



# Mum's the Word

Autumn 2010





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## (Acting) President's Letter

In my official (in)capacity as acting President, it is my job to write the President's letter for the Autumn Newsletter. Did I really sign up for all of this?!!! I know as Vice-President there is always the possibility of having to step into the President's shoes, but I thought that would entail chairing a meeting or two. Got to say though, I am having a ball! So the question is, will I be willing to relinquish power once our Dear President returns from a well-deserved maternity break? Will I cling desperately on and attempt some half-baked Christmas coup d'état? Well, no. My real skill as Vice-President lies in manoeuvring from the sidelines, influencing from behind the scenes, gently cajoling through the comfort of cyber space, and certainly not taking centre stage at the AGM dinner! So a hearty congratulations to Steph on the birth of her little boy, Dan Murdoch Escalas. But Steph, please come back soon. We need your passion and pizzazz. And there is toy cleaning to be done!!

And when there is talk of toy cleaning, we know that Christmas is truly on its way. Preparations have already begun for the annual TWIG English Christmas Fayre, and we need everyone's help to make it a massive success: donating toys, toy cleaning, setting up the stall, (wo)manning the stall on the day, keeping your Vice-President topped up with mulled wine... I will be coming round the hall over the following weeks to sign you up for a slot on the stall, so please don't hesitate to join in the fun. It really is a great laugh. Only French required – "Un verre de vin chaud, s'il vous plaît".

So, members new and old, welcome to another year of Mums and Tots fun and frolics. I know it's going to be a good one.

Karen Holland (Acting President)

*Winter is an etching, spring a watercolour, summer an oil painting  
and autumn a mosaic of them all.*

~Stanley Horowitz





## What's What at Mums & Tots?

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*Though Christmas is not yet "just around the corner", the preparations for our stall at the Christmas fair are. See below for a Toy Cleaning Session near you in October and November and how you can help us raise money for charity (and clear out your toy cupboards at the same time!).*

### **TOULOUSE WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL GROUP (TWIG)**

#### **CHRISTMAS FAIR 2010**

**Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> November, Espace Boris Vian, La Salvetat St Gilles 10am – 6pm**

Every year Mums and Tots has a stall at the TWIG Christmas Fair. This stall sells clean and usable baby and children's items such as toys, books and baby equipment. We need volunteers to help clean and wrap the toys in the weeks running up to the fair PLUS some of you lovely ladies to help us sell on the day to ensure that we raise lots of cash! This stall is one of the main sources of income at Mums and Tots and its success is what helps keep our membership fees so low since the proceeds normally cover our insurance costs. We really count on everybody to get involved with collecting and donating toys, cleaning and packaging them and (wo)manning the stall on the day. So, this is prime time to sort through all your children's toys before Father Christmas makes his next delivery chez vous – bring along anything you are no longer using (Penny and Karen will be collecting toys at all the Mums and Tots meetings). Please also ask your neighbours, halte-garderie, crèche, school etc. for any donations. There will be posters available at the hall for people to take away and put up asking for toy donations and if anyone has trouble getting stuff delivered to us, Karen is happy to come and collect it in her car.

Toy cleaning dates will be held throughout October and November at members' houses. Please contact the hostess for directions if you are able to come along:-

<b>Wed 13<sup>th</sup> October 9.30 – 11.30am</b> <a href="mailto:mysteadlee@yahoo.co.uk">mysteadlee@yahoo.co.uk</a>	<b>Yvonne's, Leguevin</b>
<b>Thurs 21<sup>st</sup> October 9.30 – 11.30am</b> <a href="mailto:frontlinesen@yahoo.co.uk">frontlinesen@yahoo.co.uk</a>	<b>Jennie's, Toulouse</b>
<b>Wed 10<sup>th</sup> Nov 9.30 – 11.30 am</b> <a href="mailto:mysteadlee@yahoo.co.uk">mysteadlee@yahoo.co.uk</a>	<b>Yvonne's, Leguevin</b>
<b>Thurs 19<sup>th</sup> November 2 – 5pm</b> <a href="mailto:dnpdickinson@orange.fr">dnpdickinson@orange.fr</a>	<b>Penny's, Marestaing</b>
<b>Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> November 10 am – 12 pm</b> <a href="mailto:frontlinesen@yahoo.co.uk">frontlinesen@yahoo.co.uk</a>	<b>Jennie's, Toulouse</b>
<b>Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> November 9.30 – 11.30 am</b> <a href="mailto:mysteadlee@yahoo.co.uk">mysteadlee@yahoo.co.uk</a>	<b>Yvonne's, Leguevin</b>

