



## 6: A Peek into Preshal

When I was young and not in a good place many people helped me. There was Dr Jack Clark, for example, and the thanks he got for coming out to see me when I was drunk and had slashed myself was that I threw whatever I could lay hands on in his direction. Then there were the taxi drivers who delivered me home without having to ask my address because they knew me so well. And, of course, there were the policemen who didn't take me home when I was drunk and out of my mind. They took me through Paisley and into the country and then dumped me so that I'd sober up a bit on the way home. Mum was the best help she could be and little thanks she got for it. My brothers and sisters helped too and without my family I know I'd have lost Tracy and Alan to the Social Services and I would have



deserved to. It wasn't help that was missing in my life, it was Jesus.

After I became a Christian in 1981 God put it in my heart to help where I could. Now through Preshal the work of the locusts is being completely restored. Not only do I still have people coming to offer their help, but their help isn't just for me. It's for over 450 women, men and children who come in the door of Preshal. To give you an idea of the helpers we need here's a typical week in our life.

#### MONDAY

Morning: sewing and card-making.

Afternoon: board games and cooking.

#### TUESDAY

Morning: art, photography, choir and Bible study.

Afternoon: drums and guitar.

#### WEDNESDAY

Morning: bowls, pool and dominoes.

Afternoon: cooking and pool.

#### THURSDAY

Morning: knitting, Bible study, bingo – great for teaching people numbers. A good proportion of those who come in our door have problems with numeracy and literacy.

Afternoon: guitar and sound engineering.

## FRIDAY

Morning: literacy and board games – once again, excellent for helping with counting.  
Afternoon: baking and bowls.

While all this is going on the place is busy with other folk doing their own thing, chatting, getting help with problems and just enjoying having company.

On Tuesdays and Thursdays we have a lunch club which is normally full. By the end of lunch we are all full too. People would be hard pressed to get a nicer meal in a restaurant. I met Iain Graham through our then Chairman, Maclain Service. Iain owns farms including Killochries Fold where highland cattle are bred. He and his wife Sheena provide Preshal with the best of Highland beef. They caught the vision of our people being precious and only the best is good enough for precious people. What we sit down to on Tuesdays and Thursdays is the best steak pies, sirloin steaks, mince and sausages – all of it organic. They also gave us a seven-seater car that allows lads to go down the Clyde coast fishing and so get out in God's good fresh air. That's great for their physical and mental health. Ian and Sheena are examples of the many, many people who are generous to Preshal with their money, time and expertise.

Meet Margaret, she's one of our helpers and she's an expert with a sewing machine.

### MARGARET'S STORY

*I first heard about May from a friend in the Guild who had heard her speaking at a meeting in Dundee. Preshal was looking for starter packs for people just moving into their homes. We brought some stuff in and you come to Preshal once and the atmosphere is so attractive that you just keep coming back. The first sewing project my friend Cathie Gibson and I were involved with was making a quilt featuring the Preshal logo. Everyone made a block and each one bore the name of the person who made it. It looked magnificent! May sometimes takes it out with her when she's speaking at meetings.*

*One day Mary Doll, who has been coming to Preshal for years, asked if I could take up the hem of her trousers. I said I wouldn't, but I'd show her how to do it. Cathie and I knew that if we did mending for people, we'd never get to an end of it. But if we showed folk how to do simple things themselves, then we'd have done a useful job. That was the beginning of the sewing group. Mending came first: replacing buttons, hems and even fixing zips. Afterwards we became more creative. Starting with cushions we moved on to quilting, covering coat hangers, making*

*dog blankets and other such things. That was nearly ten years ago and we're still coming!*

*Knitting was next and before long the click clack of needles was producing scarves and mittens. Maybe it was seeing the wool that made one of the men ask if we could darn his socks. Once again the answer was no, but we would teach him how to darn them himself. I'm sure that till then holey socks were just worn until the holes won the battle against the socks.*

*One of the staff asked if we could make some puppets. A group of Preshal's adults had written a play and needed puppets to perform it. Now, that really held the attention of the sewing group. These were no finger puppets; they were more like the Muppets you see on television and about half a metre tall. It took us a long time to make them but the sewing group really enjoyed it. They rose to the challenge and we could see a real difference in them, both in their skills and in the sense of satisfaction they had from the work they were doing.*

*Part of the challenge with the puppets was that they were made to be specific characters because the play was already written. You should have heard some of the suggestions! We got googly eyes for the faces, put lips on them and even managed tongues. That was one of the hard bits. Charity shops were the*

*places to go for scarves and cravats for the finished puppets and in the pound shop we found a variety of wigs. As one of the puppets was meant to be bald, we gave him some long strands of hair to stretch across his bald pate. Another one had to move between being a boy and a girl so he/she can do a quick change of hairstyle when required. These puppets will be used over and over again and I think there are plans to use them in ministry too.*

*Preshal is a family. There's a real fellowship in the place and a degree of security that many people won't have anywhere else. When people come in there is always someone to talk to and, if some sit on their own, others take note and sit beside them. The other day I noticed a woman looking a bit low. It was her birthday and she was feeling sad. But with company and something to do she was soon back to her old self again. We talk while we work in our wee group and problems are shared. Cathie and I talk about ourselves as well. It's a two-way thing.*

