

***I Seem To Have Forgotten The Elephants* © Dorothy Freed, 1995**

Adventures with Anna

In 1965 I shared a flat in London with my younger daughter Anna. She already 21, but looked and seemed more like 15. Caring, loving, charming, and incredibly naive, she swanned around London in miniskirts and short pigtailed with flowers in her hair and refused to take life seriously.

Anna planned a solo hitch-hiking trip to Spain from Calais for the summer two months, destination vague. I, too, was going away for two months.

About a fortnight before Anna was due to leave London she received a mysterious letter from Stockholm. Martin Brent, a New Zealander, claimed to know two New Zealand journalist friends of Anna's then travelling in Europe. They were all about to embark on a trip to Spain, the girls as unpaid crew of a small craft he had just bought in Sweden to sell there. Would Anna join them?

Brent, an experienced seaman. had sailed a yacht singlehanded from New Zealand to Sweden. He made his living buying and selling small Swedish vessels. The boat he had just bought for the buyer in Spain would not be leaving Stockholm for a fortnight. but Anna must come pretty smartly, as a preliminary trip round the Swedish coast for some purpose was planned.

"What do you think, Mum?" Anna asked me.

"Dangerous!" I replied.

"But it's what I've always wanted to do! Go on an exciting yachting trip. I want to go. But I'll make a few enquiries first."

I was apprehensive, but it really sounded no more hazardous than her original plan of hitch-hiking alone to Spain.

After ringing Brent in Stockholm she decided to go, and wrote to her father in Wellington to tell him about it. She would be two months away, and was taking with her £40 and a Youth Hostel card.

She travelled by ferry and train to Stockholm. She had promised to write as soon as she arrived in Sweden. but after a week there was still no letter.

At 6 a.m. one morning my husband rang me from New Zealand. He had shown Anna's letter to the local police who said she was in the hands of an internationally known criminal. His specialty was taking money from gullible, attractive females with the promise of an adventure at sea, using them as unpaid crew, and then dumping them penniless on some lonely beach in a foreign country. I nearly fainted with shock.

"She has to be found immediately and got back to London. You have to go to Scotland Yard straight away!"

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"But it's only six in the morning!" I wailed. "There won't be anyone there',"

How silly can you get!

I did indeed wait until about 8.30 before leaving the house. I met the postman at the door, and received from him the long-awaited letter from Anna.

Yes, there was a tale to tell, but she seemed to be, so I forgot my visit to Scotland Yard. She was with some newfound Swedish friends on a train from Stockholm to Malmo where these young Swedes lived. She was going to stay with them.

Her adventure in Stockholm had been horrific. The New Zealand girls had not yet appeared from a side-trip when she fled. Brent, when he met her at the station, was so rude, chauvinistic and downright uncouth that she knew that one of the journalist girls must have written for him the literate and persuasive letter she had received in London. She decided immediately she was not going anywhere with him.

The boat was pitiful, cramped, insanitary and uncomfortable. Anna was importuned almost at once on arrival on board but managed to keep Brent at bay for that night, at least, pleading exhaustion. The girls were expected next day, and she wanted to explain to them why she must leave. They did not turn up. She was then faced with a second night on board, but managed to persuade a young Swedish couple of students she had met who were visiting a boat moored nearby to join them. In spite of this Brent bullied and yelled at her, so she picked up her rucksack and ran ashore. She hid in a nearby park, waiting for daylight.

Brent managed to find her. His whole face was transformed into that of a terrifying maniac. He shouted and swore at her in rage, and threatened to kill her if he ever saw her again. The Swedes appeared on the scene, more terrified of Brent than even Anna was. They rushed her into the city and bore her off with them in the next train to Malmo in southern Sweden.

Anna did not take the killing threat seriously. But she was thankful to escape from someone with such a violent temper — and in fact from the whole expedition which she now knew would have been a disaster.

This was the dramatic beginning of Anna's four months in Europe that summer. She had many other adventures hitch-hiking down to Spain from Sweden, but they were all pleasant ones. But the risks she ran travelling from top to bottom of Europe alone were pretty horrific. Fortunately I learned of her adventures well after they had happened. Anna led a charmed life.

