

Stanley Johnson new

Dennis the Menace, the storm that swept through the British Isles in February, was aptly named, causing widespread flooding and devastation. But, as I sat at my desk in my Exmoor farmhouse, I couldn't help thinking of the storm that ravaged the South West in 1952 with an even greater impact.

For four days and nights the rain poured incessantly. Our farm is on the River Exe. I can remember waking up on the morning of 16 August to see that the river had burst its banks, sweeping the bridge below the farmhouse away. We were effectively marooned.

Further west, things had been much worse. The battery-powered wireless in the kitchen carried the news that a cataract of water had swept through Lynmouth causing not only damage to property but an unprecedented loss of life, with 34 fatalities.

Recalling the great 1952 flood unlocked a host of memories. When he left the RAF after the war, my father (with my mother) bought the hill farm where I still live. Keeping a flock of sheep on Exmoor back then was hard and it remains so today.

When we bought the farm, there was no kitchen as such. The cooking was done over the open fire in the living room with its huge chimney. My mother suggested she would quite like to have a proper kitchen. The only possible place was the byre at the west end of the longhouse, where the cows were kept in harsh weather. My father reluctantly agreed. Once the cows had gone, my mother persuaded him to turn the hayloft above the byre into a bathroom! Then, in 1994, we got mains electricity and really joined the modern world.

On the farm last week, I read Simon Murray's book *Legionnaire*, a brilliant account of how he spent five years in the French Foreign Legion when he left school. Joining this unbelievably tough environment may be taking things to extremes, but I definitely think there's a lot to be said for being cut off from all mod cons from time

to time, including email. At the very least, it induces a certain hardiness, a different sense of perspective. The preoccupations of the 'woke' generation seem fairly distant.

Of course, it's not all wind and rain on Exmoor.

The sun shines too, from time to time. Ten years ago, on a gorgeous summer day, to mark my 70th birthday, a Johnson XI took on the local Winsford XI at cricket and lost decisively.

In August this year, to mark my 80th anniversary, we are planning a return match to exact our revenge. The Johnsons may lose again, of course, but one thing is certain – there will be a fabulous cream tea in the pavilion, whatever the weather!

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13 TIMES OVER. MORE THAN ENOUGH
FOR A CRICKET TEAM

One of the reasons we came to Exmoor after the war was that my father had been based at RAF Chivenor in North Devon.

He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) for saving two of his crew from the flames after a crash. He himself was severely injured.

Last December, I was invited to say a few words at the RAF Benevolent Fund's Centenary Carol Service in the wonderful church of St Clement Danes on the Strand. I climbed up into the pulpit. The church was full of men and women in uniform, many wearing medals.

I told them: 'I can't tell you how proud I am to be described tonight as Stanley Johnson, son of Flt Lt Wilfred Johnson DFC. That means a lot to me. Nowadays, of course, I'm usually referred to as Stanley Johnson, father of Boris Johnson, PM. Well, I'm proud of that too! Very proud!'

On that note, I was very happy to hear the recent news from No 10 Downing Street.

I already had an inkling before the Sunday papers splashed with the story that Boris and Carrie are engaged to be married, and that Carrie is expecting a baby 'in early summer'. This will make me a grandfather 13 times over. More than enough for a cricket team. Soon we'll be able to field a rugby XV too consisting entirely of my grandchildren. Could start a trend for mixed-sex rugby!

