

With Festive Wishes for All Our Readers

The Kittywomps Flyer

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New Gardens for Old

Inspired by *Ground Force*, Alison & Steven decided to do something about the patch of waste land at the back of their house. Rather than sort it out themselves, they found a handy local gardener. He was chosen for his skill at graphic design—Alison was impressed by the layout not of any garden, but of the leaflet he stuck through the door.



From this... (summer 1999)

He quickly set about levelling the ground, setting out a path, and laying plants and trees.



...via this...

Only a few weeks later, they were able to string up the hammock that they'd been fantasising about for a decade.



...to this

Alison's only remaining problem is that she had the idea that *she'd* be able to spend some time in the hammock.

Baby Cousin Ned Now on Public Display



Marianne and Jonathan were made up with their new baby cousin Ned McDonald, pictured here at ten days old. Ned was just getting used to multiple visitors, each of whom remarked what a fine, strong boy he was and how like his mum/ dad/ gran/ auntie (delete as required).

Jonathan has been taking lessons in how to be a good cousin, and is planning to teach Ned how to spray paint gooseberries gold any day now. *(More photos of Ned on p4)*



Marianne and Jonathan really enjoy the hammock

Jonathan Walks!

Life became an order of magnitude more complicated in September, when Jonathan decided that this crawling business limited the number of objects he could carry around. Once up on his hind legs, he could move objects round the house randomly, and set about learning his next trick; posting remote controls in the kitchen bin.



Ha! With My Amazing Walking Power, I am Truly Invincible

Cains Celebrate with Tony

The clan got together in March for Steven's dad's 65th birthday. Anne, with her customary efficiency, gathered the entire family together for a party in Northop Hall. It was a bit of a shock for Steven, who as eldest son was asked to say a few words off the cuff. Off the cuff remarks not being his strong point, he spent the rest of the meal fretting, before making a speech that I'm sure everyone would find memorable if it wasn't for all that wine.



Nana Anne and Grandad Tony with Jonathan and excitingly spiky-haired Liam



Ami and Lauren talking girly

Ten Run Amok in Kitchen

Marianne's fourth birthday, way back in January, cheered everyone up after Christmas.



I wonder what this could be?

The afternoon party, while a great success for her, proved rather exhausting for all the grown-ups. History does not relate whether this was due to the natural exuberance of a wide range of three and four year olds, or because of the red wine dished out liberally to all the parents.



I can blow out all my candles

Fashion Corner

Giulia enchanted Marianne by making her a fine fairy princess costume, which Marianne wore, regardless of the heat, pretty much all summer. I'd like to see Giulia get her precious cat into one of these.



Marianne and her invisible twin sister model the dress

A Bicycle Built for Three

Steven, Marianne and Jonathan have been regularly stopping traffic since taking delivery of a new Bike Friday Family Tandem. This bike is special in that the rear seat can be quickly refitted for anyone from Marianne's size to, well, Alison's. Though when Alison cycled 13 miles on the back of the tandem, using Marianne's saddle, she *really, really*, regretted it. With a baby seat on the back, it's unquestionably one of the more peculiar things on the road.



The very first day we had the tandem

Once both kids were installed, the entire family could enjoy some spectacular rides in North Wales and the Lake District.



We cycled all the way up to the Drunken Duck, and boy my arms are tired.

In truth, most of the cycling in the Lake District would be better described as 'cycle assisted walking'—that's where you push a bike up a hill, and then freewheel down again.

Mum forced back to work shock!

Despite new government guidelines suggesting that women should be able to take as much maternity leave as they like, Alison reluctantly returned to work just before the election. Once back, she remembered that work is actually much easier than the simple business of looking after her home and precious children. Over the summer she acquired an interesting project to work on, developing

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and has managed to get herself a rare office that actually has a window.

Young British Artists

You're excused art from Jonathan, because he's not really able to make marks on paper yet. You're also excused art from Alison (apart from the Christmas card) and Steven. But here are two recent compositions from Marianne. The first is clearly influenced by her love of the impressionists, fostered by a recent visit to the Courtauld Institute. Well, at least she liked the pretty pictures of dancers.



