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Well, thank you all for your cards and letters, which have been much appreciated and enjoyed this Christmas. Sorry if this gets to you a little late but time has flown by and we seem to have almost missed Christmas altogether.



'Grandma' Joan Blair passed on at 97

This year is one which we shall always remember because 'it was the year Grandma died'. Grandma being, of course, Joan Blair, Meg's mother, who had seemed as if she was going to live forever, and we certainly thought she was going to make 100. But at the fine old age of 97 she finally had a heart attack, at home, which was as good a way to go as I can think of. She had kept her marbles right up to the end and was still jolly and cheerful, living in her own home and having a good degree of independence, in part thanks to the Romanian mother and daughter team she had befriended many years before.

But much of the credit must go to Meg, and also her sister Sally, who did everything they could to support Joan in her final years

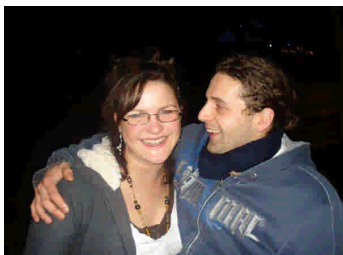
Anyway, the result of all this is that Meg and I are now both orphans and hopeful that, if the genes are right, we too will live to a ripe old age. However, I logged on to a website the other day which offered to calculate, using the most up to date actuarial tables, the likely date when I would pass on. Apparently, I have 18 years and about 272 days to go, but as the website says "death on this day is not guaranteed". We shall see.....

But enough of death, I know you are all wanting to know how the progeny are getting on. Well, I know you don't really want to know but I will tell you anyway.

Tom has had a complete change of direction. Having been out to the Caribbean with his girlfriend in the summer, he discovered that he loved sailing. A couple of days on a catamaran in glorious sunshine was enough to convince him that a life on the ocean wave was what he wanted to do. So he has swapped his cosy life with both Camilla and the NHS, for a cramped cabin pottering around a cold and blustery Solent whilst he literally "learns the ropes". He has passed all his exams with flying colours, and still seems to be enthusiastic and happiest when up a mast in a force nine gale.



Tom takes to the high seas and loves it!

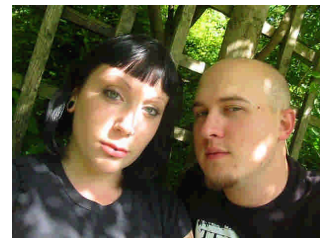


Jessie and Pete in Oxford and celebrating over two years together

Jessie meanwhile has also had a change of job and has gone back to working as an occupational therapist for the NHS. She has been lucky enough to get a job in Oxford looking after elderly people and within cycling distance of the flat she shares with Peter Lloyd. She had spent almost two years looking after children with cerebral palsy in the Pace Centre in Aylesbury, which was a long commute, and she is very glad to be working near her home. Jessie and Pete love Oxford and manage to work away on their allotment even growing carrots successfully, so we are jealous!

Sam has taken the big step of becoming self-employed as a Live Sound Engineer. He has given up his day job as a chef. He still lives in Brighton which is ideal because it has a very lively music scene and Sam is at his happiest setting up the gigs, or touring with different bands. He has a wonderful website with a huge list of bands he has worked with and seems to be making quite a success of it. The only snag is that success does not seem to include making huge sums of money. He pays regular visits to the Manager at

Barclays' Bank in Brighton and Sam, having the gift of the gab, has managed to conjure him into allowing a huge overdraft which Sam has no possibility of ever paying off. No wonder the banks are in such terrible trouble.



Sam and girlfriend Nina

This of course brings me to the credit crunch and as I know you all love my annual political commentary, I can't just let it pass! But this

year I am almost lost for words. A situation that was entirely predictable – i.e. boom followed by bust – and which Brown assured us would never happen under his watch, has, of course, happened. I was given a wonderful book for my birthday called 'Gordon is a Moron' by Vernon Coleman and I would recommend it to you. Published back in 2007 it now has, with the benefit of hindsight, astonishing prophetic qualities. It is also quite funny, which the present situation certainly isn't.



Historic photo really, in memory of our Maran cockerel, who the fox took.

We continue to have the animals and in fact did have a few lambs this year. But have only kept two of them as replacements for the two oldest ewes. We still have our nine hens and the electric fence has kept the fox at bay. They have laid steadily since they arrived two years ago and it is really nice to have the fresh eggs. The pests of the year have been the grey squirrels that decided that apples were their favourite food. They decimated the orchard and despite shooting about 40 of them they still flocked to the trees in considerable numbers and ate the apples before we could pick them. Such is country life!

Some of you will know my sister Louise. Despite the credit crunch she managed to sell her house. This was helped by it appearing on 'Escape to the Country' and looking absolutely stunning. However, her moving from Peach Cottage broke the last link with Welford on Avon where my parents lived and my grandmother before that. Louise is staying with us in the studio while she finds a new place and armed with cash it should not take too long.

Our own plans this year went slightly wrong. Firstly, we had Excel airways going bust ruining our trip to visit our favourite Greek island, Samos. This was followed by having to cancel our flight with Easyjet to the South of France. At least we can claim we have reduced our carbon footprint, but we should increase it next year when we have a planned trip to Goa.



Tom poaching as he has always done from about four years old!

So, it's been a funny old year for us, the end of an era in more ways than one. But we love Field House, and my rather feeble attempts at self-sufficiency are starting to look like a good idea. The lake produced some excellent trout. The fields look great and the lake also produced lots of crayfish, which was really exciting and resulted in a huge feast with Swedish friends. So here's 'Skol' to you all and hope you have a happy 2009!



The crayfish which made for a great feast and looked a lot better when cooked!

Love Eliot and Meg XXXXX

