

Fiona and Colin write

It has been a busy year for us. Major home improvements have seen a new conservatory, and the garden having a makeover too – aided by Beth who is showing quite a flair for design.

The conservatory has now become our favourite room in the house – an oasis of calm amidst all the chaos! The kitchen is next on the list and as it hasn't been done since the house was built in the 1970's, it is long overdue. We are looking forward to having drawers and doors that open without the front falling off!

Other additions to our home include a couple of gerbils – Poppy and Anna – who joined us in the summer; an early 10th birthday present for Beth. When her birthday finally came for real, she was overjoyed by the thought of finally being in double figures. She is really growing up now—puberty has arrived—and she is coping amazingly well with all the changes.

Beth now attends a weekly Art Club and has surprised herself by producing some wonderful work. It's been lovely to see her growing confidence and belief that there is something she is good at! Although in a special unit for schooling, she still suffers from very low self-esteem. Her progress is slow and she is only too aware of this... but she is making progress and we rejoice at each hurdle overcome – the tricky bit is convincing Beth! An example: during summer school sports, she was in the winning team. Never having won anything before, it was only

because we had it taped on the camcorder that we were able to show her that, 'yes', she did win! She still took some convincing!

Early in the year, Fi came to the conclusion that her brain needed exercise and decided to do something about it! She is now on her third Open University course, having passed 'Mammalian Biology' and 'Maths for Science' – 2 science short courses—and is now 'Discovering Science', a much longer course involving a lot more hours of study. She is thoroughly enjoying herself and is completely hooked! Not wishing to be left out, Colin is now studying for a diploma in Forensic Science with UK Open Learning. We wonder what Beth makes of her parents choosing to do 'home work'!

When making our holiday plans we decided to try something a bit different for Beth. Having previously taken her to holiday camps, we decided to try a change of pace and stayed on a farm in Somerset for a week in June. Despite the weather not being that wonderful, we had a brilliant time and Beth loved it. An indoor swimming pool meant she was able to swim when it rained, and we enjoyed several trips out and about when the weather was drier.

Following our return from holiday, Colin was met by the news that there were redundancies at work. A week or so later it was confirmed that he would be unemployed by the end of July. He'd been there for nine years so it was quite a shock. Beth coped well with the upheaval and it was useful having Colin home during the summer holidays! He made finding a new job a full-time affair. When

signing on at the job centre you are supposed to do 3 things each week towards finding work, he usually managed 10 a week! It paid off, because he had several interviews and currently has a temporary job with an aviation company based at our local airport. Great for him, because he can indulge in some plane spotting! He seems to be making a hit, because we've just heard that his contract is being extended by 6 months so we can all breathe a bit easier now. Sending all our love and best wishes for 2008.

Fiona, Colin and Beth Mosling

Kathy, Jem & Tim write

The Gibbs family have had a really good year, busy, but with the occasional well deserved treat thrown in.

The early part of the year was taken up with the complete rebuilding of our bathroom – the only original features still standing are the brick walls. This is something that has needed doing for many years and the finished result is a huge luxury—I am longer embarrassed when people need to use my loo. We intend to get some work done on the roof and then redo the kitchen, it will look like a show house once it's all finished.

Jeremy let the side down spectacularly in April when he decided to go to the Bristol Rovers Division 2 playoff final in April at the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff. For the uninitiated, there are 2 football teams in Bristol and the supporters don't get on (to put it mildly) and our family have always been Bristol CITY supporters. Apparently it was a good game even though Bristol Rovers won...

In June, Tim and Kath returned to the mud slide that is Glastonbury Festival—luckily they went well prepared with wellies and waterproofs as it was muddier than ever this year. They saw lots of different performers such Shirley Bassey, Paul Weller, The London Gospel Choir, Bjork, and The Arcade Fire, and are determined to go again next year. There will be a sunny Glastonbury Festival one day and they don't want to miss it!

The same weekend, Jem drove to Scotland to act as a steward for a charity event, which involved competitors running and cycling large distances while Jem sat at a desk and ticked them off. He made full use of his time North of the Border by partaking in the local produce (whisky) and indulging in strange rituals (Scottish Country dancing) once the whisky kicked in.

