moves to its new home at Bishop Douglass School, we are keener than ever to maintain our strong links with the Suburb. Thank you so much to all of you who visited our stand at the Residents’ Association Picnic Fun day, picked up copies of our new prospectus and told us you were coming back to The Institute in September.

We will have two locations from September. Following the sale of the Arts Centre to the new Archer Academy, the majority of our courses are going to run at Bishop Douglass School off East End Road. Some of our specialist art and craft classes are however staying at the Arts Centre for the coming academic year. (To find out where your course is running, spot the letters BD or AC alongside the course in the prospectus.)

We also have two prospectuses – one listing all our 3 term courses and one listing our many short courses and workshops. Did you know that you can take a short course at The Institute all year round? Even if you can’t make the commitment to a 3 term course, you still have the opportunity to discover something new at The Institute.

So, to whet your appetite for September, take a look through our new 2013-2014 prospectus and our Autumn Short Courses brochure. We have a tempting range of new courses on offer this autumn term including – to name just a few – *iPad for Artists*, *The Art of Baking: Beginners*, *Philosophy: Introduction* and *Make a skirt to fit you*. iPad for Artists is a hot new course designed to help students become proficient in the use of their iPads and tablets. Over 6 weeks, using a range of applications, they will develop their skills in artistic composition under the guidance of digital designer Geoff Stocker. Philosophy: Introduction aims to build an understanding of prominent philosophical ideas drawing upon a diverse range of material from around the world. Our charismatic fashion and textiles tutor Gladys Chang will show you how to Make a Skirt to fit you – not almost fit you, not fit you after a fashion but fit you perfectly and flatteringly – in just 5 weeks.

So whatever your interest, you can still find a course to suit you at The Institute. Make sure to enrol as soon as you have made up your mind; enrolments are already flooding in – so book now to avoid disappointment in September.

For further details ring 020 8829 4229
or visit www.hgsi.ac.uk



Bishop Douglass School, Hamilton Road, East Finchley, N2 0SQ

