

Dear Friends

I am not sure if this year's theme is to be birds or buildings, but I suspect that Matilda and Nick's news will trump anything that I may have to say so perhaps it is about new beginnings. We have all been building. Here in Church Stretton we have put up what must be the most extravagant car port ever devised. Because it doesn't lean against the house, and only has two legs, we had to commission designs from a structural engineer and have large galvanised steel cantilevered legs set in the concrete base. When we arrived home yesterday evening after visiting Alistair and Michelle it was snowing, so it has had its first test. Alistair and Michelle had just completed a rebuild of their kitchen, which now looks magnificent. Matilda and Nick also finished their conversion of the barn in their garden and so they now have a little annex with a washroom and above, a lovely study bedroom, just right for us when we stay. They also laid a new lawn, made a pond and set out new garden beds, so it was all neat and tidy for May, when...



Dear All,

We have had an interesting year, totally unlike any we have had before! It began with my being 5 months pregnant and our having 2 car crashes in the space of a week, fortunately no-one hurt but we had to buy a new car!

Then we went a wonderful holiday in Egypt (our last as just a couple). It was a truly luxurious and decadent trip down the Nile and we ate and slept + walked round hundreds of amazing ancient artefacts. It really was quite stunning and also fabulous to have sun in January. When we returned I started my new job as Child Clinical Psychologist in Kettering. It was a little odd as I was only there 12 weeks before my maternity leave began. In the meantime Nick went to India and the Lake District with work: both interesting in their own ways!

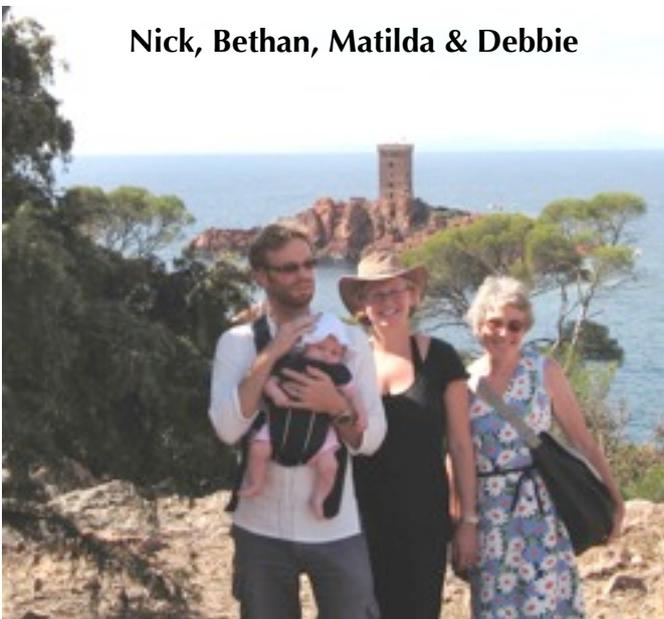
Then on 24th May (our wedding anniversary) after an intense labour, Bethan arrived into our lives via a pool in the hospital! Since then life has changed dramatically. She has had some problems and we are becoming used to the paediatric

wards, but she is much better now and she is an absolute poppet! She giggles and plays and oooos and coos and we are delighted and lucky to have her. And really that is where we are now! I am fortunate to be off work until April, when I hope to return part time. Nick is planning his next trip with work, which is likely to be Canada and we are loving watching Bethan develop + change + grow.

We wish you all a wonderful Christmas and a safe + peaceful New Year with love,

*Matilda, Nick + Bethan*

**Nick, Bethan, Matilda & Debbie**



And the birds? Well in April we saw our first ever avocets in Southport, a beautiful wading bird with long slender legs and a beak that turns up. Then six months later we saw them again in Spain. We had gone on a walking holiday through a natural park along the south coast of Almeria. The terrain was mostly dessert, dry reddish dust and rock, with occasional cacti, or palms. On the hills we saw black wheatear, and black redstart and stonechat, but down in the salt pans there were all sorts of waders including avocet, stilt and flamingos. It rained hard that day and we got pretty wet, but for most of the week we had excellent weather, and it was wonderful to be swimming in the sea on almost empty beaches in the middle of October.

*Another year seems to have flown by in Southport. As soon as Christmas was over we started the planning process for our building work, motivated by probably the least usable kitchen we've had the privilege of experiencing. Work began in the summer and after 12 weeks and the inevitable mixed emotions along the way we are starting to enjoy cooking for really the first time in two years and are very pleased. In October we took our summer holiday and had a brilliantly relaxing holiday in Tobago. We returned to finish off work and are now doing the finishing touches for our first Christmas hosting. Oh, and in May we became an uncle and aunt!*

*Love from Alistair & Michelle*



Michelle, Debbie, Alistair & Bethan

Work for Debbie, just gets busier.

She has had quite a burden of Practice management issues this year, but has agreed with her partners that she will reduce her sessions next year which should be good. And work for me? Well what is work? I had been phasing out my medical practice and allowing my Quaker committees and LibDem commitments to build up, but it has been happening perhaps a little faster than I had expected. I still do some General Practice and am now also doing GP appraisals, but the LibDem stuff in particular has increased. I took over as chair of the constituency in January, and was so disappointed by a new policy document on crime that I organised a fringe meeting on Restorative Justice at the spring conference. It was a bit scary having to book room, speakers, refreshments and publicity without knowing if I would get any grant to fund it, but in the end I think it went very well. Nick Clegg, our Shadow Home Secretary was on the panel together with speakers from Quaker Peace and Social Witness and Smart Justice. Shortly after that conference our Parliamentary Candidate resigned, and I chaired the selection process for appointing a replacement.

We appointed an excellent candidate, and then had to swing into election mode. for the election that didn't happen.

I keep thinking that I shall get over to France for an autumn break, but the diary fills up and it looks as if it will not now be till next year. Still, we have had some lovely autumn colour here and more apples than we can use. So as autumn turns to winter we wish you a very Happy Christmas and send our love, *Charlie and Debbie*