

Welcome distractions

Richard Barr is determined to have a productive New Year, but one thing leads to another...



My wife left me at the end of the year and went as far away as she could from me without leaving the planet. Before you say “about time too”, let me add that she is coming back – at least until she reads this.

As I drove back from the airport, I formulated plans to catch up on my work, fill in my tax return, write my piece for *Solicitors Journal* on time for a change and demolish the clutter-mountains that are on all horizontal surfaces throughout our home.

Our house would be a dream location for one of those TV programmes where smart, well-organised ladies take you in hand and convert your home from being an extension of the local municipal tip to something that would peer happily out of the pages of *Homes and Gardens*.

I first set about our bedroom. Do you know how many shirts I have? 67, about half of which have a neck size so small that I would now be asphyxiated if I tried to wear them. Some were still in their plastic wrappers. I sorted clothes, towels, shoes and dozens of pairless socks. Socks undoubtedly hold the secret of our universe. Stephen Hawking may talk about the mysteries of black holes, but he need look no further than into the mouth of our washing machine.

In the kitchen, I found in our implements drawer 17 carving knives, eight serving spoons and two dozen wooden spoons. Out went most except for the wooden spoons which are now in a flower vase. They make an unusual centrepiece for the kitchen table.

On day two, I determined to get my teeth into work. I did the daily rounds of the animals (feed superannuated horses,

ditto uneatable sheep, ditto unlaying chickens and ditto eight lazy cats). I was about to pick up my first set of medical records when there was a clatter of bottles and cans. It was my stepson and his girlfriend who had decided to come home and have a large party to see in the New Year. Soon afterwards there was a roar of car engines and the sound of loud laughter.

Have you ever tried sorting medical records to the backdrop of alcohol-fuelled conversation and the constant presence of people going through your office to the drinks fridge beyond? It is not easy, but they were having fun and in the end I abandoned the unequal struggle and instead spent a pleasurable New Year's Eve filling in my VAT return.

A New Year was dawning, I told myself, and I could get down to the records the following day – except that the following day was the aftermath of the party and there were revellers asleep in every bed and on every carpet in the house and empty bottles and cans stretching into the horizon in all directions. When they eventually got going and tidied up it was already growing dark and the will to sort records faded with the day.

I nearly faded with it because overnight I developed a virus whose effects can only be seen to be believed. I will spare the detail except to say that if someone had come along with a long needle and the message that I had to be put down, I would have gladly consented. The day was written off except that, however close to death I felt, the animals still had to be ministered to – and two of the sheep decided they were lame. Out came the vet who cheerfully injected the sheep with powerful antibiotics and relieved me of a three figure sum. Had it not

been so expensive I would have asked him to give me a shot too.

The next day had to be medical records day regardless of my struggling immune system. I got as far as clearing the cats from the kitchen table and peering at the first sheet when there was an almighty crash and the ground shook. Fearing that there had been a small earthquake, I rushed outside to find that a huge beech tree had (on a calm windless day) decided to fall over bringing down a fence and sprawling into the horses' paddock.

More than 48 hours later, with the help of my lovely stepdaughter and a chain saw that had seen better days, the tree was in several hundred neat pieces and we had enough logs to heat us the winter after next when they are seasoned.

Need I go on? The days crawled by. The dishwasher broke. The Christmas trees had to be removed. The gas boiler packed up. The people renovating the barn opposite us drilled through and cut off our electricity supply and I have still reached only page two of the same set of records. And I am in trouble with the editor because this piece is overdue.

And shortly I have to leave for Heathrow to collect the travellers on their return. I am so looking forward to having them back. At least then I can get down to sorting medical records. Didn't I say that I always work better when there are people around creating distractions?



Richard Barr is a consultant with Scott-Moncrieff & Associates LLP (www.scojmo.com)