

Remember Remember

It was the type of November night that makes you want to be at home beside a winter fire with the curtains closed, blocking out the driving rain. Instead, I was on my way back from Milton Keynes to Watford, it was 8.00pm and there was a crash southbound on the M1. A long snake of red tail lights was the only glow I could see.

I'd left work at 6.00 forgetting the date. There was a huge firework display on in the city centre, I had to get through the traffic to get to the M1. This was twenty years ago, no Google telling you the best route to take, I relied on Radio 2s Sally Traffic to let me know of any issues.

I finally made it to the motorway - 7.15, I should be home by 8.15. If I was lucky I could be in by 8.00. The rain and spray made driving tricky. I took it easy, ignoring my hunger. I'd done this commute for four years. When the office relocated to MK from Amersham, I couldn't take the company move. My husband worked in the opposite direction and the boys were at school in St Albans. So I settled for the daily commute. As I approached Luton, traffic began slowing. Just past the airport, it came to a complete standstill. The rain hammered down. The odd firework could be seen in the sky, I decided they were all damp squibs.

I had a car phone and phoned my husband, yes, he said they had all eaten, there was a plate of spag bols ready to heat up when I got in. Yes, he'd make sure the boys had done their homework and he'd sort the bins out! The fire in the lounge was lit! Have you ever felt homesick just trying to get home from work?

Emergency vehicles drove down the hard shoulder. Blue lights added to the red. My car shook as they passed on the nearside. The sign ahead flashed up 'road closed'. I realised, just over the brow of the hill there was a huge plume of smoke. People started getting out of their cars. There was some shouting to and fro. I turned the radio up then jumped at the knock on my window. It was a policeman in a high vis jacket.

'Good evening madam, there's been a serious accident ahead. The motorway will be closed for quite some time. Our intention is to get the remaining cars on the motorway to turn and drive up the slip road to J10a where you will follow the diversion to the A5. We'll let you know when. Are you ok?'

I nodded and smiled feebly, 'Of course' I said.

But thinking 'What the hell does that actually mean?'

I could see the slip road in my rear view mirror. It looked no distance, but how many cars were there behind me? How would we turn around? Which way would we go round the roundabout? Then I looked ahead, the smoke rising higher. Were they getting us off the motorway because it was dangerous? Was there an oil tanker that could explode any minute?

No, hang on, surely they would have evacuated us all on foot if that was the case. And so the internal monologue continued. I sat there until just after 9.00, when I was instructed to do my 3 point turn, then drive up the slip road, used for getting onto the motorway. The police showed me where to go, and before I knew it, I was on the A5, heading home.

I heard the next day that it had been a fatal crash between a lorry and a car carrying children that had been to a firework display. That poor family. A slight change in timing and I could have been involved in the crash myself. I would never have got home to my family, the warm fire and dinner waiting for me.