*On Friday 26th November from 2pm we will be taking the toys from Jennie and Yvonne's houses to Espace Boris Vian and will be needing volunteers to ferry the toys and help set up the stall.*

For helping out on the day, no French is necessary, just a sense of humour and some money for mulled wine! We only ask you to do an hour slot so hubby can take the kids to see the Big Man in red and buy you something nice for Christmas whilst you're there.

If you can help with cleaning / womanning the stall or have toys to donate please contact Karen at [antler31@hotmail.com](mailto:antler31@hotmail.com) or phone 05 34 51 28 66.

All proceeds are shared between Mums & Tots and the TWIG designated charities.

### TALKING OF CHARITIES...

...if you've ever wondered what happens to the Clothes Swap / Book Swap money read on. Thanks to our members fundraising efforts from Sept '09- June '10, Mums and Tots was able to donate 1000 euros to our designated charity, Association Dominique. As well as our swaps at the hall, we also joined in a Fun Run in April and organised a Bingo Night in June. Jacqueline Delpech, founder of Association Dominique, thanks everyone from Mums and Tots for their hard work and kindness. And we're off to a brilliant start this school year - thanks to a massive turnout on 1st October at the hall, the Clothes Swap raised a huge 83 euros! Watch this space for the next Book Swap...

*Karen Holland*



*"Caller Kazz" does the honours at Association Dominique...*

## SUMMER MEETS RECAP

Now that there's a definite chill in the air and we are starting to "kick our way through autumn's golden gown" (anyone remember Jeff Wayne's *War of the Worlds*?) the long lazy days of summer seem quite far behind us.

A big thank you though to all who hosted our many and varied summer meets, providing us with some great outings and get-togethers.

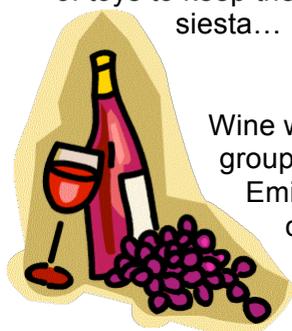
Our little splashers also raised a whopping total of 188.80€ (three eights, incidentally, being a very auspicious number in Japan!) at the Splashathon, and they (and we!) even got to race on an inflatable crocodile around Emma's lovely pool before collecting splashing stars and balloons.



*Every season hath its pleasures;  
Spring may boast her flowery prime,  
Yet the vineyard's ruby treasures  
Brighten Autumn's sob'rer time.*

**Thomas Moore**

Indeed, wine proved a winning way to celebrate "la rentrée". At Château La Crabière, courtesy of member and *viticultrice* Sarah Cameron and her husband Angus, we enjoyed a tour of the vineyard and winery and indulged in a tasting session or two. The kids were treated to a cork treasure hunt, bouncy castle and a host of toys to keep them occupied during the parents' post-prandial siesta...

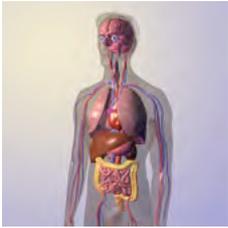


Wine was also the watchword for the Toulouse local group at their very civilised (i.e. child-free) Cheese & Wine evening - thank you Emily for the lovely venue! - complete with celery, grapes and real Jacob's crackers. A cracking soirée!

*Sue Schneider*



## ENGLISH KIDS' CLUB UPDATE



### September



We have had two great Kids' Club sessions since the children went back to school. The first was "all about me". The children started by drawing themselves feeling happy or sad, teaching them to think about mood and how it is represented. Then the group was split up to take turns doing activities based around the body or find out about the fabulous new Kids' Club Library that Penny has set up. Highlights of the morning included drawing round each other's body as they took turns to lie on a huge piece of paper and getting their very own library card and bookmark in the library corner!