Contact with me was established by telephone when she got to the town of Perpignan in the south of France about a fortnight later. English friends staying in a villa there had invited her to stay en route. I told her then about Brent's police record and she was horrified, now much more scared than she had been even in his

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presence. I also made her promise to write me twice a week from then on.

I sent her £20. So did her father, from New Zealand. This turned out to be unwise, as it allowed hippy Anna, adept at living on the smell of an oily rag, to spin it all out in Spain for far too long for her own good.

She ended up on Ibiza, one of the Balearic Islands in the Mediterranean. Ibiza, she wrote, was so heavenly and new-made friends there so wonderful that she would stay there until her money ran out.

She did write me twice a week, and also to many of her London friends.

In the meantime I attended a music school in Devon, the Edinburgh Festival and stayed with friends in Copenhagen. When I returned to London I expected Anna to meet me, as previously planned, at Liverpool St. Station. She was not there. I expected piles of letters from her awaiting me at the home of the friend with whom I was temporarily staying. No letters. None of her friends had received letters for over three weeks. I also discovered she had not turned up at the home of friends in Paris where she had been expected the week before. Where was she?

After another week with no news I suddenly panicked. Even back in 1965 hitch-hiking girls were being murdered in Europe. What to do?

I went to New Zealand House. Perhaps they could trace Anna through the international consular network?

The Consul was very kind. He agreed that the situation could well be serious. He rang the British Consul at Majorca in the Balearics, New Zealand not having diplomatic representation there. He promised to ask the Ibiza police to trace her.

I went home pleased, but still worried. I could do nothing more, I felt.

A postcard from Anna awaited me, sent from Ibiza two days before. I fell on it with excitement, expecting apologetic explanations, hoping she was not sick. But the contents of the postcard mystified and frightened me. No apologies. no explanations, but yea, an unnamed illness which had necessitated a visit to the doctor in Ibiza, and an incomprehensible screed about living in a windmill on the little neighbouring island of Formentera with a blue-eyed Moroccan, and a possible trip to Morocco very soon if remaining funds would stretch to the ticket.

This absolutely threw me. I rang her friends in London and yes, they too had received similarly cryptic postcards. What on earth could this illness be? Could it be mental, connected with drugs? Who was this mysterious blue-eyed African? And how could Anna possibly have enough money left, after nearly 4 months away, to go to Morocco? Was she perhaps going round the bend?

I dashed back to New Zealand House next morning, almost hysterical, waving this postcard at them. On the picture side was a large Formentera windmill, and this

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Anna wrote was the very windmill she was inhabiting with her blue-eyed Moroccan. I explained that the bad news had changed to another sort of bad news, because I just did not recognise my daughter in this communication from her. I was convinced she was mentally ill, possibly with drugs, and would have to be found and rescued at once.

The British Consul was rung again and told of the new situation. He pointed out that he would now prefer not to send the Ibiza police to locate Anna, as if I was right and drugs were involved she would be liable to 8 years in a Spanish jail. Could the mother not go to find her daughter herself, he asked?

My original plan had been to have the Consul find Anna and give her a fright by pretending that I was ill in London and needed her back at once. But now time was crucial, so I must go myself. I was afraid that this, my last trump card, might not work. She could be so affected by drugs that she might refuse to leave, and she was over 21. What if the plan failed?

But there was nothing else to be done. My London friends, thoroughly alarmed by now, advised me to find her (if I could), grab her, grab her passport and be prepared to run. A kidnap, in other words. How scary things were becoming.

The British Consul would meet me in Majorca en route to Ibiza. New Zealand House got my tickets for me, to fly next day. They were very, very good.

Next morning it was thick fog. I made Heathrow in time, but all was confusion there and I managed to miss the plane to Majorca. I was devastated. However, I was got on to another two hours later, and there was the dear old British Consul to meet me, magic me through customs and immigration and hurtle me on to the tarmac for the tiny plane for Ibiza, which I fancy he might have actually held back for me. The good old Brits!

