

Dear Friends

(Alan, 10 December)

Having looked at last year's newsletter, 1) I actually managed to produce this one 8 days earlier than last year, and 2) its frightening what a difference a year can make!!!!

The primary feature of the year, was, of course, the birth of Kathleen Brenda on my 37<sup>th</sup> birthday, the 18<sup>th</sup> June 2001. Kathleen was my mother's name, and Brenda Les' mother's name. It has been said that you are not a "real" parent until you have had more than one child. JaNee, understatement of the century. It now takes three-quarter's of an hour to leave the house. The alarm buttons are wearing thin—we'll have to change the code soon or it'll be obvious to any burglar! The alarm is set and unset at least four times for any given home-leaving.

There is a biological mechanism which is in synchronism with the beeping associated with setting of the alarm: I call it the "Butternut Soup Syndrome". In addition to this delightful (and continuous task, at R2 a nappy), we have the "more juice" syndrome from number one. Further, there is the "everything but" syndrome: Pram, nappy bag (x2), car chair, junior (probably wailing (x2) appropriately), handbag, cell-phone, *but* no: car key; house key; dummy; duck; whatever. . .

Rest assured that the logistical complications brought about by another sibling is not a simple doubling!!! Try having a 6-month old, exercising her lungs wanting her carrot moosh \*\*\*NOW\*\*\*, and a 26-month old standing in front of my computer in full, heart-broken cry (remember the terrible-two's :-), because the screen saver kicked in over the graphics of a Scott Joplin midi playback which he was watching with my headphones on his ears. Sigh. . .

At six months, Kathleen is really coming into her own as a quite assertive, but very responsive bundle of cuteness. She is increasingly frustrated at not being able to do things (yet), and has started really enjoying the Jolly Jumper, and continues to use the "Bumbo": a soft plastic thingy which allows her to sit, but still holds her quite firmly etc. Gone are the days where our King-sized, extra-length bed is sufficient—she is doing the "swimming", highly mobile thing prior to the crawling phase.

Robert's nose is not entirely out-of-joint, but there have been moments. . . He is progressing very nicely on the potty-training front, and any parent should know what *that* means!!! Everywhere. He is able to make himself understood on many fronts, and is also increasingly assertive. Since he has been at "play-school" one morning a week, one of the favorite sayings is "My Turn" for anything going.

The flies have been rather problematic at the Clark household this year with all the rain etc, and the fly-swatters were duly excavated from their winter hiding places, much to the delight of Robert, who now swats anything that moves. The other morning we were sitting on the back stoep, and I swatted (accurately, of course) a fly which he had seen. He had such an injured look on his face, and of course: "Daddy, my turn!!!" was stated 7 892 times, followed by the command "More fly" (Actually, "mo fy, daddy"). The gift of the "interpretation of tongues" has a lot more meaning for me now :-). Madam is rather narked that "daddy" is articulated perfectly, but "mommy" is rendered "monneu". Unfortunately, "dummy" is rendered identically: "monneu"; although "duck" is perfect.

Robert has a fascination for water, especially the hose-pipe. The cry of "aughtah" sends a chill down my municipal bill. Probably, the inheritance of my tongue-tie rather inhibits the production of consonants. A particular lack, at present, is the ability to pronounce "tr". In combination with the predilection of (healthily) pronouncing "f" for anything that he seems not to be able to pronounce, the weekly arrival of the Monday-morning rubbish truck is not a pious assembly.

I am taking such a delight in my two kids: children are truly a "Blessing from God". Les & I attended a toddler-parenting course with Andrew George which was really a cementing experience! This job is scary, but very rewarding. It is hard to deal with Robert pushing the edge (constantly), whilst Kathleen is doing a lung impression, and

maintain a Godly Discipline focus. Its sooo much easier to lash out, to control, than to train.

Robert has discovered the pool. We have a 3m diameter 0.9m high lattice plastic el-cheapo job, that Before Robert (BR) we used constantly. Now that it has a Robert-proof netting, its a bit more painful. The rain hasn't helped. We had a number of glorious days, and Robert was introduced, not confidently, but he held onto the side. . . Naturally, taking after me (as a kid, not now!) he is a bit skinny, and tooth-chattering occurred. But \*\*\*NO WAY\*\*\* would he get out!!!!

As a family, we appear to have contracted a horrible, contagious, disease, and within a month of each other, both sets of neighbours moved on. Then, only seven months after that, one of our new neighbours moved on yet *again*. We really must be ill!! One problem with Kensington is that properties are 67m long, but 15m wide. ie we live pretty much on top of each other, so noisy neighbours can be a major problem! We miss Guido and Lina, our old Italian neighbours, with whom we were always sharing pasta, vino, vegetable seedlings and harvestings etc.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> December 2000, we acquired a genuine, probably thoroughbred Boxer from the SPCA, as threatened in the last newsletter, to replace Hopeful. We thought that we could not wait till after Kathleen was born, as this would deprive Robert of valuable companionship etc. We were right, but my goodness. . . Having a toddler, an infant and a bloody naughty puppy in one house, simulustaneously, and at the same time, *jislaaik*. Her official name is Frown, called Ruff for short. Ruff is particularly good at sprinkler systems. Nothing I do can keep this bloody dog from chewing (repeatedly) every bit of plastic pipe I put down, not with all the ingenuity I can muster!!!!!!!

But the objective has been met. Robert and Ruff are inseparable: they play, tease, hurt, play again with each other for hours. At great expense (R1 500) I bought a 12 foot diameter trampoline; and, assembled without the leg extensions, Robert can easily climb on, and he spends hours jumping on the thing. Ever seen a Boxer jump? Trust me.

I have been forcibly removed from my study, now known as Robert's room; Kathleen has moved into what was Robert's room, and I have moved into what was the Sun room (conservatory in British-speak, otherwise known as the Stoep). In a mere 1.5m I have my studios existence. Since the closed-in Stoep was originally (1930) open, the red stoep floor is inclined, so as to drain the rain it collects. My right bum is now adopting a permanent list to starboard. We abandoned the idea of me moving out of the house, however, as I do much of my work at night (eg it is now 23h50, although this isn't "work" :-)

We haven't been able to get away, naturally, but I have promised myself a 3-week "at-home" break coming up shortly. I need it!!! Not even private work (real money) will get in. In addition, in late Jan, we plan to go to the Pilanesberg which will delight Robert. This will be our first attempt at a camping holiday as a foursome. Our last camping was when Robert was crawling, but not walking. I'm thinking of a fishing rod. . .

From Lesley. . . I have just read my contribution to last year's letter and not much has changed. I am thoroughly enjoying parenting but am very grateful to have a supportive husband. My life is very hectic and am looking forward to some changes in the new year. I am planning to get involved in our ladies church group as I am wanting to re-integrate into church life. We will probably be hosting a home group which will help us to start functioning in Kingsgate again.

I have spent the last ten days at home with the kids instead of rushing around to do different activities and have enjoyed being able to catch up with mundane things such as cleaning my shoes. As a nation I think we become caught up in business and lose the ability to enjoy and be content with a slower pace of life. I have certainly noticed that both Robert and Kathleen have been a lot less stressed since I have been spending more time in the "Left Hand Lane"

Much love Cheers Lesley