

Our first new year in our village saw many members of my husband's family staying with us. One cold but bright morning saw us take our dog for a walk along the beach. We ended up standing on the pier, watching hubbie and his son on the beach below us, throwing sticks for the dog. A normal-sized lady approached with a very large dog on a lead just as a stick landed quite far into the sea. Her dog chose to join in the game and headed into the water with the lady still attached. To this day I don't know why she never let go. For weeks afterwards we were mortified at not only subjecting her to the freezing North Sea, but at laughing uncontrollably as she was dragged towards Norway. I avoided her for months afterwards.

It turns out that the dog belongs to her (considerably taller and stronger) son who has since moved here from London, and he appears not to hold it against us that we attempted to kill his mother. Or perhaps he is exacting his revenge now.

A few months ago, I started to go to a class he runs in the evenings. I'm not sure how to describe it – it's not like your normal exercise class, although we do sit ups, squats and press ups. I wouldn't describe it as your typical dance class either, even though we are being taught to 'drop it like it's hot' and 'shake it' a lot. You will note that I said we are being taught to do these things, and not that I have learned to do them. A subtle but important distinction.

Luckily there are no mirrors in the hall, so when I am busy strutting around the room or attempting the 'running man' I can kid myself on that I look just as good as I think I do. There is an awful lot of laughter in the class which helps to mask some of the pain, and the hour, and a bit, flies by. I enjoy it so much that I even followed the class to Inverness during the week.

Being a neighbour and friend, I am able to demand free fitness advice from him and sometimes I even kid on that he is my personal trainer. Having my own personal trainer is as unlikely as me being able to afford to live in a castle. But I like to pretend.

Thanks to him, however, I did sleep in a castle this week. It was OK I suppose, not too shabby for Mrs Ray. I must say the pillows were truly the best I have ever laid my head on. Castles not being my usual sort of abode, let me explain.

I was invited along to the inaugural 'Highland Health Retreat' in Brodie Castle in Moray-shire. This is a new adventure being run by my personal trainer and as there was a space un-booked, he invited me to join them, sadly only for a few days and not for the whole week as some of us have to work for a living.

The retreats are aimed at busy city types, who would appreciate a bit of luxury time in a beautiful part of the world, while enjoying some active stuff such as climbing or the aforementioned dance class. The fact that I got to join them for a couple of days reminded me of just how different our lives are. Their phone and technology dependencies were well and truly scuppered by the thick walls of the castle, but did allow them to watch red squirrels while listening to their messages each morning on the lawn.

I, on the other hand, spent quite a lot of time floating in the bath or stuffing my face on the gourmet cuisine. You can take the girl out of Glasgow