

# The Notley Review

## December 2004

Early December 2004, the start of Advent, and time once again for me to put together my annual dispatch detailing the to-ings and fro-ings, comings and goings within the Notley household over the last twelve months. 2004 has been quite an eventful year for us and by the time that it draws to a close, between us, we will have visited three continents, six countries and Wales!

New Years Day was spent skiing at Lake Louise during our week long holiday in the beautiful resort of Banff in the Canadian Rockies. The skiing was superb and we all enjoyed ourselves thoroughly – even me! Sadly for our pockets, I don't think that I will ever be able to go back to skiing in the French Alps: guaranteed snow; friendly locals; a distinct lack of lift queues; and an abundant supply of reasonably priced food and drink. What more could you want from a winter sports holiday? It was incredibly cold at times and we did suffer a bit from jet lag, but we would definitely ski Canada again. We started with three days of lessons, one day in each of Banff's ski areas, Lake Louise, Sunshine Village and Mount Norquay. I then had a day off for a bit of shopping and a guided ice walk on a frozen river bed, whilst Richard and the boys skied together all day for the first time. We also lunched at the Chateau Lake Louise Hotel and took a walk on the frozen lake itself - absolutely beautiful. Our only regret was that we didn't stay for longer - I was too worried about taking the boys out of school at the start of the new term.



*Skiing at Lake Louise*

At the end of February we sadly had to say goodbye to our cat Rebel, who we had taken in as a wayward kitten back in the autumn of 1987. She had been lucky to survive the trauma of an altercation with a car in 1991; the resulting amputation had at least saved her thirteen years of tail-pulling. The last year had seen her decline steadily; even so it was a very difficult decision to take her for that last trip to the Vets. She is very much missed.

We were worried that Major - now 15, himself - would be lonely without her, so in May we acquired Ash, an eight-week-old black and white kitten - the absolute spitting image (or reincarnation?) of Rebel. We'd forgotten how much fun it is to have a kitten in the house. Unfortunately, this playful interloper has turned Major into a cantankerous old *kit*. Ash is forever launching herself at him and indulging in mock fights, and has definitely

taken over the role of Top Cat. She has grown considerably in size since we first got her, but unlike us, she is not much given to far-flung travel and intrepid adventure. I don't think that she has been further than the back garden, and seems more inclined to hide herself away in confined spaces when no one is looking – our wardrobe and the airing cupboard being her favourites. She has crept her way into becoming a most treasured member of the Notley family and we certainly wouldn't be without her.

Mark and Adam have continued to pursue their sporting interests with vigour. Mark is still enjoying his tennis and football. Adam has now joined Woking Tennis Club as a junior member and he has also represented his school at cross-country, rugby and football too. Adam finished in 11th place at the Northwest Surrey Schools Cross-Country Championships, and was part of the winning team for his age group. At the All-Surrey Schools Championships, his school came fourth overall and Adam finished 17th. Adam also had quite a lot of success on the football field with his team, the Knaphill Wanderers 'A' U12s, winning the Surrey Primary League Premier Division. Adam was also his team's Player of the Year, and was awarded the Ashley Hegarty Memorial Trophy in recognition of his commitment, effort and dedication to the club. My sideboard is straining under the weight of all this silverware and needless to say dusting has become a bit of a nightmare! Sadly, Mark's football team, the Knaphill Wanderers Rhinos didn't have quite such a successful season, but things are looking much better for 2004/05 – they have won their last two matches and are slowly but surely climbing up the table, much to their delight. (Check out <http://www.kwfc.org.uk/> for more details).

Amazingly, I have had some minor successes with my writing this year. The Scribes of St John's, the local Writer's Circle I have belonged to for the last seven years, won the Group Writing Shield at the Slough Arts Festival, the poem that I submitted won second prize in the Humorous Poem Class and I have the certificate to prove it! I have also had two poems published in two different anthologies and I won a commended prize in a local Newspaper Short story competition – a £10 book token, profit from my prose at long, long last. Not quite able to give up the day job just yet, but I've definitely got my sights set on the Man Booker Prize. Well, I can dream, can't I? The novel is coming along very slowly – my enthusiasm waxes and wanes, but I'll get there eventually...



*Prowling in the garden*

Not to be outdone, Richard has taken up cycling as a fairly serious hobby. Well put it this way, it gets serious whenever I mention any little DIY jobs that I might want doing around the house! In May, both he and Adam took part in the Woking Bikeathon, cycling the full 29 miles to raise a tidy sum for Leukaemia Research. A month later he participated in the London to Brighton Cycle Ride along with his cousin Andrew, this time cycling 56 miles and raising funds for the British Heart Foundation.

