

## A Turkish Valentine

Jenny Gibbs talk “A Turkish Shirley Valentine” was reminiscent of the film many of us are familiar with telling the story of a woman’s life changing holiday.

Jenny’s had never been abroad and for her 50th birthday her work colleagues arranged for her to go on a cruise in the Aegean. and once there she was immediately entranced by the scenery and thought: I am coming to live here.

On returning home, Jenny was offered voluntary redundancy and was able to plan her return to Turkey. Her two daughters, in their mid-twenties, were horrified but in September 1994, Jenny began her new life in Turkey. On landing, she had no idea where she was going but saw a white mini-bus. The bus ride ended on a village’s remote sandy beach. The passengers and the driver disappeared and Jenny was alone. She saw a building with its light on at the water’s edge. It was a restaurant and from there she was directed to a guest house with French windows opening on to a veranda facing the turquoise water and Jenny felt that she had reached paradise.

Jenny always ate in the restaurant and one evening she asked the owner what it was that she was eating. Her Turkish was poor and the owner thought she was asking for a job so she ended up working in the kitchen. There was a special weekend in the year when everybody in the village returned to the places from which they had originated to pay their respects to their elders. The head chef Mustafa, who had not previously spoken to Jenny suggested that he take her to his home. The day-long journey, along mountain roads with single tracks and sheer drops, ended in a tiny village carved out of the mountainside with little white-washed houses. The views were spectacular.

The women who greeted her were dressed in traditional costumes, full of colour and sparkle with a plaid apron and maroon silk pantaloons – Jenny was wearing an outfit like this for her talk. She was welcomed by a couple who said that she was the first foreigner to have visited the village. It was a village forgotten by time where women fetched water in clay jugs in baskets on donkeys and also walked with the jugs on their heads. How lovely it would be to buy a home in the village, Jenny said to the head chef who, to Jenny’s astonishment, suggested that they buy a house together. He first showed her some modern houses but Jenny preferred a 200 year old farmhouse which had not been lived in for 2 years and required a large amount of renovation.

Mustafa paid cash for the house which was a two-storey property with a balcony upstairs running the width of the house. All rooms led off the balcony with no interconnecting doors inside. Downstairs was for their animals. There was a corner cupboard which contained a slab of marble with a hole in the bottom which served as their shower room with the toilet being a hole in the ground at the bottom of the garden. There was no kitchen and all cooking was done in the garden outside. The house was built out of local rocks and stones coated with mud and then a lime wash to help stick it together. The flooring was pine boards which unfortunately suffered from woodworm which are the size of a finger in Turkey. These have to be replaced every 10 years. There was no furniture and Jenny and Mustafa slept on a mattress on the floor and sat on cushions – although recently it has been turned into a B&B and so some furniture has been purchased and an en-suite bathroom built.

Jenny has now lived there with 25 years and has indeed found her Valentine. She and Mustafa now divide their time between Turkey and Britain. In 2000, Jenny began giving her talks (1,000 so far) and at her talks she displays an array of traditional scarves, shawls, decorative pashminas, handwoven table linen and jewellery.