



Family Notley in front of 'The Wailing Wall', Jerusalem - October 2006

Can you believe that it is already December! Where has this last year gone? I didn't think that much had happened but on reflection I've still managed to fill the best part of a page. So for those that are interested here goes... and for those that aren't, this sheet will make an excellent paper aeroplane.

We had a bit of bad news early on, Richard was made redundant in March after over 11 years at Oracle. One good thing that came out of this not unexpected event was that Richard did successfully finish redecorating the bathroom in February – hurrah! – so every cloud does have a silver lining as they say. Sadly, despite apparently having some free time on his hands, Richard did not attempt any other home improvement projects. He did however manage to secure a new job as an IT Contractor with Dell which commenced in June – hurrah again!. This has meant a new daily commute to Bracknell and periods of extended travel to some exotic and some not so exotic locations such as Bangalore, India and Glasgow, Scotland.

I nearly took on a new job myself. I was due to start an Ops Manager role with a company in London in mid June. It was all finalised, I even had my leaving do from Hays and received a fabulous handbag from all my colleagues. Then I had an eleventh hour change of heart when on the same day that Richard got his new job, I received a late counter-offer by my boss at Hays. So I ended up staying put but in a new role with new responsibilities and started working full time again in July. Naturally I am a bit embarrassed to use said new handbag, now gathering dust in back of cupboard, but I am really glad that I stayed!!

Richard lost his company car along with his job so we made do with my trusty little Polo for a couple of months and then Richard had the use of my sister Debbie's Peugeot 205 when she went back to Canada, until he finally took delivery of a shiny new Mauritius blue Audi A4 at the end of September. Due to travel commitments in India etc we only went out for our first family trip in the car last weekend and unfortunately suffered major engine failure just outside Ottershaw. The engine as it raced uncontrollably, sounded not unlike like Michael Schumacher on speed and the white smoke that came out from the exhaust was nothing short of spectacular. The poor Audi was last seen being towed away on a flat bed truck, very sorry for itself. If we are lucky we will get it back before Christmas as the part that failed is apparently not readily available in the UK at this current time. Richard is now driving around in a Vauxhall Zafira and none too impressed with the experience.

Adam and Mark had a busy academic year, they each completed their SATs in May and both performed well, incentivised no doubt by the promise of a major cash payment in return for good results – bribery really does work on some occasions. Mark achieved three Level 5s while Adam got 2 Level 7s and a Level 8 for his Maths – so you can understand why I had to go back to work full time just to honor my ill-conceived financial commitments. Both boys continue to keep themselves occupied on the sporting front. Mark is still enjoying tennis lessons each week as well as his football. Adam continues to excel at football too, his team won the Premier League Under 14s championship for the Guildford & Shere League. Mark started secondary school in September and Adam commenced his GCSEs studies. He has already had his first science exams and various course work assignments – scary. This time next year he will have made his choice for which 6th form college to go to – even scarier.

Holidays were put on hold until Richard found his new job and then were further delayed when he did eventually start at Dell. I took the boys to France in August for a short break with their grandparents in Mielan. Sadly there was no extended camping trip for the Notley men this year, save one night at Stewartby in Bedfordshire, on a waterskiing/sailing weekend – so we will have to make amends in 2007 – I for one need the break!!

Happily, Family Notley did spend a week in Israel chez famille Rodriguez over half term in October. We took in the sights and sounds of Tel Aviv, Jaffa, Jerusalem, Nazareth and the Sea of Galilee which was all extremely interesting. The only down side of the trip was getting home to discover that my credit card had been cloned while in Jerusalem. Our mistake - to lunch at a seemingly inviting kebab restaurant – enticed by the promise of fresh pomegranate juice and an authentic Arabian spread. All to be recommended but clearly not the use of plastic when paying (note to self).

Amazingly (because it seems like only yesterday), Richard and I will be celebrating 20 years of marriage on 6th December this year. To mark this auspicious event we are taking the boys with us on a three city stop Christmas holiday to New York, Montreal and Ottawa. We fly out to the Big Apple on December 16th for some serious sightseeing and shopping spread out over 4 days. We then fly on to Montreal for two nights before heading on to Ottawa, to spend Christmas with my sister Debbie and her husband Bill, their two cats and Bill's parents. We will be returning to the UK on December 30th to see in the New Year at home. So a busy time ahead – I haven't done any Christmas shopping yet and for the first time in several years I haven't made a Christmas cake, batches of mince pies or even my own limited edition Christmas cards. So if your shop bought card and this letter reach you before Christmas, trust me it will have been a miracle. I haven't quite got used to working full time again yet. I will have to get my act together again for next year. Some hope. All I want for Christmas is a weekly cleaning lady – or perhaps I should put the tender out to Adam and Mark. Now there's a thought....

Wishing you all a wonderful Christmas and catch you again next year.

Much love,

Laura, Richard, Adam and Mark