

# The diary of Pamela Grimshaw

## (Part one: Her first time - at The Dizzy Monkey)

by John Ewbank © 1999

Monday February 15th 1999. Day after Valentine's Day.

Dear Diary, When I woke up yesterday morning I thought 'Blooming heck, this is the worst Valentine's Day ever!' I had nothing to do and when I went downstairs to see if anything had come in the post there was still nothing from Tony, or anybody else for that matter! Then I remembered it was Sunday and I thought I'm so upset I don't even know what day it is! I thought I'd make some toast and then go to the zoo and I was just putting on the marmalade when the phone rang. I nearly didn't answer it at first because I thought it might be Tony and I thought 'Sod Him if he can't even send a Valentine's! But I picked it up anyway and it was Stephanie Bramston from work. It turned out that she'd had a row with her boyfriend as well, and she wanted to know if I wanted to go climbing at a climbing wall!

I was a bit miffed in a way because it made me feel like she was only asking me because she had nobody else to go with, but then I thought 'Well why not?' I was sick of going to the zoo and having to put up with the squint-eyed bloke who works at the ticket booth leering at me and making the same stupid joke about watching the monkey's play with themselves. I always tell him he's the one who should be in the cage and the monkeys should be in the ticket booth, but the dirty bugger's so thick he doesn't even know when he's being insulted. He just picks his nose and tries to pretend he can't hear me, but he still gets on my wick. When I complained about him to the management they told me he's been there for years! And I said well what's that got to do with it and they told me that if I wanted to pursue my complaint I ought to put it in writing.

Tony always said blokes like that was one of the reasons why he didn't like The North - he reckoned it was full of weirdos and perverts. I told him that the South Coast where he came from was just as bad, but he said once you got north of the Black Country it was worse.

I told him that he couldn't even call the Black Country the Black Country any more because it's been all cleaned up now, and the proper new name for it is 'The Heart of England'. He said 'Fart of England' would be more like it, and if the Bureau of Political Correctness wanted to rename everything they should start with the Yorkshire Dales - where I was born - and re-name it 'Sheep Shaggers Shangri La'. He can be a right sarcastic bastard when he wants to. Him and my Mum have always hated each other and once when we were in an argument he said the only reason I'd ever been born was because my dad must have been too knackered to catch a sheep. I didn't talk to him for a week after that, but this Valentine's is even worse. I think I'll start looking for a new boyfriend. Just like Mum says; "There's plenty of other fish in the sea!"

I hummed and hahed a bit and then I said 'Well why not' and Steph said she'd drive round and pick me up in about half an hour. She'd been promising to take me climbing ever

since we'd got to know each other, so I was excited to be going at last and, to be perfectly frank, I was glad we were going with just the two of us. I would have felt a bit left out if her boyfriend had come with us it would be better without him as far as I was concerned.

When Steph arrived I invited her in for a quick cup of tea and I found I was in for a right surprise! At the insurance company she always dresses very smart but nothing flashy, a bit on the conservative side if anything, but when she took off her big coat she was dressed like Jane Fonda! I was a bit amazed by her outfit but I didn't say anything, I just tried to sound casual and asked her what everyone else wore at these climbing walls. All I had on was a pair of old sweat pants and a tee shirt, and I didn't want to look stupid. She said what I had on was fine, so I thought well that's alright then because I don't belong to a gym or anything and don't have any of the spandex and lycra and all the other gear.

But then I started to feel a bit self-conscious when I realised how out of shape I was compared to Steph! Ever since I've left school the only exercise is a bit of bicycling on Sunday mornings with Tony, and I looked at Steph's arms and shoulders as if I was seeing them for the first time. I never knew she had all those muscles! 'Oh dear' I thought, 'I'm going to make a testicle of myself!' I laughed a bit and told her what I was thinking and she said not to worry. She said we'd take it really casual and just have a bit of fun. "You won't make a testicle of yourself" she said, 'either left or right'! That was a good one I thought and it really made me laugh because I'd never heard it before. I said 'That's easy for you to say!'

