

Andy and Mel write

In January, Andy found out that he was being made redundant after 19 years working for Exchange & Mart. It didn't come as a huge surprise as the business had been winding down for a number of years but Andy found himself unemployed for the first time in his life. After being in print for 140 years the magazine ceased publication in February and Andy (along with most of the remaining staff) left at the end of that month. *Exchange & Mart* can now only be found on the internet.

In April, Andy decided to take his part-time web design business full time and during the year has taken on more work including one particularly busy contract as well as setting up an iPhone development partnership. He's thoroughly enjoying working from home and hopes that he can weather the current financial climate and really make a go of things.

Regular readers may recall that we had put our house on the market in July 2008 and at the time of writing last year's epic instalment hadn't had much luck as the property slump continued in a downward direction. Things changed in the New Year when we received an offer – just a few days after Andy had heard about his job. Panic ensued! To cut a very long story short, we found somewhere we liked, had an offer accepted and started on the long road with solicitors and everything else that moving house entails. Unfortunately, just as we were ready to exchange contracts (and after having paid for an expensive survey on the new house) our buyer pulled out. We were obviously devastated and had to put our place back on the market and start all over again.

Eventually we received a new offer, much reduced from the previous one (not a surprise in a falling market). We decided to have a look around and see if we could find anything we liked. We quickly found a lovely chalet bungalow within a stones throw of Mel's parents and walking distance of Mum's. It has a big garden, large lounge, dining room and crucially a good size room that we have converted into a home office for Andy. We moved in on Misty's 2nd birthday—29th May. We're currently in the throes of decorating, hoping to have the lounge ready for Christmas and also have



(above) Misty helping us in our new garden

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

plans to extend the kitchen next year, all being well.

This year, Mel and Misty have been part of The Friendly Dog Club Display Team who performed their half hour routine at several local events during the summer. There's a video (by Andy) of the Line Dance routine that makes up part of the display at www.claytonfamily.org.uk/newsletter. Having already passed the Silver Club Award and Kennel Club 'Good Citizen' tests since the last newsletter, Mel and Misty attended a Tricks Workshop in October.

Misty continues to surprise and delight us in equal measure. She's a very clever dog, picking up commands quickly, and gives us a huge amount of pleasure. She coped with the move well, settling in to her new surroundings. She much prefers her extended garden in which she can lay out in the sun or go and play football (the latter being part of her lunchtime routine).

In December, Mel and Misty will be dressed as clowns at the local Christmas carnival that this year has a Dickens theme. Look out for photographs on the website soon after!

In July Mel attended The New Forest Show and Andy, who has continued to learn the saxophone this year, took a Grade 5 exam. It was quite a nerve wracking experience as he had to perform several pieces (including one from memory) and take an aural test. He was delighted to pass with a merit (only 3 marks off a distinction)!

December sees Andy reach the big four oh (oh oh!). He and Mel will be celebrating with a trip to London to see *The Mouse Trap*.

Wishing you a very Happy Christmas and every good wish for the coming year.

Kathy writes

Here are a few of the highlights of 2009 for the Gibbs family:

In April we went to see a performance of Samuel Beckett's 'Waiting for Godot' starring Patrick Stewart, Sir Ian McKellen, Simon Callow and Ronald Pickup. It was a real privilege seeing such renowned actors. Kath queued up at the stage door afterwards and got all their autographs, and can confirm that Patrick Stewart is even better looking close up. Unfortunately one of our party had never been to the theatre before. This play is not one to be recommended as a 'first time' play, but luckily he managed to stave off his boredom by going to sleep and woke up in time to go for a pint afterwards.

We went to the Glastonbury Festival again, and this year we managed to persuade several of our friends to come with us and we all camped together. We had a heatwave for once and Kath came back with quite a tan. Having said that it wasn't completely dry and we had to drag our belongings back to the car on the Monday afternoon through quite a lot of mud. Highlights this year were Blur, Tom Jones, Rolf Harris, Neil Young and Madness, not to mention the morning when we were coming back from breakfast and as we passed the circus tent, the music to 'YMCA' started blaring out. Raising our eyes heavenward, we saw 6 of the riggers on top of the tent dancing and doing the actions. Of course, everyone on the ground joined in, and much fun ensued. We have already booked our tickets for next year, when even more of us will be going. As it's the 40th anniversary we are expecting something really special. Maybe riggers on top of the pyramid stage.

Kath passed her AAT (accountancy) exams and took part in a graduation ceremony in Bristol Cathedral with the boys looking on. Tim decided halfway through his third year at University to take a break and is now retaking his final year.

In August we went to the Bristol Hippodrome to see Bill Bailey, the comedian. We have all enjoyed his comedy for years and it was great to see him live. He is a very talented musician and uses music as an integral part of his performance, although we couldn't work out why he had a miniature model of Stonehenge on stage. Jem missed a trick here, by walking past him as he was signing autographs, without stopping to ask.