"Rain falling on Cedars"

The other picture is of Mike Scott, and it's here because it is, quite frankly, the first time Marianne has ever drawn a recognisable picture of *anybody*. You can tell it's Mike because one eye is bigger than the other and it looks like Rowan Atkinson.



I'm not strange, I'm just drawn that way

First Step on Slippery Slope for Jonathan

Jonathan's birthday was a pretty quiet affair. He got various presents, which all seemed highly suitable for chewing, throwing, hiding and losing. He also had a cake, and made a very serious attempt to grab the lit candle.



I'll just eat these if you don't mind

Sun during Summer in Britain: Scientists Baffled

Steven and Alison were determined to test the theory that it always rains on holidays in the UK. Admittedly, it *did* rain a little bit in North Wales, but not before one blazingly sunny day on Pensarn Beach.



Whoever manages to eat the most beach wins



A couple of days of rain saw the family heading for the Rhyl Sun Centre, which appeared to be operating purely on Welsh solar power. A very tiny sign warned people that it wasn't precisely tropical, but didn't really prepare visitors for the freezing reality. Complete with a cold wave pool, cold surfing, fun cold splashy bits, and only very chilly cable cars. Marianne loved every minute of it, while Jonathan turned blue and had to be taken out of the pool and kept warm. Alison sat in the café drinking her first instant coffee of 2001 and writing all her postcards.

That week also included Jonathan's very first ice cream cone, purchased on the beach.



I could get used to this

Marianne and Jonathan also had their first trip to the circus. Highlights of the show varied. Marianne liked the clowns, whereas Alison appreciated the troupe of allegedly African limbo dancing young men with very few clothes on.

The Lake District week was, by comparison, entirely dry, and gradually became sunnier and hotter (especially when cycling uphill). It was also surprisingly little affected by foot and mouth, with all the roads, many bridleways and plenty of footpaths open.



Walking up the Langdale valley with Alison's parents

Twenty-odd miles of cycling in the Lakes proved vastly more tiring than the same distance in North Wales or Waltham Forest, however. Funny that. Must have something to do with the hills.

And finally, even in North London it is occasionally sunny.



Marianne tests to see if she can get the whole watermelon into her mouth at once

A Quick Gloat

Alison was delighted to discover that the fanzine she co-edits, *Plokta*, had once again been nominated for a Hugo (Science Fiction Achievement Awards). The Hugos, which are the major international SF awards, were announced in Philadelphia in August.

For the third time in a row, Alison wasn't able to attend the ceremony (last year, for example, she was inconveniently giving birth at the time). And for the third time in a row, *Plokta* came well down the ranking. Oh well. It's an honour just to be nominated.

Holistic Holidays

After going to Seccord, a small SF con in Swindon at the end of May, we spent a few happy hours at Avebury. The Red Lion, spotted in the background of the weird Tai Chi photo, is the only pub in the world inside a prehistoric stone circle. Which is pretty neat (and it's a good pub, too).



Steven tops up his psychic batteries...



...and Jonathan recharges his.

A Tents Moment

For some reason, Alison and Steven went camping. Was it because they couldn't book a guest house for their favourite folk festival? Was it because Alison had forgotten that she'd sworn never to camp again as long as she lived? Was it that Steven fancied being able to stagger back from the festival site to the tent? Was it that you can now buy amazing pop-up tents?

Whatever. Armed with an amazing pop-up tent, our intrepid heroes set out to establish just how much it can rain in one weekend. The answer is, well, quite a lot really. It has in fact rained on every single occasion the tent's been pitched so far. Perhaps it's cursed?



Vampire Babies Prowl

Well, ok. The dummy was bought from America for Jonathan. It comes from a company that sells a wide range of false teeth that are meant to be comical but which are probably no worse than the British Standard Overbite. But the red-eye is all Jonathan's own. At any rate, you'll have to savour this picture, as Jonathan loved the dummy so much he posted it in a random litter bin and nobody's seen it since.



