

A Forlorn Hope

“Abseiling sounds fun. Bear Grylls makes it look easy.”

John looked up from his book and smiled at his wife.

“OK, add it to the list then. How many does that make?”

Suzanne fired up her iPad and scanned her ‘Bucket List’ file.

“Seventy so far. Is that enough?”

“Let’s keep going. There are loads of other things we can look at.”

It had been great fun so far compiling their list of putative activities. Even more enjoyable had been the hours they had spent together trawling the internet to review other people’s experience of the eclectic mix of pursuits they had chosen, often vividly animated via the plethora of video clips on You tube.

“What’s your favourite so far Suzie?”

“Oh, that’s really tough to answer. How can I single one out from such a spectacular list? Rafting down the Amazon, free-fall parachuting and surfing the waves in Hawaii... or running with the bulls in Pamplona all come to mind but there are so many others...”

“What about some of the more unusual ones we’ve found?”

Suzanne frowned in concentration, “I like the idea of building an igloo with the Inuit and treading grapes in Chianti country. And what about climbing the world’s highest sand dune in Namibia? I want to do them all!”

John had gone along with Suzanne’s suggestion that they must plan for an active future. She had convinced herself that she was going to recover and not be wheelchair-bound for ever. He knew that this was a triumph of hope over the stone-cold certainty that she would never walk again. The horrible finality of the specialist’s words after the crash came back to him,

“I am afraid your wife is now paraplegic. She has no motor or sensory function below the waist and this condition is irreversible due to the total severance of her spinal cord. You need to be aware though that like many in her position she may cling to the fantasy of recovering the use of her lower body. All I can advise you to do is play along with this delusion rather than trying to shock her out of it.”

When she had started this Bucket List, he had tried very gently to nudge her towards a more practical set of wheelchair accessible activities. He thought he might succeed in this after they had watched fellow paraplegic, Frank Gardner, the BBC’s Security Correspondent, describe his determination to find ways of adapting his new physiology to sporting activities. A keen skier, Frank had, after retraining, resumed this much-loved activity on a ‘sitski.’

But Suzanne would have none of it. John had to accept the bitter-sweet fact that their planned adventures were nothing but vicarious substitutes for the real thing. He knew that

eventually her dreams would be shattered but for now this burgeoning Bucket List provided her with a welcome diversion.

He thought sadly, *"I'll be here to catch you darling when your dream world vaporises in the face of harsh reality."*

500 Words