

The Notley Review

December 2003

Christmas Greetings from the Notley family and welcome once again to the annual appraisal of our various exploits and achievements over the last twelve months.

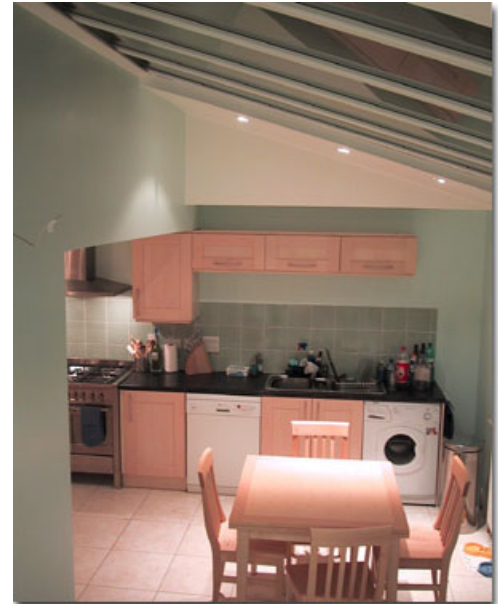
When the year began I was still a lady of leisure, but that lasted only until the boys went back to school at the start of January. I quickly secured a part time job as an Office Administrator for a local Recruitment Company in central Woking. I started off doing two days a week, but after Easter went up to three. I can't say it has exactly been a great career move on my part – typing in CV's and ordering stationery is not rocket science - but it has met all my criteria for finding something reasonably stress free, local, with regular 9-5 hours and the flexibility to work around school holidays, in-set days, etc. I now have two days a week to myself. The plan was to use this 'spare' time to write my novel – I have started, but somehow I've managed to pretty much fill the time with household chores and shopping. I've also been around much more for the boys - Mark loves being collected by me from school on a Friday afternoon now, instead of going to the After School club. Since October (once my CRB checks had been done), I have been listening to children read at Mark's school, which I have enjoyed very much.

Our big project for this year has been our Kitchen/Family room extension. Work began back in May and it has been a long and drawn out process but very worthwhile. It certainly is true what they say about builders' timescales. Had they spent every day of the three months between the start date and the date of my sister's wedding on site, then it might have been well done and dusted before the family descended. This was not to be; although the external work was complete, the kitchen was only half finished and we had to entertain our nine visitors (one brother, one sister, a brother-in-law, five nephews and a niece) without a proper kitchen floor. With the kitchen finished and the floor tiles duly laid, all that remains is to complete the internal decoration and the dressing of the room. The garden is a *little* smaller, but our internal living space is much bigger and it's just brilliant being able to eat breakfast (and lunch and supper for that matter) in our new room.

The big event of the summer was Debbie's wedding in the middle of August. Many a weekend was spent in the run up travelling over to Ealing to observe each fitting of Debbie's dress. This was one of my many duties as her Matron of Honour in addition to attending the Hen Night, signing the register as a witness to the proceedings and giving a speech at the Wedding reception. Debbie and Bill's big day was a wonderful event held at Raven's Ait near Hampton Court – Guests had flown in from all over the world, including Bill's native Canada. It was the first time ever that my parents had had their five children and ten grandchildren together in the same place at the same time.



The Bride and Matron of Honour



Our new kitchen

Adam and Mark continue to be very sporty and are both pursuing tennis and football with vigour. Our weekends are very busy as a result. Last season, Mark won the Knaphill Wanderers Under 8's Most Improved Player award – his first ever individual trophy - and Adam's team were the Under 11 Division Champions in the Surrey Primary League – so yet more trophies and medals. Richard has continued with his coaching assistant and refereeing duties for the club.

Mark turned 8 back in April and celebrated his birthday with a family trip to Legoland. Adam was 11 at the end of June and having acquired the Theme Park bug last year was determined to go one better and more thrilling. This year we took him and a school friend to Thorpe Park – we are very lucky having so many Theme Parks on our doorstep. It was a very wet, wild and wonderful experience for him but over the course of the day he succeeded in losing a couple of centimetres in height and was not allowed back on Nemesis – the mega rollercoaster - for a second go; fortunately that was only a minor disappointment and at the rate he is currently growing will not be a problem for his next visit.

Due to travel and holiday plans for later in the year we didn't have a family holiday as such this summer but we were able to enjoy the hot summer at home and over two super weekends at Richard's cousin Andrew's, where we made full use of his swimming pool. The boys did go on their annual camping adventure for few days at the end of the summer holidays; this time back to Croyde in Devon for a spot of body-boarding. Unfortunately, they were not blessed with their usual good weather, but were able to hire wet suits and they did find out that the tent was waterproof – unlike the new roof on our extension which exhibited an intermittent leak for the first time while they were away. After several return visits by both the rain and our builders, the offending gap under the lead pitching has finally been made water tight.