### October



October's Kids' Club session dealt with force – pushing/pulling, floating/sinking and the power of magnets. The kids had great fun testing out objects that would sink or float (luckily it was a warm, sunny day so we could do this outside!), learning about magnetic force and then pushing and pulling their favourite toys outside in the garden. The library was as popular as ever and Jackie Alcock provided a delicious healthy snack!

*Emily Button*

**You've had one of those days, the kids have been whinging all week and you feel like you haven't had a proper conversation with your partner for at least a fortnight. As you heat baked beans and butter burnt toast, "Peppa Pig" blares in the background and you catch yourself, once again, dreaming of escaping to a hotel for a night or two, with no routine to follow, no alarm clock (yeah right, as if you've needed one of those since you become a parent!) and, most importantly, without the kids.**

**Well, our dearest VP did it and this is what she had to say...**



## **Two's Company**

Sitting in the passenger seat of the car, I was driven away from my three children - Nell (4 years old), Martha and Joe (twins of 22 months). Husband at the helm, I wiped back a tear as my mum and dad held the three of them up at the window to wave goodbye. Their little faces haunted me all the way up the street. "Why mummy?" they seemed to say. But then we reached the end of the road. We turned the corner and they were no longer in view. And miracle of miracles, the guilt and sadness subsided! Our annual two-day break had begun.

It is astonishing how much talking you can get done in two days. And laughing. And eating. We even had time for a game of chess or two. More laughing, this time at my rubbish chess moves. A walk to the top of Mam Tor. A picnic in the rain. A read of the daily paper. A hilarious tongue in cheek article that had me guffawing about how UK schools shouldn't be sending home letters to parents about potentially obese children but potentially boring ones. Brilliant. Time to talk, to read, to be two.

So in brief, the annual two-day break was short, but oh so sweet. I can heartily recommend the Losehill Spa Hotel in Hope. Nothing was missing from our little jaunt into Derbyshire. Except maybe the sunshine. But this is England after all. And did I think about the children? Of course; they were quite a main topic of conversation at times. And anyway, the hotel had thought of everything, you know, just in case we were missing our three little ones. Who had they seated right next to us at breakfast? A family of five - mum, dad, 4 year old boy and 22 month old twins! Sometimes, there is just no escape. Two was definitely wonderful company. But three screaming kids at breakfast? Time to read my Independent in the lobby.

*Karen Holland*

Right, back to reality with something for the Mums' eyes only (sorry Dads!) Be warned – this could change your life (or at least 5 days out of every month)!



## The Mooncup Revolution!

When my right-on, eco-warrior yet hip & trendy Australian friend told me she was using a moon cup a few years ago, I had no idea what she was talking about. She proceeded to tell me about a little silicon 'cup' which she used during her period instead of tampons or sanitary towels. My first reaction was one of absolute horror: a re-usable menstrual product? I think not.... We had a giggle about it and I put it to the back of my mind.

After I had my second child I suffered from thrush twice in a couple of months and was fed up with the discomfort. My friend piped up once again about the moon cup saying that one of the benefits is that you're less likely to suffer from thrush. At that point I was prepared to try anything and the thought of using a silicon cup seemed a marginally better option than smearing natural yoghurt on my nether regions every other week or so.

I trekked off to Boots on a trip back home and bought my moon cup. The first thing you should know is that there are 2 different sizes of moon cup. There's a "you're young and your muscles down below are still working very nicely thank you" size or an "oh dear, poor you, have had a baby or two and everything's a bit baggier down below" size. Depressing when you have to go for the second option but needs must. I got it home and was ready to put it to use a couple of days later. The second thing you need to know about the moon cup is that you have to cut it to size! That bit is slightly hit and miss but once again I knuckled down to the task and sorted it out with no major trauma. You basically have to insert the moon cup and feel where you need to cut the thin "stalk-like" bit at the end so that none of the end part is sitting outside your body – very uncomfortable if you don't get this bit right!

The instructions are very clear about how to insert the cup. I am now a deft hand at the "folding it into quarters" method and away you go. The first couple of periods I had using the moon cup took a bit of getting used to. I didn't get the position totally right so there was a bit of leakage (far too much information, I hear you cry!) but I was determined to persevere. I honestly haven't looked back since: no more tampons to buy, no more thrush, no more pollution through menstrual product disposal...

