

Less than two weeks until Christmas and I haven't even started the Christmas cards. Sorry to disappoint you, but still just enough time to knock out my annual missive detailing the exploits, triumphs, trials and tribulations of the ever-intrepid Notley family. It's been another busy year...



We became a two-cat household again at the end of April, when we brought home our new tabby and white moggy, Hazy Cosmic, all the way from Middlewich in Cheshire. We went round to see Lucy and her new baby and came away with a kitten! In seven months this delightful bundle of fluff has turned into a stocky bruiser, and definitely top cat of the neighbourhood, although his operation in September has made him a little more docile. *(Uh-oh ... me next?! Richard)* He's a bit of a feline dustbin – not too discriminating, and quite partial to custard, baked beans, soured cream and ham sandwiches!

One of our highlight's of the year was the day the Tour de France swept through Hadlow. Liz, Paul *et les enfants* were over from Israel, and many more family and friends were there for the spectacle. We had a fabulous weekend, thanks to the hospitality of Ray and Laura.

Between the four of us, we've been all over Europe this year. During one week in early July, with Mark on a school activity holiday, surfing and sailing in Newquay, and Adam on an educational study tour of Paris, Richard and I took the opportunity to get away to Rome for a few days. We had a brilliant time taking in the sights – the Spanish Steps, Trevi Fountain, Pantheon, Forum, Colosseum, Vatican Museum and St Peter's, to name but a few *(well, most actually!)* – and enjoying the warm Mediterranean sun.



I even managed a weekend in Barcelona with a group of work colleagues, courtesy of Hays, as a reward to the Surrey offices for achieving their performance targets. *(How much of this was down to Laura's efficiency drive to reduce paper clip usage?)*

Our main family holiday at the end of August took us to Belgium and Holland. From the Channel we headed for Ypres, to see the Menin Gate Memorial and the Commonwealth cemetery at Tyne Cot –



highly recommended - before stopping off for a couple of nights in the beautiful medieval city of Bruges. We took the city tour in a horse-drawn carriage and visited the chocolate museum. *(Slightly misleading this ... the museum was not in fact made of chocolate!)* And two days gave us plenty of time to sample all that Belgium has to offer the gourmet: waffles, mussels, chips, pralines and beer!

We then met up with our friends Wendy and Richard and their three boys, Andrew, George and Oliver for a week-long stay at the Center Parcs resort, De Eemhoff near Amsterdam. It was an action packed holiday for us all: cycling, waterskiing, surfing, swimming, climbing, tennis, laser squash, fishing ... you name it. Wendy and I even managed to escape to Amsterdam for a day, including a canal boat tour and lunch outside of Anne Frank's house. *(They were recaptured by the Stalag Luft De Eemhof guards, attempting to clear a dike on a tandem.)*

The weather was great (for Holland in the late summer) and the company even better. The only downer was Richard's altercation with a rather large rock leaving the resort on the last day – it looked as though the bottom of the rear passenger-side door had been opened like a giant corned-beef tin. Strangely, Richard didn't add this event to his photographic archive! *(With the Audi restored to its former glory, the only lasting damage is to my pride ... until the time comes to renew my insurance. Aaagh!)*



We spent a few days with my parents in the October half-term. We did some walking in the Pyrenees *(near the village of Od!)* and visited Auch, Condom *(oh-er!)* and Larressingle, where the boys got to try out working models of various medieval siege machines and battle the tour guide with reproduction swords. It was one of these tours with a fair bit of audience participation, and as we were the entire audience it was pretty good value for money.

Adam is now well into Year 11, and takes most of his GCSEs next summer. He has already completed his RE and one half of his double Science award, with 2 A's under his belt so far. *(Adam's mock results left 'room for improvement', so we still need to convince him that revising is not the same as cheating!)*

Without a sixth form at the Winston Churchill School, we've been busy checking out the local sixth form colleges. Adam has applied to Woking, Godalming and Farnborough Sixth Form College; interviews, offers (we hope) and decisions to follow! He's planning to study Maths, Further Maths, French and probably Economics, and maybe even PE for a year. Currently Adam is looking towards a career in Accountancy or Finance after University but who knows? Naturally, he is still open to offers from Chelsea and football continues to be the main part of his leisure activities.



Mark very much enjoyed his first year at 'Winston' and is very well settled into Year 8. He is still playing football and tennis and, like Adam, is also very keen on the PlayStation 3 – their joint birthday present this year. They have various games like Motorstorm, Resistance: Fall of Man, Oblivion and a few other probably highly unsuitable titles. Seeing as I never quite mastered Tetris from the early Nintendo days, this is all a bit beyond me.



This year we are spending Christmas and the New Year in Tel Aviv with Liz and Paul, Tristan, Matthew and Tom. We fly from Paris on December 22nd *(we hope!)* and return home on January 2nd.

So our very best wishes for Christmas and the New Year to all of you from all of us!

Much love,
Laura, Richard, Adam and Mark