Angels in Wanstead

In the 20th of a series of articles profiling Wanstead's local community heroes, photojournalist **Carole Edrich** introduces us to Christine Anson



Christine Anson

"You're going to hate me," were the words I was greeted by when I went into the British Heart Foundation shop to interview Christine Anson for this column. The shop was short staffed so she couldn't leave for a chat over a snack at lunchtime. I wasn't letting her go that easily (she was off for a well-deserved rest in Spain the next day), so I interviewed her in the shop instead. Looking back, I don't think she ate lunch at all.

Christine, who originally came from what she describes as "an actual village with fields and sheep and cows, quite similar to our home in the Costa Blanca where a guy still feeds his goats with the bits and pieces he finds", came to London with her partner, who was called back from Spain to trouble shoot some problems in the Olympic park. She started working in Wanstead's British Heart Foundation shop for something to do. "My Dad has had a heart attack and a stent, and I had volunteered in other places before the British Heart Foundation. My friend and I used to run the tuck shop at the Women's Institute," she explains before laughing and continuing "tuck shop… doesn't that date us!"

Before that, Christine did the waste coordinating, the tannoy and the registrations for mountain bike races in Cumbria. "I don't mountain bike myself, but a lot earlier I was like Lara Croft. I did horse riding, sailing, abseiling, clay pigeon shooting and rifle shooting. Then I had a car crash, which damaged muscles, ligaments and tendons in my back. It took me seven years to get back to work. We were stationary and someone being followed by the police and driving at over 60mph went straight into the back of us."

Like many of the British Heart Foundation staff, Christine is CPR trained. So far she hasn't had to use it. She had been volunteering at the Wanstead shop when a management position in Holloway Road became available. She was given it within an hour of the interview. Then when the Wanstead manager went to set up the Loughton shop Christine transferred to Wanstead. That the recruiters were right – and that the shop is supported by our great community – is borne out by the fact that our local shop ranks somewhere in the top five of all shops in the UK in terms of the money it brings in for the charity.

Rumour has it that when she challenged an aggressive thief, several energetic passers-by showed Wanstead's great community spirit by pursuing the thief and holding her until the police arrived. That she likes Wanstead and values our community is apparent whenever she speaks: "Every Christmas, we put up hundreds of baubles. One attached to every ceiling tile. We ask the community to donate them and they do." In the shop her favourite things are the messages that start: "Keep calm and…" which they use as décor. 'Keep Calm, Save Water and Drink Champagne' is particularly appropriate because a while ago she discovered she was dairy and wheat intolerant. On diagnosis the doctor said she shouldn't drink alcohol, but would probably be alright drinking Champagne.

It would be nice to imagine Christine on holiday back in Spain sipping Champagne with her old Spanish friends, but I doubt it will happen like that. Over the past few years, some of the British in Spain have started charity shops, having taken the idea from Britain. Her neighbours have already asked her to give pointers as to how to display goods and, as she puts it 'titivate' the shops up. I think she'll be in there helping – old habits die hard, especially when you derive so much satisfaction from what you're clearly good at.

The Wanstead British Heart Foundation shop is located at 119C High Street, Wanstead, E11 2RL. For more information, visit **bhf.org.uk** or call **020 8530 0366**

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