To remove the moon cup you need to pull down on the stalky bit and the suction releases so that you can pull it out. The gory facts are that, yes, you can end up with a bit of blood on your fingers but at the end of the day it's your blood and you wouldn't be horrified if you got a graze on your knee and some blood went on your fingers, would you? So what's the difference here? It's definitely a mind over matter thing! The down side is that when you're using it out and about in public toilets and there's no sink to rinse it in, it can be quite tricky at first. I now have this down to a tee (especially at work!) and just tip the contents in the toilet and wipe the moon cup round with some toilet paper before putting it back in place.

To look after your moon cup they suggest you sterilize it by boiling it up (I have a moon cup saucepan!) for 10 minutes before and after your cycle each month. It really couldn't be any easier!

You can use your moon cup in the swimming pool too – I tried it, it works.

It is truly a liberation to walk down the sanitary products aisle at the supermarket and think that you won't have to buy all that stuff ever again (a moon cup lasts for years...)

So save the planet, avoid chemical nastiness from usual sanitary products and save money too!

*Jess Jean*

### **Some more information on the Moon cup:**

#### **PRODUCT INFORMATION:**

- ☐ Made from 100% medical grade silicone
- ☐ Can be used by all women
- ☐ Can be used before in conjunction with an IUD (coil) or contraceptive diaphragm
- ☐ Holds up to almost three times the fluid that an average tampon or sanitary pad can
- ☐ Comfortable as it is made from soft flexible silicone rubber
- ☐ Convenient to carry in your bag, nothing to throw away or to run out of
- ☐ Ideal for an active lifestyle and for active sports such as running, gym, yoga and swimming
- ☐ Bio-compatible i.e. not harmful to living tissue
- ☐ Easy to clean as the lining is totally smooth and the tab is flat
- ☐ Not tested on animals

#### **YOUR HEALTH:**

- ☐ Hypoallergenic, antibacterial, latex free and odourless; suitable for women with sensitive skin, thrush, eczema and allergies (including latex allergies)
- ☐ Fragrances used in some tampons can cause irritation, allergic reactions and may upset the vagina's natural microbial balance
- ☐ Many tampons are not inert; chemicals such as pesticides are used to produce the cotton, deodorants, absorbency enhancers, and chlorine compounds used in bleaching processes
- ☐ Dioxin, a carcinogen, may be formed in the bleaching process itself
- ☐ Fibre loss and damage done to vaginal tissue by fibres are also concerns, like 'Rayon' a manufactured fibre consisting of tiny strands of plastic and often used in tampons. Some speculate that the rayon strands can cause micro tears of the vaginal wall when a tampon is inserted or removed, leaving the vagina more susceptible to infection
- ☐ Tampons are individually wrapped to keep them clean but are not sterile
- ☐ Tampon companies are not required by any law to list their ingredients
- ☐ Tampons and pads can cause an increased risk of bacterial infection
- ☐ Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS) is associated with the high absorbency of tampons and with their prolonged use
- ☐ Tampons absorb more than 25% of natural and necessary vaginal secretions
- ☐ Vaginal dryness, peeling of the mucous membrane, ulcers and lesions are caused by the absorption of vaginal secretions and the use of absorbency enhancers

- Pads cause a form of skin reaction called contact dermatitis
- Moon cups collect menstrual fluid, rather than absorbing it, leaving all moisture levels undisturbed and allows the body's processes to function naturally

#### **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT:**

- The manufacturing of tampons is harmful to the environment; bleach and other environmentally damaging chemicals are often employed in tampon production, and important ecological resources, particularly trees, are sacrificed for the wood pulp from which tampons are largely produced
- Average woman menstruates for 39 years, approximately 500 cycles in a lifetime
- Average (very conservative) of 20 pads/tampons per cycle
- Average of 260 pads/ tampons per year
- Average of 10 140 pads/tampons in a lifetime
- This does not include the packaging: packets/boxes, individual wrapping, applicators, sticky strips
- In the UK alone, 4.3 billion disposable sanitary products are used every year: in the UK, each menstruating woman uses between 286 and 358 towels or tampons per year, 98% of which are flushed down the toilet. Fifty-two per cent of these are released untreated into the sea where tampons require 6 months to biodegrade, sanitary towels need longer. The plastic liners on sanitary towels will not biodegrade and remain as a pollutant.