*May has a heart the size of Scotland and the gift of blending in with any company. What I love is that she can talk about her faith anywhere and to anyone. She's not one bit embarrassed about talking about Jesus. I think her gifts were poverty, alcoholism and drug addiction and she uses her experience*

*of them to help others and to tell them about the Lord.*

*Some time ago I had an illness and a sad personal bereavement and was off Preshal for quite a long time. May didn't forget me; she kept in touch by phone and prayed for me. She has a big heart to love with, big hands to help folk and big arms to envelope everyone who needs a hug. It's no wonder that we keep coming back!*

#### **SHEILA'S STORY**

*I first met May about five years ago, when she came to our church one Sunday morning to receive gifts from the congregation for Preshal's children. I was a newly retired GP and wondered if there was some voluntary work I might do. As I'd been involved in teaching in Bible class, youth work seemed a possibility. When I came to visit Preshal I mentioned that to May. 'One of our girls has just become a Christian,' she said. 'Why don't you come and do a wee Bible study with her every week?' That's how it started. More people have now been added to the group, though some people have come and gone.*

*It was quite a challenge finding suitable study material as some members of the group have Bible knowledge and others don't, and not all are competent readers. In the end I decided just to take a passage and look at*

*it together rather than follow a study course. I'm not bothered if only one person turns up because, when that has happened, it has been for a reason; often the one who came had something they needed to talk about.*

*While we start with a Bible passage, we sometimes find ourselves going off on interesting tangents. Yet God overrules them too. Recently we were talking about Jesus being the Light of the World. From there we found ourselves discussing the occult (I still can't remember how that happened) but it turned out that the occult was a real and live issue for some of the people who were there that day and we discussed issues that would otherwise not have been dealt with.*

*People choose to come to the Bible study and sometimes choose not to. That's fine with me for we all have off days. It's open to anyone who wishes to come. Not everyone who attends speaks during the study and that's fine too. I can see they are listening. We have some great discussions and I think we all learn from, and are blessed by, our time together. I just pray that God's Word will speak for itself and that those who come will get what they need from it. God is all-powerful and able to do that.*

*There is nowhere I've ever been hugged as much as I am in Preshal. It took me a little while to feel totally comfortable with that. It's*



*a very safe place and people know they are not judged for what they are or what they've done. Instead, they are welcomed in the door just because they've come in the door. Of course, there are tensions from time to time, but the feeling that people are precious – and treated as such – makes a huge difference. Some don't know why they like coming; they just know they do. I think it is because they are valued, which will be the first time that's happened for a number of them. Having worked as a doctor, I can really appreciate what I see here – disabled people, people who are addicted and people with mental health issues all being treated as people rather than the disabled, addicts or psychiatric cases.*

*Another lovely thing about Preshal is that it spans the generations. People come in families, several generations of them. That can only help the local community, for everyone round about knows what's going on here. I came along to the Fellowship Meeting one Sunday night. It was a great evening though the music was far too loud for me! But I saw something that night I'd never seen before, young people outside looking in the windows at a service of Christian worship. I think they might also have felt the vibrations of the music!*

*Having made a few stained glass windows in the past, I wished to use this gift to make a window for Preshal's new building. Many*

*of Preshal's folk have had very difficult, dark lives and I hoped this might brighten their lives a little. I also wished the window to reveal something about God's love and greatness and His power to change lives. It includes a rainbow reminding us of God faithfulness in keeping His promises, a dove of peace, and butterflies which are transformed from caterpillars into such beautiful creatures.*

*I am very grateful to Mark from the supplier of the stained glass materials in Glasgow, who spent considerable time giving me such good advice regarding certain aspects of the design. I am also really grateful to my joiner and friend, Robert who spent a lot of patient time and careful thought in making the beautiful light box for the window.*

*I look forward to my visits to Preshal, and always leave feeling encouraged and uplifted by my time spent there.*

### PAUL'S STORY

Paul's story told by Paul, his Aunt Jan and Tracy, who is his third cousin and carer.

*My name is Paul and I'll be twenty-five tomorrow, a quarter of a century! Mum didn't know there was anything wrong with me before I was born. My brother is ten years older than me – ancient! His name is Kevin.*

**AUNT JAN**

*Paul was born with lumber sacral agenesis, a very rare condition that means he has no hip, knee or ankle joints, very short legs, no feeling from about the waist down and other problems. It was obvious when he was born that there was a problem and that he'd never be able to walk.*

**PAUL**

*I was born in a hospital and I spent a lot of time in hospital when I was a child. Because of my condition I catch infections really easily and when that happens I get really ill really quickly. Mum and Dad were good at seeing the signs and phoning for the doctor. I'm now on antibiotics all the time. So that I don't get used to them, the kind of antibiotic changes every month.*