We had to drive about forty miles to the Cleckhudderfax Leisure and Recreational Centre, which has one of the best climbing walls in the north- according to Steph anyway. Funnily enough it's actually called 'The Dizzy Monkey', and Steph said that on some nights it was a right zoo as well! I told her what a coincidence it was, and that I'd been thinking of going to the zoo before she phoned me and she laughed! She said we'd get good value for money here, a gym and a human zoo all in one. She asked me if I'd ever read a book called 'The Naked Ape'. Blooming Heck! I said I should think not! Anyway she said we'd have 'a swinging time' and I thought that was a good one as well and it made me laugh, so I was a lot more relaxed by the time we got there.

When we waked in I was gobsmacked. There were people everywhere, climbing up, sliding down, hanging about and standing around. They had music playing and a lot of them were in tights like Steph, except they had climbing harnesses on as well, and it made the men look as if they were strutting about with stuffed Elizabethan codpieces!

And the women were just as bad! The harnesses made it look like they were wearing industrial strength open crotch panties! blooming Heck, I thought, it's a bit like a swingers' club in London that I went to years ago, when I was going out with Brian!

Steph seems to know half the people in the place and whenever she introduced me to anybody they all seemed very friendly, so I thought well at least that's not so bad!

Then she took me to the gear rental place and introduced me to a young bloke by the name of Justin and then she went off to the café to get us a cup of tea.

The first thing that Justin told me was that the secret to becoming a really good climber as to wear really tight climbing boots, and he asked me what size shoes I wore. I said size eight and he said right then, let's get you into a pair of size fives! He told me to try the boots

without socks but when he brought them over I took one look at them and said not bloody likely! They smelt as if half the lads in Cleckhuddersfield had just worn them, and I said I'm not putting them on without socks! Anyway, I said they're just too small, I'll never fit into them. Justin said that if I wanted to be like that it was up to me, but Bliss Cutler wore hers three sizes smaller than her street shoes and she was flashing E6.

It was all I could do to keep my patience, but one good thing about growing up on a farm in the Yorkshire Dales is that it does teach the value of patience. I said 'Justin, I'm not interested in what Bliss or whatever she's called is flashing, whatever flashing is!'

I said 'I don't even know what you're talking about to be perfectly honest with you'. He said 'Oh'. The trouble is he looked like I'd hurt his feelings so much that I felt guilty. I suppose he was just trying to be helpful, so I relented after all and, just to please him, I said I'd try a pair one size up - but only with socks. (Thank God Mum wasn't there! One of her mottoes was; 'never do anything to please a man, he'll only want you to do it again!' I have a feeling that this is one of the reasons why she and dad never do anything together any more and why they avoid spending time in each other's company. When I'd suggested this to her she accused me of 'taking your dad's side as usual' so I just let it drop.)

Well in any event it certainly seems to work with Justin! He immediately brightened up and trotted off to bring me back a pair of sixes. I thought this is strange - his mood seems to be dependent on what size shoes I put on my feet! Maybe he's some sort of climbing foot fetishist I thought, only half-jokingly. I remembered something I'd heard about the ancient Chinese custom of female foot binding, apparently tiny feet on women were a real turn on. Maybe Tony was right after all - about all the weirdos and perverts in the North. After a lot of pulling and pushing I finally managed to squeeze my feet in, but by the time I had them laced, my toes were so scrunched up and my feet were in so much pain that I couldn't even stand up, let alone climb. I said 'Bloody hell, they're killing me!' Justin said that was how it was supposed to feel and it would help me to climb better.

I couldn't believe my ears for a moment and I thought the daft bastard was joking, but when I looked at him I could see he was dead serious. I suppose I must have been so taken in by all the newness of everything else that I hadn't really taken him in before. He was about the same age as me-20 - but very pale and thin, with bleached blonde hair and quite a bad case of acne. He had a diamond stud in one ear nose ring and a Celtic tattoo around his right arm. In his climbing tights and tank top you could see that he was very fit in an anorexic sort of way, and yet poorly looking at the same time, like 'a greyhound that's eaten pile of steaming cow shit' as my dad used to say! I looked at Justin and I said 'No Way!' One thing dad did do right was to teach me common sense to stick up for myself with idiots like this; 'I came here for a bit of fun, not to leave in a wheelchair'. He got the picture at long last and went and got me the proper size and gave them to me, but he had a right sullen expression on his face, like it was a personal insult to him that I didn't want to be a cripple with fungus growing all over my feet.

