

The Notley Review 2011

I've been a bit lazy over the last couple of years, putting together our Christmas card missive - well maybe not lazy, just short of time - no written review, just a few photographs with pertinent captions. Well, this year I haven't even sent the Christmas cards, let alone the review! The cards were bought in good time, but it is now 31 December and the boxes remain resolutely unopened. The good news is I have no excuse for Christmas 2012 - I can spend all year writing them!

So, to make up for my poor planning you are all getting a long letter with pictures ... but alas, no card! I really hope this will suffice and that we still make it onto your Christmas card list next year.

2011 has been a bit of a rollercoaster year for the Notley clan - lots of ups and downs - so stay with me a while and I hope you enjoy the ride.

February began with Mark's third and final School Musical production, "The Ragged Child". He played the part of the evil, thieving Leary - his first truly villainous role, which ended with his on-stage hanging! So unpleasant was his character and performance that no other cast member was willing to share the stage with him for the curtain calls, after all the hissing and booing on the opening night. Mark lapped it up - he's certainly found his calling!



At half-term Richard, Mark and I flew to Nice courtesy of Easyjet and enjoyed a week-long visit Chez Liz in Biot, just outside Antibes. We managed four days of skiing, staying at the Air France Chalet in Beuil near the resort of Valberg. This was followed by a few slightly more restful days sightseeing in Ventimiglia, nearby Cannes and Monaco.

Disaster struck in early March when Mark broke his ankle playing rugby in a PE lesson at school. He sustained a rare but text-book 'triplane' fracture of the tibia, and was quite the medical exhibit for a few days.

He was in a lot of pain and was hospitalised until they could operate. He had three screws inserted by keyhole surgery, leaving him on crutches for eight weeks - wiping out both his football and tennis for the rest of the season, and playing havoc with his PE and Drama practical exams that went toward his final GCSE marks.

In April, Mark turned sweet 16! Adam returned from his second term at Nottingham University and secured his first temporary admin job at St Peter's Hospital in Chertsey, ironically working in the records department of the fracture clinic to which Mark became a regular visitor over the following months.



Richard's god daughter Katherine celebrated her 18th birthday just before Easter and had the best day weather-wise for her fabulous party in Bexhill-on-Sea. It was an extremely enjoyable family day out.



Over the Easter weekend Richard reached his milestone 1000th geocache find on a lovely walk around the bluebell woods near Chiddingfold. Richard took up geocaching in May 2009 so it has only taken him 2 years to reach this landmark. He ends 2011 on nearly 1600 so he is sure to reach 2012 in 2012.

For the second most important wedding of the year, on 29th April, we were joined by my sister Fiona, her husband Eddie and my niece Lydia. We

had a lovely day in front of the box, sipping bucks fizz and watching the nuptials, and finishing with a barbecue in the garden. The next day we took the train to London, and were among the first day crowds that flocked to Westminster Abbey to see the wedding flowers and the Abbey decked out in all its royal wedding finery. It was absolutely beautiful and the fragrance of lily of the valley and wild strawberries, not something you could glean from the television set, is something that I will always remember. Well worth the 2 hour wait in the queue!

We took Adam back to Nottingham the following Sunday, and had a whistle-stop tour of the city and the University grounds. Really beautiful and green, reminded me of Exeter only colder and slightly less hilly.



I returned to work after taking the bumper Easter and Royal wedding double, double bank holiday break to find out that there was to be a massive re-structuring at Hays, putting me, my director, his peers and my fellow PAs at risk of redundancy. So that meant knuckling down and looking for a new job. I've never worked so hard in my life, over a four week period, perfecting my CV, networking, taking various courses on interview techniques, etc., and practicing, practicing, practicing. I wasn't expecting to stay at Hays because the nearest PA positions were going to be based in either Reading or Southampton. However, at the eleventh hour an opportunity came up for a new Executive Assistant role - my dream next step job - based in our head office in central London working for the UK Managing Director. I applied, went through all the interviews and tests and got the job! I started at the end of June, a London commuter once again with my career fully back on track, and I'm really enjoying it, even though the hours are long. I spent the summer settling in so it meant there wasn't much time for a holiday.

Richard and I did get to see Roger Waters' The Wall at the O2 in May (right in the middle of all my career stress time). It was a very welcome distraction and a great concert too.



The most important wedding of the year was of course in June, with Richard's cousin Iain marrying Vicky - a big family get-together down in Bexhill-on-Sea celebrating with them at the Cooden Beach Hotel.



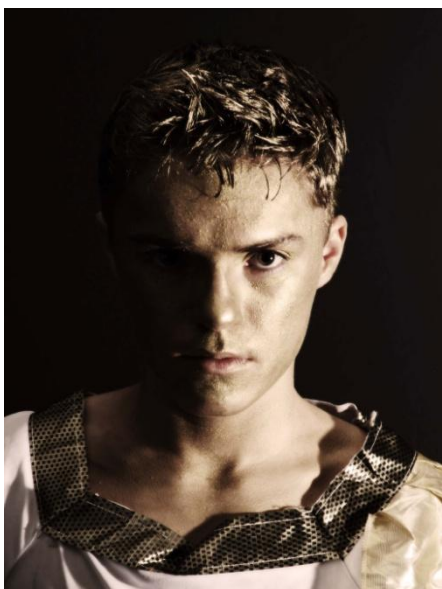
Mark finished his GCSE exams in June and had his prom - all kitted out in a DJ hired for the occasion. Adam returned from his first year at Nottingham in mid June, with Firsts in all of his exams- so a very good year. He seemed to spend most of the first couple of weeks sleeping.

