

FROM YOUR HEAD TO MINE.

The first time it happened I was only thirteen years old and still at school. There I was waiting for the bus and standing next to me was one of my teachers. Well, you can imagine how shocked I was to learn what she thought of me. I couldn't possibly repeat it here! That said, knowing what your teachers, your peers, your friends and your parents think of you can be highly useful at times.

Once I was working, my gift, as I came to think of it, enabled me to be one step ahead of my colleagues all the time so I rose up the ranks very quickly. As you can imagine, I was very proud to be in the New Year Honours list, a few years ago.

I was fortunate enough to meet the late Queen and it was wonderful to know that she thought I had beautiful hair. She was also thinking how hungry she was and wondering what there was going to be for dinner.

Donald Trump was a curiosity as he never seemed to think about anything at all! Boris Johnson neither. Last time we met he was wondering what he was going to watch on telly that night and whether Carrie was going to be in a good mood or not. If I remember correctly he was thinking of his oats. Did he mean breakfast I wondered or something else?

During our children's early years I was able to sort out any day to day problems before they became serious. I never needed to be one of those annoying mothers who are always intruding in their kids' lives because I already knew what was going on. Whether it was a homework assignment or a new boyfriend, I never had to ask. And if one of the children was being bullied at school I could sort it out quickly before things became difficult. Having said that, it's been a relief to know that neither of our two children have inherited my gift.

Of course, this gift of mine was great fun when I was young and single. I always knew if someone fancied me and was able to act on it, if I so chose to do so. When my late husband proposed it was no surprise as he had been thinking about it for months! In the end, I almost pre-empted it by asking him but I'm glad I waited. It was many years before I told him that I had always known what he was thinking. He didn't seem to be that shocked. In all honesty, I'm not sure if he believed me but just put it down to female intuition. You may say that it would have been fairer and more honest to have told him at the outset. Aside from the fact that it would have been far too embarrassing, I also found it extremely useful and I'm sure our relationship benefited from it. I think I finally told him

when it was our tenth wedding anniversary! Over a game of cards of all things! He'd never understood why I always won!

Sadly, in recent years so much of our lives have been spent online that I really miss the benefit of knowing what other people are thinking. I need to be in the same room as someone for it to be effective so Covid and working from home were a complete disaster! That well known saying, use it or lose it, comes to mind. I'd be devastated if it didn't work for me anymore.

I've sometimes wished I had some kind of tuning device. It can be really tricky to follow when everyone is thinking stuff at the same time and then I have to muddle my way through a jumble of thoughts. It's hard to cut through the crap, as they say.

It probably won't surprise you to know that so many people are simply thinking about themselves – how do I look, will s/he notice me, I'm bored, I'm hungry, what time can I leave without it seeming impolite – that sort of thing. Even when I met the kind of people whom we all imagine to be great thinkers, it was often disappointing.

Over the years I've occasionally been asked who were the greatest thinkers I've ever met. Surprisingly they're not the obvious choices. Maybe David Bowie and John Lennon from the 20th century. And Simon Schama and Rachel Reeves from the 21st. There's a surprise for you. I don't suppose many people thought she'd become PM or that the Labour Party would be in power for so long.

Jesus Christ, John Kennedy and Shakespeare are at the top of my list of the people whose thoughts I would like to have known.

You've met many great statesmen and women, interviewers ask, what would you say was your most important or significant moment? I tell them what they would like to hear but in reality it was being at my mother's bedside when she was dying. She could no longer speak but she could still hear – did you know that hearing is the last sense to go? I was able to tell her how much she meant to me, how much I loved her. And I was also able to know how much she thought of me and how proud she was of all I have achieved.

Now here I am in hospital myself and on a geriatric ward. My brain is probably the only part of me that's still active but sadly that won't be for much longer. And I'd rather not know what the doctors and nurses here think of me!

By the time you get to read this I won't be here anymore, but I would love to have known what you thought of it.