#### **How to buy a Moon cup**

Either go to Boots in the UK and they are around £21 or you can buy on-line at the moon cup website below. They cost £19.99 + £5.95 postage to France:

<http://www.mooncup.co.uk/>

There are also some stockists in Toulouse:

#### **Biocoop Biopurpan**

301, avenue de Grande Bretagne  
31300 Toulouse

#### **Biocoop Grandeur Nature**

21 Av des Ecoles Jules Julien  
31400 Toulouse

#### **Un Petit Univert**

70, rue de la Colombette  
31000 Toulouse  
**Tel: 05 61 57 26 56**

**Many of us have already experienced the arrival of a second child while many more are preparing for it. Here Naomi takes a step back and candidly shares with us her experience, thoughts and emotions following the arrival of her second son, Oscar.**

### **The inevitable shift: when a second child is born**

I love my two sons so much it can make me weep. Pregnant with my second however, I feared the change in my family dynamic and above all the difference it would make to the relationship I had with my eldest son. I honestly thought I could never love another child as much as I do Arthur. Nature dictates that I dote on him. Like most mothers, I know what he is feeling just by watching him across a room, I know what situations make him unhappy and which ones will inspire confidence. Our daily life as two (“our” as I felt we were fused in some way, something I see now as slightly suffocating for him perhaps) was easy and so enjoyable: I had one child to watch, one child to love and yet there was something brewing that felt like a pending threat. I resented my second son for his imminent arrival and in turn I resented myself for these feelings that I could not air. Now such thoughts are ludicrous. I can not imagine life without Oscar. When I pass him as he sleeps I check instinctively that he is still breathing. He is as much a part of me as Arthur ever was and I feel our family is complete.

The first time Arthur met Oscar was in the clinic: he ran towards him grinning, a present in his hands, shouting “Occer Occer”! He is still as affectionate now as he was then towards him but to start with, with me it was a different story. This I had expected to some extent but it nonetheless hurt enormously and I really *missed* Arthur. Visits over, I was alone with my “new baby” longing to go home too, to read stories to Arthur, to take him to the park, to the ludothèque...I wanted simply to resume “normal life”. Oscar felt so tiny and new. It was all so challenging and I felt mournful for what had been so *usual* to me.

Once home, I felt as if my loyalties were divided. I took Arthur out alone to try and bridge the gap I felt had formed between us but I realized quickly that Arthur had already adapted. It was *me* that was being nostalgic, me the one in denial of change! I had another son at home that I needed to look after and I found myself in the supermarket longing suddenly to go home! I could literally feel the pull to depart yet oddly Arthur was *with* me. This was what having *two* meant! Over time, I learned to breastfeed Oscar whilst reading to Arthur and I left Oscar with his father whilst I continued to be the one that bathed Arthur. Things then shifted once more. I felt guilty as I was not prepared to let Oscar howl for me and I longed for Arthur's bath time to end so that I could hold his brother once more in my arms. For a short while I felt almost apathetic towards Arthur as I had done a little with Oscar at the start. Much of this I see now can also be attributed to a little post-natal depression as very suddenly one month later, I woke up one day feeling really happy and above all calm for the first time since the birth.

Arthur I see now reaps the benefit of my division as a mother. I no longer run instinctively to his side when he is suddenly surrounded by a group of boisterous five year olds in the park. I force myself to stand and watch him. I see his face light up and hear peals of laughter as he tries to join in their game, running in circles after them and stumbling like a happy drunk. His fragility at two makes my heart bleed but I see with pride the confident child he is becoming. Sometimes at 4am when I am woken yet again by Oscar I look at him and I feel an incredible surge of love; the very same surge that I feel with Arthur and which I once believed would be uniquely and always reserved for my eldest.

Our existence is settling into a new pattern and I love the picture that is forming. There *is* a certain “magic” in one, a sense of novelty and excitement, but when I look at a photograph of

Arthur and Oscar I am so excited about watching them grow as two very different individuals. I find it amazing to love *two* so profoundly having never thought it possible and when I see families now, I see proof of such “shifts” that very few people speak of. Human life is such an amalgamation of so many complex emotions and decisions that it makes one stop and wonder when one sees another mother in the street with more than one child in tow. Perhaps she once felt as I did...

