

Dear Friends

(Les, end of November)

Yesterday we received our first Christmas card so I decided I had better get my act together in putting our card together.

This year has been full of the joy and excitement of watching Robert grow from a helpless infant into an independent, assertive, happy little boy. He loves animals, the outdoors, books and people. He is walking all over the place and waves good-bye non-chelantly over his shoulder as he goes. Thankfully he has now started sleeping through the night so life has taken a semblance of normality. Due to Alan's flexible work schedule he has been very involved in Robert's life and has seen the developmental stages as they happen. We both saw the first steps as well as the first "get up and walk". Alan being around has also enabled me to have a fair amount of freedom in terms of being able to continue going to gym 3 times a week etc.

I have formed many new friendships as a result of being a mom. Every Monday I meet with four girls who I befriended when doing antenatal classes. Our kids are all of similar age (born within a month of each other), so we have lots in common. On Wednesday mornings I meet with another group of mom's who have children of various ages. This is also a great support system.

We have taken a back seat at church at the moment as we find that Robert's needs do not allow us active participation in the various church activities. Making it to the service on Sundays is a challenge. I do sometimes manage to join the women's meeting on a Tuesday and it is nice to keep up the relationships.

Alan and I have become involved in starting a Babies Bible Class program which runs for 15 minutes during the Sunday service. Has been fun and has involved me painting many posters which I have enjoyed. I have also enlisted the help of my father and he has spent many hours painting posters. This has helped to alleviate the loneliness that he feels living without my mom.

Alan and I are very excited to announce that we are expecting another baby in June 2001. Robert will be 20 months old. We planned to have our children close and it is looking promising. When we bought our house we didn't think we were in the running for being parents so we bought a three bedroomed house with the idea that one of the bedrooms would be the study. Now that a second bundle is on the way we have had to put on our thinking caps. We don't want to move or have the hassle of building. The current thinking is to buy a large ZoZo hut to put at the bottom of the garden to use as a study. We would jazz it up with air con and make it cosy.

I joined Weight Watchers in March of this year. I had picked up a lot of weight before I fell pregnant with Robert and then put on a whopping amount when I was pregnant. I have lost 32kg in total and so far into this pregnancy have not put on any weight at 10 weeks. (My gynae is happy about this).

In September our Labrador was diagnosed as having multiple malignant tumours. We decided against treatment and will enjoy her while she is still happy and painfree. Then when the time comes we will have to say goodbye and let the vet put her down. We are sad as she has been a wonderful companion over the past 11 years. Budgie, our cat, is still going strong and has been very tolerant of Robert. Robert is a great tease and when one hears him laughing gleefully an good bet would be that he is teasing Budgie or Floss (our miniture maltese poodle).

(Alan, 18 December)

Ok, Ok, Ok, so I like the Just-in-time approach :-)) I know it took me almost three weeks, but there is the marking, you know. Ok, I know that finished two weeks ago, but I'm an Engineer, after all, and we love deadlines. . .

On the 13th December, we finally took the decision with Hopeful, and she died very peacefully indeed in my arms. We have a great sense of relief that it is now over, and that the right decision was made. We are now in the puppy hunting stage, and are thinking of a Boxer-type thing. We shall see.

This year has seen a tremendous amount of change in the running of the Clark Household!!! It is amazing what a child goes through in his first year of life! It is hard to remember how I first bathed him, with that fancy grip they teach you in antenatal. My hands can't even fit round his thighs now!

Watching him figure something out fascinates me. Every now and then, when the "next" learning stage hits, you almost see the smoke coming out of his ears as synapse after synapse fires up. He then gets impossibly Chuffed with himself, or has a tantrum, sitting (hard) on the floor, pushing himself backwards with his legs, screaming like a banshee. It is so hard not to laugh!

What amazes me is that the entire focus of the household is perforce, Robert. Everything revolves around his sleep patterns, eating patterns, *alles*; its amazing. Just what we are going to do when Number Two arrives, I don't know. We have had the scan-type-thing, and have dutifully seen two hands, complete with fingers, two legs, beating heart etc. It is a wonderful sight, and just brings the Great Design into such clear perspective! We have managed to get Number One in Les' birthday month, and Number Two in my birthday month. And I don't like the idea of the "combined" party, sigh.

On the work front, I have stopped editing Quantum, as a full-time editor was required, but am still doing a fair amount of private work to keep the wolf from the door. Its also amazing how one little 11kg bundle can attract the wolf closer, however :-)) Robert seems to have very little respect for R2 nappies. At Wits, transformation continues apace, with our Department now being called the "School of Electrical and Information Engineering", and the faculty being called the "Faculty of Engineering and the Built Environment" In the old days, that was Architecture! Talk about a mouthful!

We managed to get away several times during the year, Robert notwithstanding. We "popped" into East London to see our friends, stopping over at the rather run-down spa, camping with Robert. Great fun. On the way back, though we stopped at Hogs' Back, and it poured with rain. Not so much fun. Later, we went for a weekend to Mountain Sanctuary Park, where we did the Chalet thing. Very nice. Robert was just getting into his Jolly Jumper at the time. In September we did the South Coast, camping at Pennington, that was truly lekker. In November we had our last Accolades weekend at the Drakensburg Sun, which was a disaster. (Accolades is now dead, and has been replaced by Voyager, which we don't need!) It rained all the time, and what with Robert being VERY mobile, the Dining Room approach didn't really work well. We are campers, after all! The steep banks of the place also had various parental hearts misfiring.

It's also amazing what you can get used to. Like being trashed. I am typing this in a pair of nectarine flavoured shorts, courtesy of the boy's breakfast. I have also just been entertained by a gentleman with a gun, courtesy of the boy's morning playtime with the car keys (and panic button). It is not often that I go to work without some residue somewhere. ProNutro being the latest flavour of the day. As he insists on feeding himself now, meals are definitely outside, and the dogs score bigtime.

I am enjoying the Blessing that is my son, and this time next year, I shall be telling you all about Number Two. Frightening!

God Bless—Alan, Lesley, Robert, and Number Two.