



Get creative: Carol Field, right, with Oak Lodge students and staff in the East End Road shop.

How the ker-ching of a shop till changed my life

By Carol Field

My first encounter with The Lodge school shop in East End Road, N2, was when I visited to buy some of their lovely cards. "Only £1?" I asked incredulously. "I'll take 10!" The shop was stocked with an eclectic mix of gifts and a cash register that actually ker-chinged, convincing me I'd stumbled onto a film set.

The lady curating explained the shop was part of the nearby Oak Lodge School for special needs and its primary function was as an extra classroom. Students with autism, Down's syndrome, and a wide range of learning difficulties, could come to make saleable products, learn the rudiments of running a business and buy gifts for their families.

I'd left my job as a product developer and retail manager and was ready for a change. The whole concept of this shop intrigued and inspired me, so I wrote to the head teacher offering my time as a volunteer at the school. To my astonishment

I was offered a placement as a volunteer Teaching Assistant and my journey into the special needs community commenced.

Award-winning 'jewel'

It's an amazing organisation with dedicated, long-serving teachers and therapists and a management spearheaded by Lynda Walker. I was subsequently offered the opportunity of running this not-for-profit jewel of a shop, merchandising new and student-made products and hosting small workshop groups.

Two years on, with the support of key charities in Barnet and businesses keen to support vocational opportunities, The

Lodge, at 132 East End Road, has morphed into something rather special. On a weekly basis, students work here from both the Oak Lodge site and from Oak Bridge, which looks after over-19s and whose team leader Simon Clark was the inspiration behind the shop's concept.

The Lodge offers an opportunity for students to interact directly with the community and handle money transactions. Controlling that environment can be challenging but student presence totally enhances the surroundings and customers are extremely supportive. Students make cards and embellish boxes on site which we sell. The students proudly deliver items designed and made in school. We were delighted to win the Barnet Youth Enterprise Award last year with our shop model. Please contact me on 020 8444 5400 for further information.

A life lived to the full in the great outdoors

We are sorry to report the death of Jack Takoushi, 93, the longest-standing plot holder at the East Finchley Allotments site off Plane Tree Walk, N2.

For 32 years in his retirement Jack spent most days at his beautifully tended allotment, producing vegetables through the seasons, many of which he gave to friends. His personal favourites were peas.

He would walk a mile each day to and from home and treat his cultivation like a full-time job, arriving before mid-morning and staying into the late afternoon before walking home again.

Filmmaker Zachary Denman interviewed Jack last year for a charming three-minute film about his love of the outdoors. You can watch it on YouTube at youtu.be/AYb1Csr_MvQ.



Jack Takoushi, pictured last year. Photo Mike Coles

Why we scrapped our wedding list

Archer sub-editor Jeff Robson and his partner Sue Bayford have raised £1,500 for Macmillan Cancer Support through a sponsored walk – and an unusual approach to wedding presents.

They completed the 25km Thames Bridges Trek on 9 September and, just over a month later, they tied the knot after seven years together. "We were thinking about presents and realised that we didn't need much for the house or anything," Jeff said. "So we asked people to make donations to Macmillan instead."

"Everyone was phenomenally generous and that helped us raise a total of £1,580. When Dad was diagnosed with cancer

Macmillan were incredibly helpful and supportive for the whole family. We wanted to say a big 'thank you' to them. And it meant that we felt even more that Dad was part of the wedding day.

"We'd like to thank everyone who donated. Macmillan offer lots of practical advice on things like claiming benefits as well as emotional support for sufferers and their families. It was great to be able to raise so much for a worthy cause."



Tired toast: Jeff and Sue after their 25km walk.



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