

## BEING THEMSELVES

by Lauren Foley

My mother, being herself, always wanted to live in a lighthouse. My father, being himself, always did the opposite of what she wanted.

So, my father bought a house as far inland and as high set into the mountains he could find in our part of the Welsh countryside. Armed with the knowledge that the unpronounceable irritated my mother immensely he named our house *Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwlllantysiliogogoch*. This achieved his aim and aggrieved her no end. Added to this was the fact that our post was always going to the village *Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwlllantysiliogogoch* (of the same name on the island of Anglesey) and not to their damp-prone bungalow in the middle of Snowdonia; this was quite the added bonus in my father's opinion. The lack of post reaching its destination was beyond irksome for my mother, she wanted to read her subscriptions to fancy schmancy magazines like *Gourmet Traveller*, *Condé Nast Traveller* and *National Geographic*. But, she had to live with his ever-reliably delivered tongue-twister *Gwlad* instead.

My mother tried to make his life as painful as possible by cooking the most inedible dishes, never getting out of bed before teatime on a weekday, and making herself the most unflattering kaftans, to float about the house in, fashioned out of the tackiest touristy tea towels she could find. None of this irked my father at all. He was unflappable.

Unbeknownst to her, he would eat a huge lunch in the local pub (he enjoyed the trip and the company), stay out of the house until she was up and about, and he never paid much attention to women's fashions anyhow.

My father, being himself, disconnected all of the electricity from our house. My mother, being herself, had been teaching herself morse code late at night and her practise had been blowing out our fuse box. My father said it helped us see the stars better. My mother took to wearing sunglasses after sundown.

My mother, being herself, and interested in doing anything that might pique my father collected thimbles. My father, being himself, had chopped off his right thumb farming in his youth. This is the way they went on in a brazen onslaught one against the other day in, day out. My mother stood her destination souvenir thumb toppers in an uneven, somewhat hexagonal, line on top of my father's redundant record collection. She started placing them in a seemingly random design hoping it to be as discommodious as possible to my father should he want to crank up the heirloom gramophone and listen to one of his vinyls. One day, being in a particularly chatty mood, my father said: 'Australia; is it?' while passing the LP filled thimble topped crates.

Some days later, my mother passed them herself and saw that the thimbles, displayed as they were, did indeed resemble Australia's coastline. My mother set her mind to emigrate to Australia then and there.

She started getting up early in the mornings; and being awake began looking at breakfast cereals thinking they might give her a way to get to Oz. If she saved up enough Weetabix, Ready Brek, Country Store tokens perhaps that would be the way. But, no joy there. Then, she thought she wasn't being Australian enough in her token collecting endeavours. She went all the way to Aberystwyth to hunt down some Vegemite. The Vegemite scheme did not hold the answers either. But, she saw an advertisement in an Aber bank window saying it offered overdrafts to students. My mother, not being known to take the easy route to anything, needing always to take the darndest route around something, started applying to university as a mature student to do Cultural Studies; thinking her tacky touristy tea towel and thimble collection had served, in its own way, as research for such a degree. Easily enough she got accepted to Lampeter, and even though she'd been pre-accepted, attended the Open Day where she learned even more about student loans, grants and overdrafts.

A plan transpired.

She worked out that she could get a total of almost £10,000 STG. She got herself a PO Box in Bala and set to work on her NatWest/UK Government heist; moved into halls for almost two weeks – telling my father her mother was ill in Scotland and she had to go visit her. As soon as all the money was in her account, she withdrew it, and bought herself a one way ticket to Western Australia.

My mother has lived there, uneventfully, as close to The Cape Leeuwin Lighthouse as she possibly could for the rest of her life. She set up a rather profitable company making kaftans out of tacky tourist tea towels that became all the rage with surfers – male and female alike. They offered great sun-protection and were dual usage, so she built up quite a trade with lefties, surfies, and eco-friendlies.

My father, upon retirement, moved into an abandoned lighthouse not far from *Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwllllantysiliogogoch* proper, in Anglesey himself. He kept my mother's thimble collection, painted letters on them, and used them as Scrabble pieces on a makeshift Scrabble board. He was happy, lacked indigestion and air-dried all of his delf precariously, setting it on the various curved windowsills up and down the tower – wary as he was of that ever-versatile towelling fabric.

My father was eventually hunted down by the authorities to repay my mother's loans. He thought £10,000 STG was a great deal, much cheaper than a divorce, and paid the debt in full. Then, he decided, after reading all of these redirected glossy travel magazines that he could do a distance degree in Cultural Studies. Lampeter University actually gave him a valued customer discount. Several years later, after all his studying, he took a world tour of lighthouses painstakingly avoiding any on the intersection of the Indian and Southern Oceans.

Nowadays, he can be seen from sea on a moonlit clear night—reading back copies of *Gourmet Traveller*, *Condé Nast Traveller* and *National Geographic*—with a cigar poised between his forefinger and stub.

My mother, being herself, might branch out into scenic surfy stubby holders.

I, being myself, have as little as I possibly can to do with them, seeing as they are quite so inclined to be themselves.

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