Ah, but on the full moon...

The next picture was actually taken by Alison's Mum. You'd think he was as good as gold, wouldn't you? That's his cunning plan.



... I turn into a werebaby.

Baby Instruction Manual "Incomplete"

David and Christian seem to have got the hang of being parents, and no longer keep looking at Ned as if he might break at any minute (except when Jonathan is nearby, of course, but then, that's understandable.) However, just to remind us all of what it feels like to be left in charge of a baby, here's another photo from Ned's first weekend full of visitors:



Do you think he's likely to melt in the sunshine?

David and Christian were both troubled by the danger of Marianne holding Ned for long enough to get a nice photo of the three children together. But as you can see, she approached the situation with appropriate gravitas.



Marianne demonstrating her sombre side

Meanwhile, Jonathan was getting around the garden, despite not yet being able to walk. This gave him a chance to commune with nature, including digging up worms, eating tadpoles and extracting opium from the random poppies that keep springing up.



Victim of (comparatively) severe parental neglect

By the next time we went over to visit, Jonathan was walking, climbing, and generally causing mayhem. Ned, meanwhile, had developed an enigmatic smile.

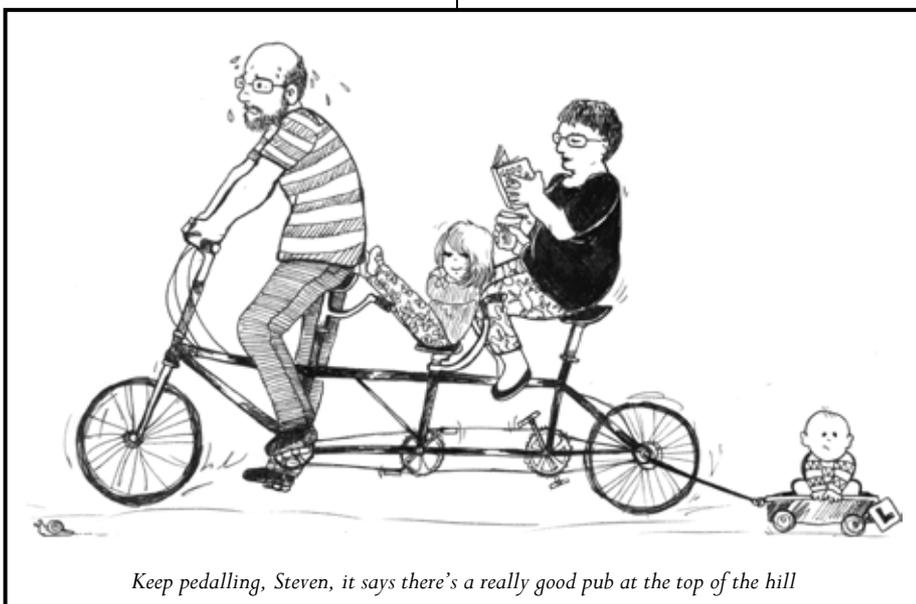


"Actually, I've got wind," explained Steven

New School for Marianne

Marianne has learnt that she'll be starting at her 'big school', Henry Maynard Infants, on 11 January 2002, the Friday before her fifth birthday. She knows that she'll be in Daisy class and that her teacher is Miss Blake. She's visited the school twice and she says that her favourite friend from her new class is Rebecca.

This has been *The Kittywompus Flyer*, one of those tedious letters that people send out with their Christmas cards, telling you all about stuff you either know already or aren't in the least bit interested in, and bragging about how their children are smarter/faster/more beautiful (pick one) than anybody else's. At least this one has pictures. And (hopefully) jokes. It comes from **Alison Scott** and **Steven Cain**. But you'd probably guessed that, I imagine. You can e-mail us at alison@kittywompus.com or steven@kittywompus.com, or see our web page at www.kittywompus.com. Photo of the tent by Steve Davies, and of the werebaby by Alison's mum. Four on a bike picture by Sue Mason. December 2001.



Keep pedalling, Steven, it says there's a really good pub at the top of the hill