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For those of you that hate Christmas letters, stop reading now,
For the rest of you, its Christmas and the first one of a new
Millenium. If, like us, you found the whole Millenium thing a bit of a
damp squib then we hope this letter will cheer you up!

First things first. At the time of writing (!) we are all alive and well.
We also have a cow and its calf (Dexters if you are technical), five
Cotswold ewes, also a large black faced ram - known as Rambo -
and a lot of magpies and crows grazing on the fields. I mention this because they are busy mooing, baaing
and cawing as I sit here writing to you. We have no hens because we got fed up with the foxes killing them,
despite the electric fence, the fox trap (which it studiously ignored) and the cockerel.

However, I am now at home more and with time on my hands perhaps we shall restock in the spring. I miss
the eggs greatly. I also rather miss the hens, stupid as they were.

This preamble is to give you that 'living in the country' feeling. We do
feel quite strongly about it at the moment because the whole thing
seems to have become politicized. The right to roam, the BSE crisis,
the anti shooting and hunting lobbies, never mind the petrol shortage,
the hopeless train services and building on flood plains, all seem to be
irritants that, even if not directly caused by the Government, at least
seem to be stimulated by them. I promised Meg not to get political in
the letter, but having had my pistols taken away by the last
Government, in my view quite unfairly and unreasonably, they are now
waging a campaign against all forms of shooting and hunting which
seems an unreasonable and unwarranted attack on a minority. Even
Meg who is an avowed vegetarian, has come on a pheasant shoot with
me and found it interesting, challenging, and a lot less cruel than Nature is.



Those self sufficient among you will be proud to know that I slaughtered, skinned and dressed one of our
(rather large) lambs the other day. We had a supper party and it was praised by every body as the best they
had ever had. I suspect I broke every law in the land by killing it myself but at least I knew how it was killed,
what it had eaten when it was alive, whether it was healthy or not, and what parts we were eating! I can
understand why people go vegetarian but I think the idea that much so called organic food is organic is a
myth. We have organic apples but nobody would buy one. They have scabs, marks and blotches all over
them. They are delicious but you would never guess they would be.



Anyway, I have decided to slow down work a bit. My scheme in
Cardiff is completed and should be fully open in the Spring. I am
still working on an industrial development in Witney but decided
that the completion of Cardiff was a good point at which to stop
flogging up and down to London. The train service really had
deteriorated to the point of unacceptability, not only that, but by
using a cunning loophole in the privatization legislation First
Great Western managed to double the fares at a stroke. The
promised new rolling stock has never materialized and in the last
month the Sapperton tunnel fell in meaning there were no trains
at all! This combined with queuing for petrol did not put one in
the best of moods. We have some friends who are refugees
from Iraq who thought it was all very amusing. The fact we had
to queue for half an hour was nothing they said, in Iraq, which is
one of the biggest oil producers in the world, you queue for three days!

I have promised myself that I shall learn a bit more about writing websites - I have done a basic one for Meg
(www.postnatalexercise.co.uk) if you want to see it and perhaps I shall post this letter and some photos
somewhere - actual that's a good idea. Look on www.ogpog.freeserve.co.uk in a few weeks time and you will
see if I have got it together.

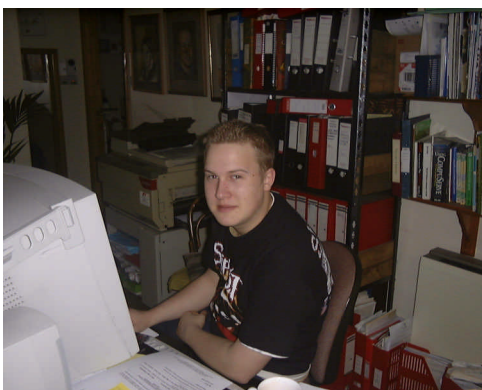
I have been doing a little bit of share trading from home, the tools available are now very sophisticated and the net is transforming the whole thing. I suspect it remains a very good way of losing your money fast but so far I have had a little luck. Having done so I do not propose to rely on it for my living.

What of Meg and the children you ask? Well Meg has gone literally from strength to strength. Not only does she teach aerobics classes most of the week, but her Guild of Postnatal Exercise Teachers has begun to grow in both numbers and stature. It has been incredibly hard work, just as hard as starting a new company, but with her mother's help and some real determination she has made it happen. In passing she has learnt computer skills - she gets far more e-mails than I do - and has also become advisor to the County Council on teaching standards, as well as calling into Stroud Maternity hospital regularly to help women learn how to feed their babies. She loves doing this especially.



Tom, now 21, has had a very exciting gap year. It was supposed to be work experience, but Tom being Tom decided he would go to Canada snow boarding. He paid for all this himself, got a job in Whistler working in a snow board shop in the morning and then snow boarded all afternoon. After doing this for three months he then went across to Toronto and having found he could stay at the University in superb accommodation for a pittance, he then worked there as a barman before coming back to his business studies in London where he is at the moment. What he will do after is not known, perhaps he will go traveling again because both he and Jessie seem to have the traveling bug.

Jessie has done her A levels and passed them all, much to the credit of her school, and her. She loved Wycliffe and particularly the sport. I never cease to be amazed at her love and success at hockey. She was captain of the Firsts and is currently playing for Stroud. She is not built like the archetypal image of a hockey player. She is petite, but she is a very fast and aggressive player. She often plays full back which I find incredible and remains a highly enthusiastic team member. More than that. Her enthusiasm motivates others and at the same time she is sensitive to other people's feelings. I guess this is why she made such an effective Captain. She is now having a gap year and is studying sports injury massage at weekends in Birmingham as well as having a full time job in Cirencester leisure center. She may go traveling, Australia in particular being the place to go to study sports massage.



Sam, now 15 and looking and behaving more like nineteen, is shortly to do his GCSE's. He hopes to go on and do A Levels at Cirencester College and then I am not sure what. Sam is very popular, seems to have a party organised three days a week and is probably the most sociable of all of us. We have allowed, even encouraged, him to take over the stables at the end of the garden, which means he can have his life there without driving us all completely ragged. He is known as Sam the Guitar. He is passionate about his seven string. He has built his own 300 watt speaker to go in his amplifier, he worked at a local specialist hi fi manufacturers called ATC to learn how to do it but the music is

HEAVY if you know what I mean. He has been in Kerrang magazine and devotes most of his waking hours to practicing the guitar. We are lucky in Stroud in so far as there are various (retired if not failed) rock musicians here and they are delighted to pass on their skills for a modest fee

What of the future. For my 'sabbatical' year we have made lots of resolutions. Meet all the old friends, learn new skills etc etc. We shall try and now really have no excuse, so look out!

Love to you all from Eliot, Meg, Tom, Jessie and Sam XXXXXXXXXXXXX