

I could have SORN I did it

AN OLD FRIEND recently remarked on how wonderful it must be to work at home, never having to worry about traffic jams, the price of diesel or whether I might find my possessions in a cardboard box and someone else sitting at my desk when I reach the office.

Yes, it is good to be able to tumble out of bed and be at work five minutes later.

Yes, it is good to work when I want to, not when the conventions of office life demand – which means that clients frequently get emails from me the wrong side of midnight and I derive a perverse satisfaction in leaving defendants' solicitors messages at antisocial hours.

And yes, until every computer has a webcam, I can wear what I like (or nothing at all) and nobody is the wiser. Nowadays there is novelty in wearing a suit and tie. Indeed, fairly soon I expect to join the ranks of Norfolk old men who put on a suit to accompany their wives to market on Saturdays, then carry on working (still in their suits) in their vegetable patch afterwards.

Yes ... and no

There are drawbacks too. A typical day might go like this.

8am. At my desk, already stuck into a juicy set of medical records, and I am beginning to bristle with indignation on behalf of the poor client.

8.20. The door bell rings. The postman wants me to sign for a package. Among the other post is a severe looking envelope from the DVLA which I ignore – for the moment.

Three pages further into the medical records there is a loud coughing nearby. A cat has chosen to vomit on the carpet. Resisting the temptation to plead (later) that I heard, saw and spoke no vomit, I assemble the CVCK (cat vomit cleansing kit) and set about removing the remains of whatever disagreed with Marcus Aurelius (our cats have grand names – there is also Maximus Decimus and Mr Susan – so named because he was originally thought to be a girl until his first visit to the vet: "Mrs Barr there are two reasons why this cat is not a girl and I am holding them between my fingers").

Then I have a clear run at the records for a luxurious half an hour before my wife

Kirsten comes in dressed as though she is about to set foot on the moon.

"Come quickly – the bees are swarming. We need to see where they cluster in the trees so we can hive them." It was actually the third swarm this year. I groan loudly.

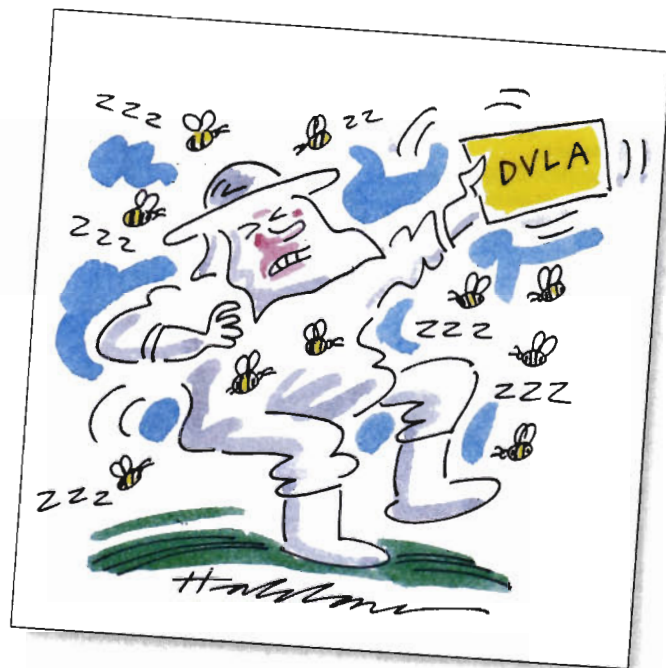
Cue for me to dress like a spaceman too.

I put on the spare bee suit but cannot find any gloves. No problem, I assure myself, swarming bees usually don't sting you. That is actually correct, but we now have many hives and the rule does not apply to non-swarming bees. And as if to emphasise the point one lands on my right hand and delivers a good strong dose of venom.

Wincing I follow her out into this whirling tornado of insects. It is exhilarating. There is an energy given off by a bee swarm that is both powerful and menacing. To capture it you have to get inside the noisy vortex. It takes more than an hour to round them up (if you want to know how this is done, look up the extended version of this 'Tales' on solicitorsjournal.com).

I am beginning to lose the will to examine medical records, so I am less stressed than I might have been by the arrival of Mrs Duck and her 14 offspring. She had made a nest nearby and proudly announced that we had been appointed guardians of the ducklings and that our little pond was an ideal place to train them for duckhood. However the mandatory conflict check revealed that the interests of the cats and the ducklings definitely clashed.

The cats are rapidly rounded up (bribed by a helping of succulent prawns – which I had earmarked for my lunchtime sandwich). A makeshift raft for the pond is quickly assembled out of an old door with several plastic milk cartons as floats. This is decidedly downmarket from the MP's duck house that has been in the news recently and cost nothing (we can provide the plans if he would like them), but it works. Duck and ducklings are lured onto the raft by a liberal dose of duck food (feeling the burden of responsibility, Kirsten dashed out to the local feed shop and



returned with a huge sack of the stuff) while the cats sit inside with their noses pressed to the windows.

Now it is time for my lunch of prawnless sandwiches. I idly open the remaining post, to discover that I have been fined by the DVLA for not sending in a SORN declaration. We have a Land Rover that never goes near a road, and each year, without fail, I tick a little box on the form and send it in to the local DVLA office – except this year they did not receive it. And now they wanted to fine me £40. This is the worst distraction of the day. Hell hath no fury like a solicitor fined.

In the very order of things most of us involved in the law are just a little obsessive, so, all work abandoned, I spend the rest of the afternoon relentlessly researching the law and concocting a letter to the DVLA in response so incandescent that it glows warmly through its envelope.

Let me warn others in the same situation: resistance is futile. The DVLA reverse the normal rule: their attitude is that you are guilty until you can prove yourself innocent. I couldn't, because I did not keep a record of when I sent in the form. When the DVLA told me that they would sue me in the county court I capitulated and coughed up.

My rage abates at around 10pm and at last I settle back into scrutiny of the medical records. Then there is a clap of thunder.

And the lights go out.

SJ online



Read up on how to round a swarm of bees

www.solicitorsjournal.com/tales