Late, cold and cranky about privatisation

Christmas is a difficult time for many, writes Darrell Bailey.

This note, included with the writer’s Christmas cards some years ago, is a salutary reminder that Christmas can be a very challenging time for some - the lonely, those suffering from conditions like dementia and the bereaved and those for whom life is not as they wish.

Dear friends,

No doubt you will be surprised to receive this note enclosed within your Christmas card.

I have considered very long and deeply before doing this, but I cannot put off the inevitable, and now consider you should know what has happened, and is happening with us.

Three years ago, Helen was diagnosed with early memory loss. The signs had been building for some time. Medication was prescribed. Memory loss is also known as Alzheimer’s disease or dementia. Sometimes it is sensitive about her condition and behaviour she is aware of what is occurring to her, and in our regular contact with family and friends she is not treated any differently from any “normal” situation.

Experts say it is best not to draw attention to any odd behaviour or mistakes that are made, but just to go along as if nothing is astray. Some cannot handle this, and want to correct her – or have almost avoide us from them.

Of course, you may well understand that we do not shut her condition from the rooftops, nor do we try to hide it when others become aware and comment. It is amazing how many are absolutely ignorant of the affliction, and how it impacts upon the person and those near and dear. But life goes on.

Our lives have taken a different path from the one we would have liked to travel in our autumn years. Some things we planned cannot, of course, be done, and our social life and association with special friends have been curtailed. One day can be quite OK, but the next could be confronting and disastrous.

Helen is continuing to be looked after at home, where she is held pretty well, but at each review Helen slips back a little further.

This will continue until she reaches the severe end stages of dementia. This may take several years or happen fairly quickly. As for all of us, the future is unknown! Please don’t be upset with this news. It can happen to any one of us.

Looking out across this old city last week I read a new government report into the ownership of British infrastructure. It told me that three quarters of Britain’s infrastructure - airports, railways, water, electricity, ports, telecommunications and waste collection - are controlled by profit-making companies. Less than 30 per cent remains in public hands.

Which is a shame. My journey out of old Blighty shows what happens when essential services are in the hands of shareholder service accountants rather than public serving engineers.

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FREEZE FRAME: Weather can bring essential services to a screeching halt if providers place profits first.