

All shook up

IT WAS MORE like a war, because there were several battles and the outcome was not to be known until all the fighting was over.

Right now I was losing badly. I had so far won one battle and lost two. To preserve my reputation I had to win this one and the next. This duvet put up a spectacular fight, threatening several times to engulf me in its polyester and cotton (best quality) folds, bringing to bear all 14.5 togs of its might on defeating me. I in the meantime did have the advantage of arms with reasonably versatile hands attached to them and legs that could kick and thrust me out of danger. Yet despite its formlessness the duvet fought on, almost bringing me to my knees and then attempting to truss me like a turkey.

Not until many minutes later did I succeed in forcing it into its cover and laying it flat on the bed that I was making. Even then it was not giving in willingly as it crouched at one end of its cover and refused to spread out like all good duvets should.

A previous editor of *Solicitors Journal* once asked what it was about men and duvets when, in a moment of complete irrelevance, I complained about their behaviour. She asserted that she had never found any difficulty in handling duvets.

She should have started her own prime time television programme – *The Duvet Whisperer* – and made herself an even bigger fortune than comes to editors of mighty publications like this one by encouraging the owners of recidivist and delinquent duvets to bring their charges to her opulent mansion (probably in Hollywood) where she would only have to talk soothingly to the duvets before they obediently climbed into their covers and lay motionless on the ground.

Singing for your supper

With the Legal Services Act, the cuts in legal aid, and the light at the end of the tunnel being decidedly dim, more and more of us are turning to other activities to endeavour to scrape a living out of the arid soil that represents the life of practitioners these days. Norfolk, in the last few weeks, has seen:

- A solicitor who has given up private practice to clean ovens for a living. Mr Peter Webb, a former high street solicitor, is quoted in the local press as saying: "One of the problems with the law is that it is a very

stressful way of earning a living. I am one of those sad individuals who just doesn't like mess. I like things to be clean and I get a certain satisfaction out of getting there, finding a disgusting oven and making it better and there's something very attractive about being a man with a van, and not having to worry about staff."

I expect everyone else has already thought of the obvious comment – that he may have jumped from the frying pan into the fire.

- Another local solicitor has been reincarnated as Elvis Presley: Mark Fitch, a Norwich solicitor, not only achieved fame by getting himself onto the fourth plinth in Trafalgar Square for an hour, but he now performs (as Elvis) in local pubs and village halls. As a trained mediator he has also produced a DVD in which he sings of the benefits of mediation.

- And me. I haven't given up the day job yet, but we do own a cottage in a Norfolk village which we let out to holidaymakers – and it is my weekend job to don my hairnet and marigold gloves and scrub the cottage until everything is as clean as hospitals were before they abolished matrons.

But once you have been a solicitor for a number of years it is very difficult to turn it off. I think we can see that with these two solicitors who have gone in for alternative careers. I wonder if the solicitor with the van secretly wears a pinstriped suit when he goes to work; but I would put good money on the Elvis solicitor not appearing in court dressed as the King.

Duvet day

In these parts you can incur judicial wrath simply by not wearing a waistcoat in court. I suspect that even in these enlightened times the Norfolk courts are not yet ready to be sung to by an Elvis lookalike, though it is tempting to suggest appropriate Presley

WELL, SINCE YOUR BABY LEFT YOU, YOU'VE FOUND A NEW PLACE TO DWELL...



lyrics for different types of case: *Suspicious Minds* (fraud) *Heartbreak Hotel* (ruined holiday claim) *Return to Sender* (dispute with the post office) *Jailhouse Rock* (plea in mitigation – armed robbery or George Michael) and *Too Much* (challenging the other side's bill) – speaking of which – as I was struggling with the duvet I wondered what the cost experts would have made of my claim for time spent changing a duvet.

Does anyone else suffer grief from opposing costs experts? The arguments that are put up against you when you reach the end of a difficult case, having funded it for two or three years, will almost certainly convince you that your cleaning lady could have won the case blind folded while smoking a cigarette – and in less time than it takes to get through a packet of Benson and Hedges. You will be told that you should not have spent anything like the time you claimed for and that the defendants would have paid up without a murmur the day after you had been instructed if you had only asked.

If changing a duvet had been part of your work on the case, their arguments would probably have contained the following: no need to change the duvet at all because it had been only been used once; time spent changing duvet should only be five minutes; danger money not claimable as no deaths have yet been recorded by killer duvets; and wrong level of duvet changer used. Eight years PDE (post-duvet experience) not justified. Task could easily have been undertaken by a TDC (trainee duvet changer) or a DE (duvet executive).

And in response I advise frustrated claimant solicitors to respond with an Elvis song: *All Shook Up*. And if you do not feel like singing yourself, I can put you in touch with someone who does.

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