Many years ago, I met this nine-year old girl in a magic cottage called ‘Forces’ in Devon.

Her room was a big surprise for me: it was full of cuddly toys, lots of clothes all around, books on the floor and a huge menagerie on the windowsill. It was a universe of a kind, a world of stories, trust and innocence we shared for many years.

I watched Kathy grow into a bright secondary school girl and through a wild adolescence; she became an intelligent and adventurous young woman and then a young mum trying to balance all the different aspects of her life. She had an excellent academic mind and always combined theory with practice, knowledge with application. She worked and played with gusto and never stopped developing.

We shared moments in various parts of England and Greece with various activities through the years, always interspersed with cooking and talking, surrounded by a combination of family members and friends. Then life got in the way and there were big gaps easily bridged when life events brought us together. There was Vinnie’s birth, David’s early death, the first cancer surgery, Joyce’s death, the final diagnosis seven years ago.

That was the last year Kathy visited Greece, and we shared a few days of fear and reuniting, trying to take it all in and find some sort of plan. There were telephone calls, but the gap could not be so easily bridged any more. Seeing all these photos I saw how busy she kept herself through the years of fighting the disease and not giving up on life.

I just managed to make it to Bergerac in time to share some few hours and odd moments when our eyes met, and we held hands and ate together, mostly from the same plate. Our last heart-to-heart moment was when she asked me to tell her what I felt. I said something like: ‘there is tiredness, anger, frustration, love -lots of it, fear, boredom’ and I felt her relief at hearing a true response.

The last three days I stayed after that, we hardly communicated with any coherence. It was not easy leaving her alone in that room, a shadow of her world of books, people, plants, animals, and feelings. What a blessing it has all been.