*Naomi Rivière*

The following article needs no introduction and, as you’ll see, I am not an innocent party in the affair. In my defence, I would just like to say that, desperate for content, I was acting solely in the interests of our readers!



### **Brian’s Unseasonal Gardening Tips**

Well, I must say it’s been a fair while since I was so single-mindedly pursued by women in the plural, mithering me for “mouth-watering” (E.) “top tips” (K.). At one stage, women in unison even set to cheese ‘n’ wining that a “short something about growing stuff” would be “a breath of fresh air in amongst all those potty-training, weaning etc. articles” (K.+ E. et al.)

Well, I don’t think I’d be too chuffed if I were all you noughty, modern women out there, who almost by definition now know where you’re at, to hear that kind of thing. Surely you don’t need me, Middle-aged Modern Man who, almost by definition, no longer has a clue where his at be at, or even if he ever had one, feeding you the wherefore on the fat of the land. So what’s with all the hassle-mail and Fronton-fuelled enthusiasm, then? Call me paranoid, but I was at ManPoly during the eighties, and if I’d so much as hinted that the token woman at, say, a fresher’s real-ale meet, write an article about how to use a washing machine (remember the ads?), chances are that within minutes I would have found myself tarred, feathered and falsetto in front of the Winnie Mandela Students’ Union building.

It’s got to be a trap, come on, it’s some kind of test, admit it. How else can you explain that such a progressive collective as Mums and Tots, initiated and organised almost exclusively by educated women for women, still surely subject to the occasional headache from hammering through the glass ceiling, would attempt to get the token man to pen an article on gardening for the next newsletter.

Nice try girls, but I’m not falling for it this time, all the more so as I seem to recall the qualifier ‘seasonal’ being added to the syntagma ‘garden tips’ at one point, seemingly suggesting some kind of repeat performance potential with every issue, now do I look that...

Well, if the truth be told, I know very little about it. I can recommend a good book – “Le guide du jardin bio”, published by Terre Vivante, but it’s in French. I can tell you that Lily likes chards (“blettes” or “bettes” in French), which are like a poor man’s (sorry person’s, oops!) spinach but nicer, mixed in with butternut squash, both no-brainers to sow and grow summer-cum-winter. But my best Top Tip for all you pursuers (although stalkers might be a more appropriate epithet, given the subject-matter) of the pain and pesticide free veggie patch, comes, more fittingly perhaps, from my better-half, Flo: Get your Ol’ Man to do it for you!!!

*Brian Steer*

**Brian, that was great...Can we have another for the Winter issue?!!!**

**Right, well summer is well and truly over and it’ll be another year before we can see our little ones splashing around in the paddling pool in the back garden or down at the local outdoor pool. But that doesn’t mean swimming is over until next summer. We asked qualified swimming instructor Helen Saks for a few tips on helping children to gain confidence in the water. So don’t put your costumes away just yet... pop down to the local indoor pool and keep that love of water going over the winter months.**



***Get the lil’ fish swimmin’***

For some of us swimming comes as naturally as well, eating, drinking, breathing. I can’t imagine what it would feel like not to be able to swim... But actually this is quite a luxury.

Along with the almighty weight of parental responsibility, comes the requirement to make your children safe in the water. A childhood fear could result in a lifelong phobia, so whatever you can do to encourage your kids’ love of water, you should. It is, after all, a life skill, rather than just a sport.

I trained as a swimming teacher in the UK about six years ago as a lifestyle choice (“one day I will get out of the rat race”) but also to pass on my own personal passion. A self declared little fish from a young age, swimming was quite simply “my thing”. I was good at it, I loved it and I spent a huge amount of my “yoof” at the pool, at galas, doing laps.

So, following a request to pass on some words of wisdom, it is quite simple really:

1) Swim, swim, swim. Make it a family activity all year round. Practice makes perfect, or more importantly, confidence and competence.