Both Tim and Kathy passed their first year, Kath in Accounting and Tim managing a 2.1 in Creative Writing. This was duly celebrated at Tim's 21st birthday when the whole family went out bowling and then for a meal together. Tim had a party a couple of weeks later for all his friends.

Kath, Jem and Tim managed to fulfil a longstanding dream and went to the Emirates stadium in July to watch Arsenal play in a friendly tournament. This was a great experience on a beautiful warm summer's day (one of the few), although by the time they got back to Bristol at 2 in the morning (aren't trains wonderful!) it was freezing cold and pouring with rain, so back to normal then.

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Andy and Mel write

In February, Andy was sent to Norway on business for a week. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the scenery was very snowy and the temperature well below freezing!

While he was away, news came through that 19 people were being made redundant including 2 from his own department. This was added to with further redundancies in October; so after starting 2007 with 9 people in his department Andy finishes it with just 5. We await 2008 with some trepidation. On the plus side, Andy continues to run his web design business part-time and this is now making a small profit. He doesn't advertise, but gains new customers from personal recommendation.

For their holiday this year, Andy and Mel stayed on the Devon and Cornwall border in South West England. Despite the weather this summer being pretty lousy they seemed to pick well and had two weeks of virtually unbroken sunshine. Highlights included The Lost Gardens of Heligan (run by the same team who look after the nearby Eden Project), picturesque Clovelly, Lanhydrock House and an enjoyable journey on the South Devon Steam Railway.

Mel was lucky enough to visit Crufts this year where she looked around the Discovery Dogs section and many stalls as well as watching the impressive agility and heel work to music.

Our big news this year is a small furry addition to our family. Misty, a blue roan cocker spaniel puppy, was born on 29 May (one of a litter of 4) and came to live with us on 27 July. She's such fun to have around and a very fast

learner. We're attending dog training classes with her one evening a week and she's already earned two certificates one of which is the Kennel Club Puppy Foundation. Misty was just 3.5kg when we first got her but at the time of writing is getting closer to 10kg. Although she's learning well, she's still a typical puppy and our garden is now full of holes, the plants are gradually all being eaten and Andy had to rescue a frog from an early demise. We wouldn't have it any other way! (More pictures at www.claytonfamily.org.uk/family/misty)

In August, Andy and Mel held a small family party for Joy's birthday attended by Fiona, Colin, Beth, Kathy, Jem and Tim.

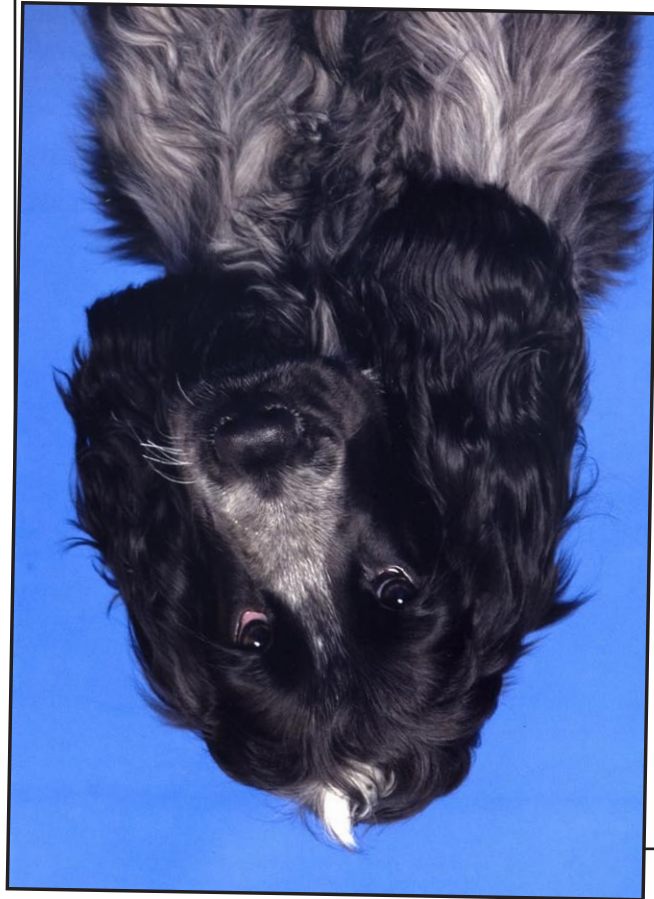
The BBC were in town in August to record an episode of the long running programme *The Antiques Roadshow*. Mel went along to watch and it was interesting to see how the day was organised as the TV people managed to cope effortlessly with over 2,500 visitors—apparently one of the largest turnouts in their 30 year history.