*I also take seizures and some have been really bad. Once I had a seizure when I was just sitting watching the TV. Mum wasn't sure what to do. When I was in the ambulance going to hospital everyone thought I'd died. They were working on me in the ambulance and then took me to a side room. I was well out of the game and can't remember anything about it.*

**AUNT JAN**

*I got a phone call to say that Paul was on his way to hospital so we went right there, my son Allan and me. Paul comes from a very close family of aunts, uncles and cousins and we are all always there for him. That day it turned out that he had pneumonia and we hadn't known a thing about it. It had flared up so suddenly and triggered a seizure. It looked as if the problem was seizures when it was really pneumonia. When they knew what was wrong they could start to treat it.*

**PAUL**

*I was at ordinary primary school but I used to fall asleep a lot. In school I had a special Swedish-style chair that I called my throne. Sometimes I gave my teacher a fright. I'd go from sitting on my throne to jumping on to a wide windowsill. I could do that kind of thing then because my arms were so strong. Sometimes when the teacher was reading a story to the class I'd do something like that. I think I was quite mischievous.*

*PE was one of my favourite lessons because I could do things the other boys couldn't do. I could walk on my hands with my body swinging along. One day I thought I'd show them what I could do and I hauled my way up the monkey bars! I was good at swinging on the gymnastic rings too. Disabled people can*

*sometimes do things that other people can't do.*

*All my class in primary school went to the same high school. Because I used to get tired I still slept a lot in school. One of my friends, she's called Amanda, did my work for me sometimes. One day the head teacher looked at my book and said, 'There's something wrong here.' Then she looked at Amanda's book and realised that she'd done my work. She phoned Mum. 'Do you know that your son didn't do any work in school today?' she asked. Of course, she couldn't know; she wasn't there! I used to do challenges in school, like challenging myself to eat my soup in record time, and I could do it faster and faster and faster! The teachers just looked at me but the dinner ladies thought I was amazing!*

### AUNT JAN

*Paul has to drink a lot to prevent infections. When he was at school he sometimes didn't do that and we had to keep a close eye on him or he would get very ill. That's been a real problem all of his life. His cousins were at the same school as Paul and they kept an eye on him when he was there and his parents and aunts kept an eye on him when he wasn't at school. He lives with his dad and mum; his mum is my sister. We're a very close family and his Aunt Marie sees him every day.*

*Something that happened to Paul at school helps to show what it's like for him living with his condition. He used to get out his wheelchair and walk on his hands in PE. Once he got friction burns on his foot from dragging it behind him on the floor. He has no feeling in his lower body so didn't feel it happening. The first anyone knew about it was when it was infected and his mum noticed the infection tracking along a blood vessel. He went to the hospital but couldn't go in the ward as there was an infection doing the rounds. The doctor did an operation on Paul's foot right there and then with his Aunt Marie and my niece watching. Paul didn't need an anaesthetic as he doesn't have any feeling anyway. We were told that he was very lucky. If his mum hadn't noticed it, he could have lost his leg.*

## PAUL

*When I left school I went to college to study computing though I missed a year because I wasn't well. After that I went to another college. I like computing. I've got the kind of mind that gets into things like that. My big brother is good with computers too and he knows a bit more about them than me.*

*My cousin Allan told me about Preshal. Allan was a volunteer for SACRO and one of his service users told him about Preshal. He said it was good and that I'd like it. When I*

*came first I couldn't work out what the place was about. Everyone was so friendly even though they didn't know me. Now I know most people. I should have come here years ago. There are loads of things to do. I'm learning drums but I'm not very good yet. Coming to Preshal is a big thing in my life. Before that I didn't go out much. Aunt Jan and Aunt Marie and the rest of the family were great at coming to see me. They did a lot for me but I like being out meeting other people too.*

*Preshal is part of my routine now. On Mondays Aunt Jan comes and we go up the town. Tuesdays I come to Preshal and have lunch here. Tony makes great lunches. Wednesdays I go shopping with Tracy at Braehead, she's my carer – and my third cousin! Thursday it's back to Preshal and more good food and good company. On Fridays I go to Tracy's house and have a go on the PlayStation with her son Sean. So you can see that Preshal's a big part of my life. I'm sorry I didn't know about it sooner.*

## TRACY

*I knew about Paul but didn't actually see him until he was about twelve apart from at family parties and things. At a family 'do', when he was eighteen, Paul's mum asked if I would consider becoming his carer. Now he's like a second son to me. Using the funding he gets,*

*he can choose and employ his own carers. For the first two years he was at college and he loved that. Then he did another year but he was at a loose end after that. There are not many places that have the kind of facilities Paul needs.*

*We came to Preshal for the first time in May 2014 not sure what sort of place it would be. There was Paul and me, his mum, Aunt Jan and his cousin Allan. We were certainly checking the place out! We just couldn't believe the welcome we got and how much at home we all felt, especially Paul. The staff are amazing and they come from every walk of life. We know it's a Christian place but it's not preachy at all. Paul and I have both made good friends and we look forward to seeing them every time we come. I meet other carers here too. There's nothing matters at Preshal as much as people and that's what makes it a great place for Paul and me to come. I agree with him; I wish we'd found Preshal years ago.*