Over the Spring Bank Holiday half-term, at the end of May, we headed for the Peak District with the families of several of Richard's old friends from his Judd School days - a collective 40th Birthday celebration. Our group peaked at 19, and we stayed in a large house in Hopton Village near to Carsington Water. We indulged in all sorts of energetic pursuits: hiking - to the pub in the next valley for lunch; running - the men-folk at least, to fetch cars to pick up exhausted children; climbing - up an unfeasibly steep slope at Dovedale on the *shortcut* back to the car park; and cycling - 13 miles each way along the High Peak trail. There was of course plenty of eating and drinking too!

On our one wet day, the children rebelled and we headed into Derby for Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban. We fitted in trips to the Crich Tramway Museum and to Castleton, where we went down "The Devil's Arse". We also stopped off in Bakewell, home of the famous Tart and surely one of the most difficult places in the world to find a car-parking space. The Peak District, at that time of year with the Hawthorn in full bloom, was absolutely beautiful and we were extremely lucky with the weather! If you have never been, it is well worth a visit.

This summer we made our own little contribution to the furthering of Anglo-French relations when Adam participated in an exchange with Richard's sister Liz's husband Paul's boss Bernard's son Raphael - are you following this?! Raf, like Adam, turned 12 this summer and his family were keen for him to improve his English. So Richard took him to Wales! The fifth Annual Nottley Boys Camping Trip was to Snowdonia. They climbed Mount Snowdon; did a spot of canoeing; and visited Caernarfon (not recommended) and Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwlantysiliogogoch (not easy to pronounce). On their return I took the boys for a day out in London. We went on the London Eye and the boys did some aerial trampoline on the South Bank, before lunch at McDonald's (Raf's favourite apparently) and a sightseeing tour of London on an open-top bus.

Adam then spent a week in the south of France chez-Raf, just outside of Toulon on the Med. According to Raf's parents, he didn't speak much French but he did go to the beach every day, played tennis, swam in Raf's pool and all-in-all had a fantastic time. Richard, Mark and I drove the length of France to collect him at the start of our own summer holiday - we covered a lot of miles this year. After Toulon, we spent a night with Emma & Doug, north of Carcassonne - they've just relocated to this lovely part of the world and are adjusting well to their new blissful lifestyle! From Carcassonne, we headed for my parents' place in Miellan in the Gascony region. We spent a fairly lazy week there - if you don't count the now obligatory cycling - doing little more than reading in the sun and swimming at the nearby lake. We did venture just over the border to Spain to hit the cheap Hypermarket at Les in the Spanish Pyrenees.



*Walking in the Peak District*

Then we were off to the Atlantic coast for a week in a caravan in Messanges, and yet more energetic activity - body boarding, Kids' Club and, of course, cycling! Setting off on a 10 mile cycle ride to Leon for lunch, straight after the inter-holiday company Kids' Club football tournament, was probably a mistake - the boys were exhausted, but they feasted on paella and were well set up for the 10 miles back. We celebrated Richard's 40th birthday while in Messanges and went out for a special meal in the nearby town of Vieux-Boucau, booking a table on the outside terrace of a fairly classy restaurant. This coincided with the first night of an International Harley Davidson convention that had converged on this normally sleepy seaside town. It was quite a noisy affair, but we did get to see some very impressive bikes and most of the Bordeaux Chapter of the Hell's Angels!



*Cycling in Landes*

And so back to school and work... Adam is now in Year 8, Mark is in Year 5. I have been working at Hays for nearly 2 years now. I'm now doing four days a week as PA for a Regional Director - the work's not that different to what I was doing before, but I'm getting paid a bit more, so mustn't grumble. Richard celebrated (?) ten years at Oracle in September. Mark has just returned from his first-ever residential school trip, to Hindleap Warren in the Ashdown Forest. He had a great time rock climbing, taking part in teambuilding exercises and crawling through mud. Mark came back with a hold-all full of filthy clothes, including a rogue pair of boxers, but minus his own trainers and a couple (not a pair) of socks. So much for all that name-labelling!

This Christmas we are returning to Cotonou in Benin, West Africa to visit Liz, Paul, Tristan, Matthew and 'bump'. We may even get to Lomé in Togo. We are flying out on December 17th and return on the 30th, so not long to go now - passports, visas and vaccinations all up to date, we're ready and raring to go! I wonder whether we'll have a White Christmas?!

Wherever you are spending this festive season and whoever you are spending it with, we hope you have a very enjoyable time. All our very best wishes for 2005. See you next year!

Much love,

Laura, Richard, Adam and Mark

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