2) Get the kit. Go to Decathlon and get armbands, floats, toys, stuff to play with in the pool. Make sure your child feels supported and safe in the water and understands the importance of their flotation kit. Noodles are fantastic for a million different water activities - use them for support on the front, on the back, ride it like a horse. Encourage

reaching forward (fingers together) “for your favourite toy” and get those legs kicking (straight legs, floppy ankles, pointy toes).

- 3) Encourage faces in the water, bubble blowing, submersion, jumping off the side.
- 4) Make shapes in the water - mushroom, star and pencil floats, roll from front to back, tread water (can they do it with their hands in the air?) Encourage a feeling of being comfortable in the water.
- 5) Always be on hand to offer support, but try to let your child be independent in the water.
- 6) Get lessons. Kids have an instinct to cling to Mum and Dad in the pool. With somebody removed from the family they will take instruction differently, with the goal of being able to show off to Mum and Dad afterwards!

*Helen Saks - Swim Skills*

**And for those of us who prefer staying on dry land, trapeze artist Susie Sureda tells us how learning circus skills helps children develop both physically and mentally:**



## **Circus Activities:**

### **A fun way to learn new skills!**

When most people think of the circus, skill-building and exercise don't immediately come to mind. But the Big Top is not only for spectators! Circus work helps children to become more aware and in control of their own bodies, gestures, senses and emotions, and to learn to adapt to different rhythms and equipment.

With its natural emphasis on social skills and interpersonal relationships, it serves to boost self-confidence, imagination and the unique personality of each child, while at the same time teaching them vital life skills such as risk evaluation, perseverance, self-expression and mutual respect.



*Susie Sureda*

You may have always dreamed of working from home. Read on to find out what it's really like...



## Working from Home... or The Art of Juggling

The reaction of most people when I tell them I work from home is, "Oooh, aren't you lucky!" And I am. Most of the time. I love being my own boss. I love being flexible so that I can be there for my children when they need me. I love the independence and responsibility it gives me (and that wonderful feeling when I invoice clients, knowing that no fat cat director or shareholder is going to get his hands on my well-earned money!)

The benefits of working from home when you have small children are huge. You can work around their needs (to a certain extent), you can do the odd household job instead of taking a coffee break so that weekends aren't crammed full of washing, cleaning and shopping chores and, most importantly of all, you have no-one to answer to if you have to nip off early to fetch a sick child from school or nursery.

It's not all plain sailing though. Deadlines still have to be met. In my case, these are completely inflexible once they've been accepted so there are times when I have to work late at night or at weekends to catch up. Then there are the inevitable client phone calls that almost always come when the children are screaming blue murder in the background. Not very professional. And so much for my clients thinking I work full-time! The other day I said to Nelly and Matilda (4 and 2 years old respectively), as the phone rang and caller display meant I recognised a client's number (and what a godsend that particular technological breakthrough has turned out to be!), "Right girls, this is an important client for Mummy's work, please play quietly." I might as well have asked for the moon. They proceeded to make more noise than you'd think possible so I shut myself in the garden despite the rain and tried to enter into work mode. This is another of the downsides of working from home – there is no obvious cut-off between work and home life, no daily commute to get you in the right frame of mind, no slipping off your chocolate / paint-smeared jeans to put on your power suit and killer heels. And when does your working day finish? What happens if you sit down in the evening to write a chatty email to a friend and notice a work email that must have popped into your inbox during the kids' tea? Ignore it and carry on with what you were doing or say to yourself, "I'll reply now and it'll be one less thing to do in the morning before the school run"?

But actually, the biggest disadvantage of working from home, for me, is the fact that there is no social aspect in my work – no chats round the coffee machine or in the canteen queue, no possibility of talking a work problem through with a colleague and none of that being part of a team or "community". The friendliest I've got with any of my clients (none of whom I've met before – everything is done through email or by phone) is comparing notes on childcare solutions for strike days! But hey, I have Mums & Tots for friendship and chats over coffee and I actually love the peace and quiet I get on work days!

So next time someone tells me how lucky I am to work from home, I won't moan about the downsides but will answer, "Yes I am, aren't I?"

I wouldn't mind some killer heels though!

