



Dogged determination pays off for Martha

By Ruth Anders

Local resident Martha Epstein started her working life in event planning, but she found her heart was never really in managing weddings, marketing launches and other such occasions.

Furlough during the pandemic gave her time to think about her future. The redundancy that followed confirmed her desire for a different career path. That's when she started thinking about running her own business working with dogs.

Martha, who grew up in Durham Road and Twyford Avenue, told *The Archer*: "The dog grooming idea came from nowhere. I was aware that dog grooming salons were opening ahead of hairdressers, and I joined a salon in Crouch End for a trial."

There Martha progressed to qualifying as a junior groomer, before taking an intensive course with Groomarts in St Albans to become a fully-fledged dog groomer.

Martha's Mutts is born

She soon realised that taking the groomer to the dog rather than the dog to the groomer was far less stressful for her furry clients and so obtained the funding to buy and convert a van into her own mobile grooming studio via specialist company Wet Pets.

The result is a gleaming vehicle containing a water tank, heater, hydro-bath, wall fan and a wide array of trimming, cut-



Mobile beauty parlour: Martha Epstein with a customer in her dog grooming van

ting and drying tools. The van also acts as a sparkling mobile advertisement for her business, Martha's Mutts.

Martha recommends that dogs are groomed as puppies to familiarise them with the process. She said: "I love building relationships with dogs and their owners, and I'm already enjoying repeat bookings. But I never force a dog to do anything it doesn't want to do."

Keep that double coat

Martha offers a variety of doggy services from de-shed-

ding and shampooing, to coat and nail clipping. She added: "Some owners don't understand the issue of double coats, which applies to animals like Huskies, Chows and Pomeranians. I have to explain that their thick coats keep them cool in summer and warm in winter and that cutting damages the coat."

Martha's skills and warm bubbly personality guarantee a successful career ahead, in a vocation close to her heart. Find out more at www.marthasmutts.co.uk

Music lover Mark Mitchell

February 1967 – August 2023

By Adam Porter

I first met Mark Mitchell in 2008 at my then local pub Maddens Bar in East Finchley. He was living in Leicester Road at the time. Within minutes we were talking like old friends, such was his ability to put you at ease with his charm and humour. Mark was always positive even in his last weeks and loved nothing more than socialising over a beer.

Mark lived for music and art and was a talented graphic designer and illustrator. This made him popular with celebrities, who he would sketch before presenting them with their portrait as a gift. He was friendly with the members of bands such as The Buzzcocks, The Hives, and Pussycat and the Dirty Johnsons. We called him 'Mark, friend to the stars.'

Mark also had a passion for India, spending time in Calcutta, where he gave boxes of ballpoint pens and paper to crowds of excited street children, who ran after him chanting, 'Pen! Pen! Pen!' Afterwards, he braved the sweltering heat in order to ride a camel through the desert in Rajasthan.

I lost contact with Mark for several years, having moved out

of London, but music brought us together again. In June this year he invited me to watch The Beat perform in Camden, reuniting me with another mutual friend. But to our disappointment, Mark didn't arrive for the gig.

It was then our friend told me that Mark had cancer and was too weak to come. I think Mark didn't want to worry people, he was thinking of others, wanting us simply to enjoy the music.

I'm grateful to have reunited with Mark in his last weeks, and although seeing his rapid decline was heart-breaking, he wasn't bitter or sad, but was great company till the end. He is missed so much by so many. East Finchley won't be the same without him. Mark is survived by his partner Priya and his mother Penny.



Musical connection: Mark Mitchell, right, with Steve Diggle, guitarist and vocalist from The Buzzcocks.

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Know your caterpillars

By Mike Coles

In August I noticed a Red Admiral butterfly in my East Finchley garden and I can't remember how long it is since I saw one there. Their numbers in cities had been falling until people started rewilding and local conservationists started making dedicated nature spaces about ten years ago. Since then, butterfly numbers have been rising, although they are still well below what they were.

Red Admirals, and for that matter, Cabbage Whites, including their caterpillars, the larvae stage in the life cycle of butterflies and moths, are completely harmless, although some gardeners might disagree.

Reader's experience

Last month however, a reader wrote to *The Archer* to warn of a toxic caterpillar that caused a nasty and painful rash and should be avoided. Although there are a minority number of hairy, colourful caterpillars around which can irritate, the caterpillar in question was probably of an Oak Processionary Moth, which has invaded the UK, at the moment mainly in the London area.

It's serious enough for the government to start a website detailing the problem insect at www.gov.uk/guidance/managing-oak-processionary-moth-



Be wary: The caterpillar of the Oak Processionary Moth

in-England

These caterpillars fire off hairs when threatened, which are also carried on the wind. Children, pets, people who work on or close to oak trees, anyone spending time close to infested trees and grazing livestock and wild animals have been identified as being among the groups most vulnerable to the health hazards associated with them.

Which to avoid

Southern England was first hit by the pests after the caterpillars arrived in London via a shipment of trees in 2006. The Forestry Commission issued an

appeal for sightings of the moths.

Although it initially favoured oak trees, it's becoming less fussy. Rather than squash all caterpillars you come across, it's important to recognise those that are welcome like the Red Admiral and be wary only of the toxic ones, in particular, keeping young children away from them.



Harmless: Red Admiral caterpillar