We went to a live demonstration by Richard Curtis in October. Richard performs displays to music with his dogs all over the world. The rapport he has with his animals is amazing and Andy and Mel picked up some useful tips during his talk.

In December, the three of us are taking part in two local carnivals with other dog owners. Misty will be dressed as a sheep (if she doesn't eat the costume first) and Andy and Mel will be Wallace from *Wallace and Gromit*.

We wish everyone a very happy and peaceful Christmas and wonderful 2008.

Andy and Melanie Clayton
Web site: www.claytonfamily.org.uk



(right) The new addition to the family: Misty, Andy and Mel's cocker spaniel puppy

That old cliché "how the year has flown" springs to mind as Christmas draws ever closer and it's time to do our annual newsletter. Last Christmas was again spent at Andy and Mel's home where we all, including Collin, Fiona and Beth enjoyed Mel's scrumptious dinner which she and Andy provided. As usual Kath, Jeremy and Tim joined us on New Year's day for a family get-together. On my birthday in August Andy and Mel invited us around for lunch and to my surprise and delight Kath, Jem and Tim turned up for another afternoon of family togetherness. Sally and I have enjoyed "walkies" with Andy, Mel and Misty (see Andy's report on a couple of occasions and we meet our friends (human and doggy) on the meadows most days when we don't go to the beach. I am still involved with the Bible study and Support group, playing "Upwords" with Fiona twice weekly, baby-sitting Beth on a regular basis, visiting friends and so forth. I was going to say that nothing out of the ordinary has happened this year—that is, until this morning when Beth, Sally and I went for a walk on the beach. The incoming tide had deposited thick layers of kelp along the water's edge and Beth was walking on it beachcombing when suddenly she sank up to her knees and couldn't move. She was truly bogged down! On going to her rescue I too became stuck and to my extreme embarrassment overbalanced in a most undignified manner, which elicited peals of laughter from Beth. In the end I managed to extricate us both and we were none the worse for our adventure though when one has been in close contact with seaweed one doesn't come up smelling of roses!

On that pleasant note I shall close with my Love and best wishes for Christmas and God's peace in 2008 to you and yours.

November 2007

Joy writes

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In August Tim and Kath went to the Proms at the Albert Hall. We arrived in London in mid afternoon so were able to go for a meal and visit Covent Garden before going to the concert. Tim had never been before and very much enjoyed it, so we think it might become an annual event.

Kathy forced the boys to indulge in some cultural pursuits this year when they all went to see 'Carmen'. It was a very interesting production with a live horse on stage (unfortunately not playing one of the major roles), and Jem realised that he knew a lot of the tunes—but to completely different words—it was a struggle stopping him singing along...

Kathy had another work trip to Washington—very luckily this time the meetings finished early

and she had a whole day to sightsee, riding on a trolley bus tour of the city and visiting the National Archive where she saw the Declaration of Independence.

In late summer, Tim and Jem spent a long weekend in Croyde in Devon camping with a large group of friends and getting sunburnt (and paying the occasional visit to the local hostelry....)

The autumn saw Tim returning to University for his second year, Kathy starting the next level of her accountancy training, and Jem taking on a new part time job behind the bar in our local members club 2 nights a week.

Much love to all of you from Kathy, Jem and Tim.

Kathy, Jeremy and Timothy Gibbs

For more photographs and news
please visit our website at
<http://www.claytonfamily.org.uk>



See inside page for news from Melanie, Andy, Fiona, Colin and Beth

