



Adam, Mark, Richard and Laura; Becky Falls, Devon August 2005

This is the bit where I normally give you a full and furious account of the exploits and accomplishments of the Notley Family over the last twelve months. Unfortunately it wasn't a very great first half of the year for us. We had a fantastic Christmas holiday in Benin with Liz, Paul, Tristan and Matthew and came back feeling very refreshed and really not at all prepared for what was to come.

We spent a low-key relaxing New Year with Debbie and Bill in Ealing and then on 2nd January Mark suddenly fell very ill. As we had just returned from West Africa, we decided to get him checked out - we were worried it was malaria because he had such a high fever. So Richard took him to the hospital - It turned out that Mark had developed a very serious kidney infection which led to septicaemia so he was kept in for five days. And so began a nightmare cycle that went on until the middle of March. Poor Mark was in and out of St Peter's Hospital in Chertsey with recurrent kidney and urinary tract infections which developed into septicaemia three times and the doctors were becoming more and more baffled and concerned as to what was causing the problem. In the end, in the middle of March he was transferred to Guys Hospital where he spent 5 days and 4 nights on Dicken Ward, the specialist place for children from all over the South East with kidney and bladder problems. Mark had the first of two bladder operations in March and he had to have a second one, again at Guys at the start of the summer holidays at the end of July. I am pleased to say that he is now doing very, very well and is growing at last and pretty much back to his normal self. He is seeing his specialist at the new Evelina Children's Hospital every three months now and although both his kidneys are scarred by all the infections he has had, the doctors are pleased with his progress and hopeful that he will be able to soon come off the antibiotics that he has been taking since pretty much the start of the year.

Because of Mark's illness and second operation we couldn't make any plans to travel far this summer but we did manage a last-minute and therefore hastily organised short camping trip to Cornwall in August. We travelled down via Exeter and Richard and I introduced the boys to some of our old University haunts, twenty years on since our graduation. It was a sad shock to discover that not only has my old Chemistry Department had to prepare to close but my old Halls of Residence (Birks) were boarded up and apparently destined for demolition. The good news however was that the "On the Waterfront" restaurant on the Quay was still thriving and still serving its famous dustbin lid pizzas which were just as enormous as we remembered and the perfect pick-me-up for two boys not that enamoured with an enforced parental nostalgia trip. They did however enjoy Becky Falls and Hay Tor which we also managed to take in that day. While in Cornwall we stayed at a campsite near St Austell and visited Bodmin Moor, Mevagissey, Fowey, Boscastle, Tintagel, The Eden Project and quite frankly anywhere else in the vicinity with a car park free to National Trust members. Membership of said organisation being an absolute must for anyone taking their car to said county, wanting to avoid extortionate car parking charges and not objecting to the occasional long hike.

Richard took the boys on two further short camping trips during the holidays; they had a few days near Weymouth and a short break in the Peak District when they were joined by their cousins and uncle from Cheshire just before returning to school.

Mark is now in his last year at junior school and Adam is in Year 9 and all set to make his subject option choices for GCSEs when he returns to school in the New Year. Both boys will be sitting their respective SATS in the late spring/early summer.

This year we finally had our small garden landscaped and patioed and we have borders (one sunny and one shady) and a substantial herb bed at long last. We've even got a tree! Richard is currently in the process of re-decorating the family bathroom. Work began in October along with assurances that of course it would be finished in time for Christmas when we are having various Notley and Hantusch family members coming to stay. We are currently exactly one week before Christmas and well... - tiling has started, the ceiling has been re-done but no bath, shower toilet or basin are currently installed - these items are presently residing in both the spare room and Mark's bedroom. I think the project might be finished by February if we are lucky. Thankfully we have a shower in our ensuite and a downstairs cloak room so we can cope (but have yet to break it to the visitors about the resultant tent-on-the-patio-sleeping arrangements - let's hope it doesn't snow! ☺)

Keeping it short and sweet this time because apparently I have already missed the last posting date for 2nd class mail. So... Wherever you are spending this festive season and whoever you are spending it with, we hope you have a very enjoyable time! Wishing you all good health and happiness in 2006 - the most important things. See you next year.

Much love,

Laura, Richard, Adam and Mark