Adam reached the important milestone of starting secondary school this September. In January, he did extremely well to pass the entrance exam to the Royal Grammar School in Guildford; however, after much deliberation, he instead opted for the nearby Winston Churchill School in St John's, Woking - along with the majority of his junior school friends and football team mates.

Adam has settled in very well and has made many new friends and taken up new interests such as rugby and *hanging out* in the LRC (Learning Resource Centre – where all the computers and Internet access are). The school is within easy walking distance and he has no shortage of friends to share the journey with. It is an early start - 8.25am registration - but it is also an early finish - 2.30pm - one of the reasons I wanted to cut down the number of days that I worked so that I could be around a little bit more. Last year the school was granted Sports College status and has excellent facilities. After one term Adam says his favourite lesson is PE and his least favourite is German, but all in all it seems to be suiting Adam down to the ground. He has done very well in his first term assessments and so far he has only had one detention – for forgetting to bring his bible to an RE lesson! The most exciting development for the rest of the family has been the fruits of his efforts from Home Technology classes (cookery to you and me). So far we have been treated to the delights of fruit salad, apple crumble, cornflake crispies, chocolate fridge cake and a desert of his own invention called 'Short & Sweet' that contains shortbread, strawberries, sugar, yoghurt, marshmallows and chocolate sprinklings – Jamie Oliver watch out!

Well I hit the big 4-0 at the beginning of October and being as how I am not really much of a 'party girl' I decided that I wanted to go away for a city break with the family somewhere vibrant and exciting where we had never been before. Mexico City – my first choice - was just a bit too far away; hence our long weekend in Barcelona. This was booked up way back in March thanks to EasyJet for the flights and Richard's Dad who was still working at his travel agents, for the hotel. We had a fabulous time but it



Adam and Mark go back to school - hooray!

oh so nearly went badly wrong at the start because I came down with stomach problems on arrival and spent the whole of Saturday, ill in the hotel room while Richard and the boys took in various aspects of the city – well the Camp Nou football stadium to be exact – without me. It turned out that Barcelona were playing Valencia at home the following evening – an opportunity not to be missed - so they came back with tickets for the game. Fortunately I'd made a full recovery by the evening – thanks to the stomach settling powers of Coca Cola – and we hit the town that night. We had a great time sight-seeing over the next couple of days – we can thoroughly recommend the Sagrada Familia and the Parc Guell, and the open-top bus tour is an absolute must. The football match was excellent fun too. The Camp Nou when 90% full is quite atmospheric and where we were sitting half the crowd was from the UK. Barcelona may have lost 1-0 and Ronaldhino may have fallen over a bit too often, but it really didn't matter. Adam and Mark were as adventurous as ever with their food - snails, baby squid, paella and tapas all went down a treat – they certainly put me to shame but only because I don't eat fish or seafood. I would definitely go back to Barcelona – but probably just with Richard next time, as the boys weren't quite so keen on the museums and art galleries - there was so much that we didn't see.



Laura and Richard at the Olympic Stadium, Barcelona

No sooner had we got back from Barcelona than we were looking ahead and preparing for our next adventure. We are off to Banff in the Canadian Rockies for a week's skiing over the New Year. Adam and Mark have been duly primed with dry slope lessons over the Easter holidays and October half term and the four of us went to the Ski Show in Earls Court at the end of October to get us in the mood and to stock up on all the bits of equipment and outerwear that we would need. We fly into Calgary on December 27 and will be staying in The Rocky Mountain Chalet in Banff,

about 2 hours drive away. It has been 10 years since I last skied, so I'm a little nervous – for Richard it has been something like 7 or 8 years. We had intended to get in a little practice of our own on the dry slope at Bracknell last weekend, but unfortunately Richard turned his ankle over at the start of the month and is currently all bandaged up and on anti-inflammatories. I've come down with flu complicated by a vicious sinus infection, so neither of us are really in a fit state at present. Will our intrepid family recover in time for Christmas? Will Richard be able to squeeze his swollen foot into a ski boot in time? You'll just have to wait until December 2004 when we bring you the next thrilling and spilling instalment of the Notley Review.

Looking ahead, what excitement can you expect from this forthcoming tome (well two-sided newsletter more like)? We really will be doing something with the garden (I know I say this every year). We lost our old patio under the extension and are desperate to replace the mud flats left behind by the builders with something courtyard style, perhaps to set off the garden furniture and the barbecue. Richard hits 40 himself next year and, in addition to a May half term trip to the Peak District with a crowd of similarly chronologically challenged old school friends and their families, there is going to have to be some kind of celebration Chez Notley at the end of August to mark this most auspicious occasion.

It just remains for me to wish you all a very Happy Christmas and a prosperous New Year. The four of us will be on our own in Woking – no family visitors for the first time ever this year! I'll be packing for Banff whilst the Turkey is cooking, I can see it now! Have a good one, one and all.

Much love,

Laura, Richard, Adam and Mark

For updates throughout the year visit us as <http://www.icecoldinalex.co.uk>