

Street Farm and the Revolution

Yohanna and Josefina were kind enough to send me a copy of Keith Cowling's letter, which I hadn't seen before. Keith was a good friend of my dad, Bob Kindred. They were part of a large group of friends, including architects, artists, activists.

When I discussed the letter with Keith, he said he has no memory of writing it. He was a bit embarrassed by the tone, saying he sounded like a 'smart arse.' To me the letter sounded like an informed twenty-something year old speaking to like-minded revolutionaries.

During the Pandemic, I came across some letters that I had written from the Revolution, which prompted me to write a book about my memories of being taken to the Revolution on an epic journey In July 1975.

Nine of us including Keith travelled to Portugal in Bob's old blue van. The aim was to build a solar shower for the people of the Bairro de Liberdade. The group included women who did much to support the group with washing, tidying, and making food. Feminism was very much on the agenda, but the practical application wasn't possible in a patriarchal society.

The journey from London to Setubal took two days and nights. Bob only allowed us to stop three times during the whole journey.

The nine people in the van were:

Graham Caine (AA / Street Farm architect)

Bob Kindred (AA / architect – helped with Street Farm and Thamesmead in London)

Lynne Bailey (partner of Bob Kindred)

Katy (foster daughter of Bob Kindred and Lynne Bailey)

Hassle (John Gerber) – electrical engineer

Richard Cooper (AA / assistant for Graham on the solar shower project)

Kathy deWitt (AA / photographer)

Keith Cowling (AA / architect)

Gary Ball (boy of c.13 whose parents were friends of Bob Kindred)

It's a shame that Keith no longer has his notebooks about his time at the revolution. Bob didn't keep a record of it in his diary either. Graham Caine died in 2018, and unfortunately his dairies were thrown out by tenants who were living in his house in Spain.

I was eleven at the time, and my memories are very different from the adults' memories. As I write my book, images come to me: the relentless heat on the building site where we lived in our shack of scrap timber and palm leaves for a roof; mosquitoes biting me all night long. For three weeks we lived without a bath, hot water, electricity, or privacy.

When the solar shower was completed, it would have been nice to have had a hot shower, but there wasn't enough privacy for me, so I didn't use it. One of the streets in the bairro had a standpipe with a tap that we used for drinking water and washing. This was shared by the whole village. There was no toilet – we had to go in the nearby woods.

What did this eleven-year-old from London make of it? Solar showers were vaguely interesting, however I was more interested in disco music, nail varnish and ice skating. When not on demonstrations, I spent most of my time in the Bairro de Liberdade removing ticks from stray dogs that hung around the bairro. I also made friends with a girl called Lena who was two years older than me.

Lena's family fed me and let me watch television. Although they were poor, they treated me like their own. How ironic that I inveigled myself into a poor family to access a decent standard of living, when the (relatively) well-off architects lived in squalor.

The architects had intended to return to the Bairro de Liberdade in the winter of 1975, to follow up on the solar shower project, but they never did. I don't know why – no one remembers.

I'm not familiar with the theoretical framework that Keith mentions in his letter. There were lots of theories around at that time, often expounded during dinner party conversations. I sat among left-wing radicals, chewing my brown rice and lentils, listening to their theories. I grew up questioning everything, which was very annoying for the adults.

Keith's letter mentions Bruce Haggart, an architect at the AA, and a good friend of ours. He worked on Street Farm with Peter Crump and Graham Caine in the early 70s. At the time Keith wrote the letter, he, Bruce and Graham were living at the Church, a squatted commune in a Victorian church at 21 Flodden Road, Camberwell, London (demolished years ago). I recall huge parties there, the pulpit was a stage for rock bands including Hawkwind and Lemmy from the (yet-to-be-formed) Motorhead.

Since then, fifty years has passed. Experiments in solar technology and sustainable living have been absorbed into society to some extent. Renewable energy and sustainability are subjects taught at most architectural institutions all over the world, although we still

have a long way to go to eliminate carbon emissions, toxic chemicals, and soil depletion.

Back to Keith's letter. Did Bob ever return Lucas' plumping fittings? Did he give back the thirty pounds he borrowed from Josefina? These are mysteries unlikely to be solved. Bob died climbing in France in 1991. Graham died in England in 2018. Hassle died many years ago. I hope that in time, after the rest of us are long gone, this short account will provide enlightenment and perhaps entertainment for future researchers who are interested in the very special time that was the Carnation Revolution. When my book is published, I hope that too, will be a useful record.

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