By the time Steph was coming back with the tea I had the harness and boots and I was all set to go, but Justin handed me a form with all the gym rules printed on it and told me I had to read it before I could climb. He must have thought I was born yesterday! I knew he was up to something. He went up to Steph and sort of steered her away from where I was standing. I pretended to be busy reading the rules but I could just see the two of them out of the corner of my eye; he was pointing at my feet and shaking his head! You cheeky little

bugger I thought to myself, but I decided not to make a scene. After a minute she came over to me and smiled. 'Right then' she said, 'Let's go'.

Steph took my arm and when we were out of earshot she laughed and apologised. She was she was sorry about Justin, she'd forgotten that he couldn't get into his head that some people might want to climb for fun, especially beginners. He's only been climbing for less than a year himself, and he's still going through what I call the 'if it's not hurting you it's not tight enough' mentality. He'll grow out of it probably. Mind you, some of them never do! They're a bit like those blokes who only eat in Indian restaurants so that they can boast how hot a hot curry they can eat. It's like this stupid macho competition where they try to look as if they're enjoying themselves and say they can never find a curry hot enough! God love 'em. This is a bit like that except these blokes actually brag about how tight their boots are and how much their feet hurt! I think some of them are more interested in talking about how tight their shoes are than they are in climbing. If some of them couldn't talk about how much pain they're in they'd have nothing to talk about at all. It's a bit like a load of old age pensioners talking about whose arthritis hurts the most. The best part of it is that a lot of them have never done anything hard anyway, they just wear their shoes really tight and hang about at the climbing wall, pulling funny faces and looking at their own forearms! What a laugh!

She looked at my boots and bent over to feel where my toes were. 'Perfect' she announced. 'That's just exactly how they should be - snug without going mad about it'. 'If you decide you want to start climbing hard somewhere down the road you'll have plenty of time to start wearing tighter boots. The secret to becoming a really good climber is to enjoy climbing and have fun and it's very hard to enjoy climbing and have fun when your feet are killing you, especially when you're just a beginner'.

'That's funny' I said 'Your mate just told me the secret to becoming a really good climber is to wear boots three sizes too small'. Stephanie looked at me and laughed. 'I'm not surprised, he'd probably tell you to climb with a pineapple up your bum if he's read it in a climbing magazine. Just because some of these blokes act as if they know what they're talking about don't let that fool you. Half of 'em don't know shit from clay. Give 'em a chalk bag and a bandana and suddenly they're all Masters of Stone Volume One Hundred and Thirty Nine. Come on, let's go and have a bit of fun'. I said that sounded good to me, but who's Bliss Cutler when she's at home and what the bloody hell is flipping E 6?

Stephanie just burst out laughing and said she'd tell me later, and that we went into it now we'd never get off the ground.

We went to the beginner's area and the first things she showed me was how to tie into the end of the rope with what's called a figure-eight knot. It was the first time I'd done knots since I was in the Girl Guides and it was really exciting. I felt a bit silly really - getting so excited about tying a stupid knot, but it was really good, even though it took me ages to get it. Then she taught me belaying. What a laugh that was! I kept getting all tangled up and she kept telling me to never let go of the rope with my right hand. It took me ages to get that as well, but I did in the end and I was glad Tony wasn't with us. Whenever he tries to teach me anything to do with repairing my bike, we end up having a row. He's got no patience and he never explains anything properly, but Steph was really good. I told her she could get a job teaching rock climbing and she would expect that she'd only make a quarter of what she made at the insurance! Blooming Heck I said!