As we came down to land I watched the lights of a large ferry steaming out of the Ibiza harbour. It was just as well that I did not know then that that was the once-a-week ferry to Morocco.

Although the flight from Majorca to London for us both had been confirmed for three days hence, the flight from Ibiza to Majorca had not. I tried to fix this at the Ibiza Airport when I arrived, but found all planes would be full for a whole month. Never mind, I thought, there's bound to be a ferry. It's not far. I couldn't worry about that now. I had things to do.

First was to find somewhere to stay for a couple of nights. I walked along the waterfront of the charming little port, eschewing the hotels there as being too expensive. I saw a Pension sign down dark little sidestreet and knocked on the open door. Nobody came, but I heard voices upstairs so went up and knocked on a second door. A startled man opened it. and behind it I glimpsed a room filled with a long table around which about twelve workmen were eating. Forks stilled in midair. they all stared at me openmouthed. I was quickly hustled out, and my smiling

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friend indicated that this was no place for a senora and I should go further along the street.

I found a modest hotel nearby, and was escorted to a clean, plain room with two beds in it. Perfect. I flopped on one of them, exhausted after the traumas of the day, and wished I was somebody else, How would I start looking for a sick, possibly stropic, lost daughter in this town? At 8.30 I knew it was time to get going, scared or not.

At the tiny reception area downstairs a beautiful senorita sat at her desk. I was armed with Anna's photograph, and a short list of christian names of people she had mentioned in her letters. One was an American called Bud who had a bar. The receptionist did not know Bud or his bar, but directed, me to the Old Town nearby, as she was sure it would be there. She even gave me a little map.

From then on everything worked like a charm.

I walked into the first cobbled lane of the Old Town, and "Bud's Bar" was winking at me in neon lights. I entered and found a young Spanish barman alone, polishing glasses. The evening's customers had not yet arrived. He beamed.

"Where ... is ... Bud?" I asked slowly.

"Barcelona!" he replied, indicating on his watch that Bud had left on the midday ferry. This was a new blow.

I produced Anna's photograph.

"Ah! Anna, Anna!" cried the barman with obvious joy.

I pointed to myself, "Anna's Momma!" I said.

"Anna's Momma, Anna's Momma!" He was leaning over the bar all smiles and outstretched arms, ready to give me a hug. He was so excited he seemed unable to believe his eyes and ears.

"Where is Anna?" I said slowly and clearly.

"Formentera, Formentera!" he cried.

I showed him the postcard of the windmill. He nodded vigorously.,

"Raja!" he cried, smiling broadly. Raja was the blue-eyed Moroccan.

He then produced a ferry timetable and pointed out that the next boat from Ibiza would be at 8 a.m. next day. I seemed to be getting somewhere.

I managed to ascertain from the barman, in spite of no common language but

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plenty of gestures, pencil and paper pictures and mutual goodwill, that Anna had crossed to Ibiza 2 or 3 days earlier to see a "medico", that the trouble was with her ear (a great relief — not her brain!), and she was now much better and had returned to Formentera. I then mentioned an English girl called Betty, a resident of Ibiza whom Anna saw often. Si, si, Betty would soon be coming to this very bar — I must wait. Could all this really be true?

In due course Betty appeared on the scene and I ascertained more facts about Anna, in English this time. She had had a mastoid, and a good doctor in Ibiza had given her penicillin. Yes, said Betty examining the postcard, that was indeed a Formentera windmill, but there were 26 on that island. And yes, Raja (broad smile) did live in a windmill like that. And what did this mysterious Raja do? Oh, he was a dope-pedar — but not to worry, Anna couldn't afford to buy it. However, this information shook me more than a little.

Did Betty know if Raja and Anna could have already gone to Morocco? No, she did not, but thought it unlikely as the ferry had only just left and they would have been seen in town during the afternoon. Also, she understood Anna did not have enough money for that trip. I hoped very much this was true. One had to count one's blessings on this sortie.

