

# Mr Spratongly



One day Mr Spratongly and his friend Gel Pack went for a walk around Emsworth Harbour.

They saw lots of boats and lots of white swans. There were some seagulls too!

The seagulls came near the shore to look for food.

Mr Spratongly and Gel Pack went right along the wall by the mill pond. One side was close to the water in Chichester Harbour and the other side was close to the water in the mill pond.



"I hope we don't fall in the water" said Mr Spratongly. If that happens my clothes will get wet and I might die".

"I'm not too bothered" said Gel Pack. "After all I'm waterproof, which is why I was invented".

Mr Spratongly was an epicure, which means he was a person devoted to sensuous pleasure and luxurious living. His clothes were very smart and cost him a lot of money. It really wouldn't do to get them all wet. But he did like walking along the wall and feeling the gentle sea breezes against his face.

A few years earlier Mr Spratongly had sat near the harbour and done some paintings. He met a Welsh lady named Lin Ashcroft who was very good at drawing and painting. She gave him some tips on how to create a lovely picture of a lovely scene.

At another time Mr Spratongly was looking around some shops in Emsworth. There were shops called chandlers which sold all sorts of bits for boats. He loved looking at old brass lamps, divers' helmets, batches of latches and hatches and catches, plus a great variety of knick knacks and other things.

Mr Spratongly thought he could probably spend the rest of his life quite happily in shops like that, just looking at strange things.

Sometimes he went to a ship's chandler's next to the river Hamble near Southampton where they had bigger things, including whole boats.

One of his other travels was to Croydon. In a road named Lower Addiscombe Road was a shop called Greenweld Electronics. "What an unusual name!" he thought. "I wonder what they sell there".

Mr Spratongly went in and talked with a very nice chap for a while and found the shop sold components for making electronic circuits and devices for doing things. He found that by soldering some components together and connecting a battery you could make a device that told you if there was rainfall.

Another device turned lights on when someone walked into a dark room.

Some made sounds louder: all by using tiny little electronic parts.

Mr Spratongly wasn't a very technical person but the names of components like transistors, resistors, thyristors, capacitors, shunts, transformers, inverters, rectifiers, diodes, etc, etc, he found fascinating. Mr Spratongly wondered how people came up with such strange names for things.

Then he met Gel Pack. In a glass cabinet near the door was a "thing" which looked to Mr Spratongly like a small plastic box. "What's that?" he asked the shop's owner. Mr Spratongly simply called the man Greenweld.

"What does it do?" asked Mr Spratongly.

"It's used to join wires and keep them dry and safe" said Greenweld.

"Why can't you just twist the wires together and wrap some sticky tape round the outside?" asked Mr Spratongly.

"This is for joining wires in places where they might get damp, like under the ground" said Greenweld.

"Why would you want wires there?" enquired Mr Spratongly, who only remembered seeing wires above the ground between telegraph poles and on walls.

"Let me give you an example!" said Greenweld.

"Please do" said Mr Spratongly. "This is fascinating!"

"Suppose someone has cable television in their house and the wires which carry the signals for the programmes go from the road, under the grass in the front garden, through the wall of the house, and into the room where the television is".

"OK so far, please carry on" said Mr Spratongly.

"Then suppose someone is digging in the front garden, perhaps to plant a bush or small tree, and they accidentally cut through the television signal wire with their fork or spade. The television won't work because it won't get a signal and there may be some people in the house who are very unhappy because they can't watch their favourite programmes".

"Yes", said Mr Spratongly, "I can see the problem but what happens next?"

"If someone came to fix the problem they could dig the wire up and lay a new wire all the way from the road and into the house, but that would mean a lot of digging, take a long time, and make a mess. Meanwhile no television programmes" said Greenweld.

"But if the repairer dug around where the wire was damaged a gel pack could be used in that place to join the broken ends of the wire and the television could be working again quite quickly!"

"What exactly is in a gel pack?" asked Mr Spratongly, now his curiosity had been raised even more.

"Inside the plastic case is a connector which the ends of wires can be pushed into or screwed into whilst the lid of the case is open. The lid is filled with gel and when the lid is closed again the gel surrounds the wires and protects them. They are electrically insulated and waterproof", explained Greenweld.

"Wow, that all sound very clever!" said Mr Spratongly. "How much do they cost? "

"The prices vary according to the size" said Greenweld. "They are made in various sizes to suit different sizes of wire and current ratings" said Greenweld.

"What have currants got to do with it, are they made of dried fruit?" asked Mr Spratongly.

"No", said Greenweld. "That is a different kind of current and the words are spelt differently. The current I mean is the flow rate of electricity. You know at the seaside you hear of strong currents which can carry swimmers out to sea? Well that is to do with the rate at which water moves.

In electrical science electrons and electrical charges can move slowly or quickly. If a small amount of electricity is moving along a wire it is called a low current and if a large amount of electricity is moving along in the same time it is called a high current".

"If you think a big water pipe can carry a lot of water in a minute, in an hour, in a day, and so on, but a small water pipe can only carry a small amount of water in the same time, that might give you a clue", continued Greenweld. "Big pipe, lot of water, big wire, lot of electricity".

"So, if I bought a small gel pack it would only be suitable for a small electrical current, but if I bought a bigger gel pack it would be suitable for a bigger electrical current?" asserted Mr Spratongly.

"You've got it!" said Greenweld.

"How much for a medium size gel pack?" asked Mr Spratongly as he pointed to one which looked about middle sized.

"For you, five pounds" said Greenweld.

Mr Spratongly bought the gel pack and also bought two small books about electronic circuits. He didn't know if he would understand the subject very well but it did fascinate him.

During the next few months after buying the gel pack Mr Spratongly did read about electronics and also about robotics.

He got some more components from different shops and joined a robotics group called Curiosity Hub in Chichester, which isn't far from Emsworth.

Using the medium sized gel pack as a "body" Mr Spratongly fitted some legs, arms, a head, radio control, sound and other features. After some careful work, a few mistakes, and a lot of head scratching, he had a friend who could walk, talk, solve problems, and do other things, as long as his battery didn't go flat.

Luckily in summer there was plenty of sunshine where Mr Spratongly and his friend went for walks and the battery got charged by rays of sunshine.

Mr Spratongly thought of calling his friend Ray because of the sun rays. He also thought of other names such as Jelly Bean and Rover, but in the end he decided to name his friend after what he started as: a gel pack.

People who went to Emsworth Harbour a lot were quite used to seeing Mr Spratongly and Gel Pack walking around chatting to each other.





Mr Spratongly thought that one day he might be able to get Gel Pack to paint pictures as well.

Wouldn't that be something to show Lin Ashcroft!

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