Well anyway, Steph explained that - seeing as it was my first time - we were going to only do what they call 'top -roping'. I said that's fine by me Steph! I could see them all doing what they call 'lead climbing' in the big part for the experienced climbers and there were people falling off everywhere - through mid-air and everything. I said I don't want any of that Steph! That looks worse than the tight boots does! That made her laugh!

Anyway, to cut a long story short, because I have to get up really early tomorrow, I tied on and up I went! The climbing wall is made out of plywood and painted to feel like a rock face and then they fix all these different coloured handholds onto it, and once I stepped onto it and started climbing up, I felt like Alice in Wonderland! I can't even describe it really but it was like I wasn't even in Cleckehudderfac anymore, like I'd stepped through the looking glass! I always loved that story when I was little, especially the mad hatter!

What was really amazing though is that I didn't even feel scared! I'd expected to feel really scared, especially when I watched everybody else doing it, but once I was doing it myself I didn't even feel scared at all. Steph had lent me her chalk bag to use and whenever my hands got sweaty I put them in the bag to get chalk on them while I worked out how to get up the next bit. Steph was really good and encouraging, but she didn't yell up too much. There was a girl trying to climb up near me and she wasn't so lucky. The bloke who was belaying her was shouting his head off, giving her so much advice and instructions about exactly where to put her hands and feet that it was making me dizzy just to listen to him.

Steph just told me to enjoy it like climbing a tree when I was a kid and that's just what it was like. It was just like climbing up the broken little limestone scars by the beck on the farm, except it was about four times higher and we were inside and I had a rope and there were people everywhere. I know that sounds stupid but it's true! It was completely different and yet it was the same in a way. When I got to the top Steph lowered me back down to the bottom with a rope going through a ring like a pulley, and next thing I knew I was back on 'terra firma' and Steph said I was 'a natural'! I said I thought she was just trying to be nice but she said she really meant it and that I really was and that made me feel really chuffed!

Anyway, Dear Diary, it's well past my bedtime. To cut a long story short we stayed there until it closed and I belayed Steph up and down the wall and she did me. I felt pretty chuffed about her saying that because being a novice I didn't want to feel like I'd been holding her back. She explained one of the great things about these indoor climbing walls is that even if you climb at completely different standards you can come and enjoy yourself with one of your friends. I told her it was the best thing I'd done since I'd been on a camping trip to Switzerland with the Girl Guides when I was sixteen.

We stopped off at a fish and chip shop in Bradford on the way home and I was so hungry I had fish and chips and scallops and some bread and butter as well! Steph started telling me some stories about some of the climbers she knows and some of the stuff they get up to and some of the stories were so funny I nearly peed myself, especially because I'd just drunk a big bottle of Size.

By the time she dropped me off it was after eleven and there was nobody up but they'd left the light on for me in the kitchen. I asked Steph if she wanted to come in for a cup of tea but she said she still had to drive nearly half an hour back to her house so she'd better be off. I said righto then, but before she drove off she said I could go with her again on Tuesday night if I wanted to - straight from work! Blooming Heck! I said I'd love to and she smiled

and drove away. It was only when I went in that I realised how much I ached! I ached everywhere! I thought what I should do is have an Epsom Salts bath, but to be perfectly honest I was so tired I couldn't be bothered, even though I poned a bit as well. I thought Blooming Heck; I won't even be able to walk tomorrow!

When I was climbing upstairs to bed I thought this is what it must be like climbing Mt Everest! I got undressed and got into bed without even putting the light on and just before I went off to sleep I realised I hadn't even thought about Tony either and just before I finally dropped off I thought about cycling with him and I realised it was really boring for me and he's really boring as well actually and I don't even really like him any more either!

Today was dead boring at work, and I always hate Mondays anyway, but I'm really glad I've got a desk job, because I was so tired I could hardly stand up! I didn't see Steph at all and I couldn't wait to come home and write my diary. I had no idea I had so much to write about! I can't wait to go back to The Dizzy Monkey tomorrow night!

(To be continued. Next instalment: Pam gets addicted to climbing and starts turning into a gym rat.)