It seemed amazing that, in an hour or so I had already discovered so much. I had a meal with Betty and her friends and returned to my hotel to bed, very satisfied with my first day's work, knowing that it was impossible to do more.

Next morning I was down at the waterfront by 8 a.m., but the ferry did not leave until 9 o'clock - manana manana. An English couple on the nearly empty ferry befriended me. I told them about Anna, and that I was going to take Betty's advice and take the only taxi operating on the island to do a windmill crawl looking for Anna. They said they, too, were needing that taxi, but suggested I stay with them. After Mr. Whaley, a Spanish-speaking travel agent, had done his business in "the Capital", which was rounding up passengers for his return charter flight to Britain two days later to warn them to return to Ibiza in time, the two Whaleys would accompany me on my quest. I was overcome with gratitude.

They saw to it I waited in a taverna with plenty of booze before we all took off for that memorable taxi ride. One really needed a jeep for the trip, so primitive were the roads and tracks on that island, and we followed clues picked up from other windmill-dwellers en route. Everyone seemed to know "The New Zealand girl", so by the time we had travelled to the very tip of the island —12 miles — I had discovered more interesting facts. Anna, it seems, was not living with Raja (big smiles) in his windmill, but nearby in a hut with the Danes. Who were the Danes? Oh, a group of young people who had adopted Anna. They did not sound like dope fiends. But who could know?

The Whaleys flanked me and we bore down on the Danes' hut. The Whaleys, too, considered Anna might have to be literally kidnapped. But the Danish girl who answered our knock was blonde, beautiful and squeaky clean, much to Mrs.

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Whaley's relief, as she told me later. She invited us in but the Whaleys, finding no cause for alarm, retreated to wait in the taxi. Anna, who was visiting — visiting! — was not far away (with Raja, of course, at the windmill), and another Dane flew to get her. The girl made me a cup of tea and expressed amazement at my arrival. She assured me Anna had written me many, many letters. When I said I had not received them she looked staggered, then thoughtful.

"I wonder if those letters ever left the island?" she mused. "Everything is very primitive here. Perhaps they took the stamps and threw the letters away!"

As it turned out, that is what had happened. I was also given an innocent explanation for the living at the windmill bit. Lots of the Danish group, it seems, spent nights there too, worshipping at the feet of Guru Raja the dope-pedlar.

Anna arrived, her face a picture when she saw me. Absolute delight beamed out as we fondly embraced, and I burst into tears. She looked pale and drawn but had indeed been very ill with a mastoid acquired from too much skin-diving. and London doctors later told her she was lucky to be alive. Ecstatic at the idea of flying — actually flying — back to London with me, she got her things together. We joined the Whaleys in the taxi, and all four had a wonderful afternoon together, being shouted a fabulous meal en route to the ferry — the best Anna had seen for many weeks. Sweet Mr. Whaley insisted on paying for the taxi, too. Not only that, but he settled the tickets-to-Majorca problem by transferring us on to his own plane direct to Luton two days hence. It seems there were no ferries, either, to Majorca, so really we had a lot to be grateful for. My money would not have lasted long.

I had two wonderful days on Ibiza with Anna, meeting all her many friends there —even the charismatic Raja who come over for a party and did not impress me. Others paid for all our meals. I had a ball on Ibiza.

When we returned to London I took Anna to New Zealand House to meet the Consul and say thank you. He told her Martin Brent was now in London, renewing his passport! This was the last straw.

Scotland Yard assured her she was indeed in danger, and advised her to go into hiding until Brent had left the country, which she did, in a friend's studio flat. And indeed he did try to find her — but failed. Then he mercifully left.

Like most real life stories, this one ended with a damp squib.

For better or for worse, this Spanish episode re-orientated Anna's life. In the hands of an internationally known corrupter of women and possible murderer, she emerged unscathed. In the hands of a dope pedlar she escaped becoming an addict. But Raja's phoney intellectual charisma and guru qualities did have a lasting effect. After Ibiza Anna became the original flower child in the London of the swinging 60s. Everything was love, love, love for the next ten years.

As for me — well, I sure had an adventure.