We had a great weekend visiting Richard and Wendy in Bedfordshire, waterskiing and camping. Unfortunately, (my) Richard managed to sustain a groin injury which took him most of the summer to get over. Adam had his 19th birthday at the end of June and the very next day sat and passed his driving test - first time and with only minimal practice.

Clearly a natural ... unlike his



mother! I certainly found it very useful having a son who could pick me up late from the station a few times over the summer. The following week Adam got a further lucky break when his CV hit the desk of an accountant friend, and he was offered a 6 week placement in the city working for Mazars in their forensic accounting practice.



In August, Mark headed off to the Edinburgh Fringe with his school theatre company (the WCs), taking their production of "The False Corpse" to the city - Mark only had a small acting role, but was also the stage manager. They spent almost a week there, staging five performances, touting for audiences on the Royal Mile, seeing the sites and attending over a dozen other live shows including the Tattoo. We had planned to visit Scotland to see the play but with all the uncertainty over my job the trip was put 'on hold'. We did see the preview at The Lightbox in Woking, so we didn't feel too guilty.

Instead we decided at the last minute to take a short break to the Cotswolds, a part of England neither of us had visited before. We

booked a B&B in Bourton-on-the-Water and spent four days there, walking and geocaching, visiting Stow-in-the-Wold, The Slaughters, Daylesford, Winchcombe and Cleve Hill. Stunning scenery and countryside, and the weather wasn't too bad either - not exactly high summer, but it only rained on one day.



Towards the end of August, Mark spent a few days with his cousins in Biot, enjoying the delights of a summer on the Cote d'Azur. He came back with a decent tan and excellent results in all his GCSEs. In early September he took his place at The Sixth Form College in Farnborough where he is now studying for 'A' levels in Maths, English, History and Drama.

Adam completed his work assignment at the end of August and then he too visited his cousins in France. Liz did have a few days to recover in between! A week later and he was heading back to Nottingham for his second year and student life in a shared house in Lenton. Richard and I dropped him off and found that things really ain't what they used to be.



His student house boasts a dishwasher, washing machine and full surround-sound projection TV, all wood floors throughout and two bathrooms with showers! We don't expect to see much of him - conditions are better than at home, except that they don't use the central heating much and he still brings all his washing back with him. Apparently they do all their shopping online and get Sainsbury's to deliver. It's clearly a hard life being a student.

September saw the start of a very difficult phase in our lives. My father who has lived out in France for the last fourteen years became very ill. At the start of the summer he was diagnosed with skin cancer, but while undergoing treatment, a routine blood test revealed that he also had prostate cancer. Then an ultrasound scan indicated a growth on his kidney. Just prior to having a biopsy for this, he suffered a heart attack; he survived but was left too weak for any action to be taken on his kidney. A further MRI scan showed that the growth was very aggressive and that the cancer had spread to his spine, causing him considerable pain and discomfort. Along with my brothers, Robert and Paul, and sisters, Fiona and Debbie, I spent much of September and October travelling to and from France. I am very fortunate to have an understanding boss as I had to take about 3 weeks off work in total over the course of the month. The doctors allowed my father to return home and he received palliative care with the nurses visiting daily. We all managed to get out, to see him to say our goodbyes. My father died peacefully at his home in Miellan on 20th October.



There was no way that my mother could stay out in France on her own so after the funeral I stayed on to pack up the house, and at the end of October Richard drove to Miellan to pick us both up. She is now staying with us in Knaphill until the French property can be sold and she decides what she wants to do and where she wants to live. So it has been a big upheaval for us all but for my mother most especially.

In amongst all the trauma of my Dad's illness, Mark had been suffering a set back with the healing of his ankle. Once the cast came off he found that he was unable to move his big toe and it didn't improve over the summer. So back to hospital to have the screws removed, followed by some physiotherapy. The movement is improving slowly, I am pleased to say, but it meant that he never really got started in the new football season and his tennis was again put on hold.



In December Richard and I marked our silver wedding anniversary with



a very much needed holiday in the Maldives. We stayed at the Meeru Island Resort on the North Male Atol. It was a blissfully relaxing holiday - the most beautiful place we have ever been to and quite the second honeymoon we hoped it would be. A marked contrast to our week in

Torremolinos 25 years ago! The weather was hot and the food, the atmosphere, everything was just stunning. I overcame my fear of putting my head under water to go snorkelling for the first time. We saw some incredible corals and fish at the reefs we were lucky to swim at.



We came away totally chilled and rejuvenated, and very eager to return to the Indian Ocean again one day ... and not at all ready for Christmas!



Three days after our return, Adam arrived back from University for the holidays, and the next day my mother departed to stay with my brother near

Doncaster. The same evening Liz and family arrived from France to spend Christmas with us (with a few days in Kent in between). With Richard's dad and uncle joining the party, there were eleven of us for Christmas Day and Boxing Day. The turkey just lasted through.

We haven't made any major plans for 2012 yet, except to walk Hadrian's Wall from end to end with our good friends Peter and Rachel, hopefully at the end of May. We didn't get any Olympics tickets sadly, so looks like we'll be watching it all on TV at home.



We wish you all a very happy new year and hope to see you soon.

Much love,

Laura, Richard, Adam and Mark