In October, Kath started a new job at the MOD, gaining promotion as a result. It is a new direction for her and involves a steep

Continued on back page...

Fiona and Colin continued...

and needs to get back to normality; on this occasion however, she seemed to cope really well and a very good time was had by all.

Less than a week after our return Beth faced a huge hurdle... starting a new school. Beaucroft is a special school catering for youngsters with moderate learning difficulties from age 4-18. She is in a class of nine with a lovely teacher and a teaching assistant, so she gets individual attention. There have been some teething troubles though and she is finding the transition very hard

even though the school is supportive and she would have struggled even more in a mainstream school. At school she holds it all together and works well; she just lets all her angst out at home. Her teacher is confident that she will settle in time and is working hard to that end. Although Beth is only 12, she is a typical teenager, with all that entails, plus all the extra bits that her history and disability bring, so all in all life as parents is quite 'interesting' at the moment!

Fi continues with her Open University studies (helps to keep her sane) facing her first exam for over 20 years in July. She passed Human Biology with a distinction,

much to her amazement, and is now 'Exploring Psychology'.

Involvement in church is becoming more of a challenge for Fi and Colin as Beth goes through an 'anti' phase so we take turns to attend. Beth still attends the youth group and we hope that in time we will again attend as a family. Colin is still managing to stay involved in the youth work, but Fi has had to step down from the worship band for the time being. Although life has many challenges for us, we press on knowing we are not alone and that we have the love and support of family and friends to see us through.

Fiona, Colin and Beth Mosling

Fiona and Colin write

A year ago we wrote that Colin had a temporary job until Christmas. The credit crunch meant jobs became scarce and it was six months before he finally found another job – permanent this time! He now works as a bursar for a language college in Bournemouth. It's been a steep learning curve for him as the job entails accounts work – not something he's been too involved with before. He has been there over three months now and seems settled.

Last December we had our first trip abroad as a family, spending three days in Disneyland Paris and then two days in Paris itself. Highlights include the Musée D'Orsay, where Fi marvelled at famous works by, amongst others, Monet and Van Gogh; an evening river trip along the Seine which Colin particularly enjoyed; Notre Dame where Beth enjoyed feeding the pigeons – her highlight of the whole trip! Beth found the travelling traumatic in places – French escalators seem faster than English ones and she was terrified. On one occasion a lovely French lady helped us get Beth onto a moving walkway - then re-appeared a little later to help us with Beth again – perhaps an angel working undercover we thought! More positively, Beth became confident enough to try saying "bonjour" and "au revoir" to people in the hotel and restaurants we frequented and as she rarely says anything in similar situations at home this was lovely to see.

Our summer holiday this year was spent in Cornwall. We had our own enclosed garden which Beth loved... Fi liked the fact that the cottage had a tumble dryer (how sad is that?) and now wants one! Colin just enjoyed getting away. In fact it was the first holiday the three of us have had together where we all wanted to stay longer... normally we are only too keen to get home because someone (naming no names, but she is the smallest one) has had enough

Continued inside...

Kathy continued...

learning curve, especially as her new boss is taking a job in Scotland in December and leaving her to take over!

Also in October, Kath was involved in a performance of 'Messiah' as part of a local arts festival at St Michael's Windmill Hill. This was very well received and will become an annual event. There are a couple of grainy clips on the Clayton Family web site if you want to see how we did (see link below)

Jem and his girlfriend Sam went to Swanage in Dorset for a long weekend in August, and had a trip to London to see 'Hairspray' in October. Tim also had a trip to London to see

Kathy, Jeremy and Timothy Gibbs

For additional photographs and videos please visit
www.claytonfamily.org.uk/newsletter

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

Joy writes

Christmas is looming over the horizon and here we are again. Last Christmas Fiona, Colin, Beth and I had dinner with Andy and Mel – always a treat – and at New Year Kath, Jem and Tim joined us here at No. 37 for a buffet lunch. It is a wonderful opportunity for all the family to get together and have fun. I am still involved with the Bible study group, also the Support Group at church.

Sally at 13½ years has arthritis in her right back leg which means no more "walkies" to the beach as it is too far so we are confined to outings to the local meadows.

In June I enjoyed an open-air jazz concert at Highcliffe Castle in the company of Andy, Mel and her parents and uncle. On my 75th birthday I was treated to afternoon tea by Fiona and Beth at "The Cliffhanger" - a local tearoom/restaurant which, as the name suggests, is perched high on the cliff overlooking the beach far below with a spectacular view across to the Isle of Wight.

Afterwards, Fiona and I relaxed in chairs on the beach whilst Beth enjoyed swimming in the sea. In the evening I visited Andy and Mel and on the following Friday Kath with Jem, Tim and their respective girlfriends turned up to take me out to lunch.

We had a few days of glorious "Indian Summer" in October but the past few days have turned quite chilly and it's "gloves-and-woolly hat" time again.

That is all from me so I leave it for the other members of the family to report on their exploits and I send you my Love and best

Joy Clayton



Christmas Blessings