*Emily Button*

## Our Journey into the Land of the Deaf

You may have noticed my one-year-old daughter's lovely purple hearing aids. Most people don't expect to see hearing aids on a baby's ears, and she does get quite a few stares when we are out for walks or in the grocery store (what can I say, it was either purple or zebra stripes. It doesn't help that she has hardly any hair!) For us, though, they have become just another part of the daily routine: Lucia wakes up, I feed her, dress her, and put on her hearing aids. She does pull them out quite often, but big brother Noé is always quick to come running, reporting "Lucia took out her hearing aid! That's naughty!"



*Dolls can have hearing aids too!*

Once in a while, someone will spot Lucia's hearing aids and ask about them, and I will answer simply that she is deaf. Lucia was actually born with near-normal hearing and slowly lost it as the result of a virus that I caught at the very beginning of my pregnancy, or just before. To be honest, it was harder for me to explain when she was hearing impaired rather than deaf. I struggled to find the right word in French – I didn't like to call her "*malentendante*" because of the implication that she "heard badly." I find that "*sourde profonde*" rolls more easily off the tongue, at least for me. She is profoundly deaf, it's part of who she is, and she's also part of a wonderful culture that most people know very little about.

Still, sometimes people respond with pity, saying "*la pauvre*," or asking if anything can be done. I think some people are surprised when I answer that it's not really a big deal. To be honest, it's hard for me not to think that it was in some way my destiny. I first started learning sign language when I was in high school, and have done volunteer work at schools for the deaf in Wales, the US, Ecuador, and India. I seriously considered training to become a teacher of the deaf, and always thought I would one day adopt a deaf child. When I lived in Paris seven years ago I joined a sign language theatre troupe. When I was in film school I made a documentary about deaf immigrants. So of course it didn't take me long to accept Lucia's deafness, because along the way I have met so many wonderful deaf people – anthropologists, college professors, scientists, actors, authors.

At the same time, I'm shocked at how difficult it is to raise a child with special needs in France. Lucia has not been accepted into an early intervention program because there are no spots available – she is on the waiting list for September 2011, by which time the intervention could no longer really be considered "early". We found an independent speech therapist but when she asked to come to our home for our weekly sessions the Social Security administration refused, even though it only costs 2 euros extra. We would like to learn French Sign Language but the classes cost hundreds of euros. We hope Lucia will receive cochlear implants, which will allow her to learn to hear and speak, but while in the US, UK, Canada and Australia it is now standard practice to give children two implants (after all, we have two ears), in France bilateral implantation is reserved for special cases, including old people at risk of losing their "autonomy." Apparently the French government feels it's more important for an elderly person to feel independent than for a child to learn to speak; as a parent, it's difficult to accept that the care my child is receiving is not the best, but only "good enough." And as an American used to hearing my country criticised by the French, often for its lack of social services, I am disappointed and infuriated that France places such little importance on the welfare of children and adults with disabilities, and saddened to think that eventually we may have no other choice but to leave the place we

have come to consider our home, because “good enough” is simply never enough when it comes to bringing up our children.

At the same time, Toulouse has a wonderful and vibrant deaf community, including a bilingual school, an active association for deaf adults, and a sign language performance group. We go to a playgroup with deaf children and parents once a week, and I have met several wonderful deaf mothers happy to share their language and culture with us. Lucia’s deafness has already brought me into contact with many people I might never have met otherwise.

Of course, I can’t know what the future holds for Lucia, but I suppose that’s true for all our children. All I know is that my dreams for her didn’t change when I found out she was deaf. I hope she will be not only bilingual, but trilingual. I hope she will never feel that she needs or deserves anyone’s pity. And I hope she will grow up knowing that deaf people can do everything except hear (and with modern technology, some can even do that!)

*Debra Bellon*

**“Life is either a daring adventure or nothing.” – Helen Keller**



**friend (ASL)**

If you’re interested in learning more about deafness or sign language, I recommend

*Seeing Voices*, by Oliver Sacks

*Le pays des Sourds* (In the Land of the Deaf), a documentary film by Nicolas Philibert

*Sound and Fury*, a documentary film by Josh Aronson

French Sign Language resources: <http://www.monica-companys.com/>

British Sign Language: <http://www.singandsign.com/>

American Sign Language: <http://www.signingtime.com/>



## Naturopathy Insights

*After last season's EC\*, our resident naturopath practitioner and Mums & Tots member Jennie Taylor tackles another interesting acronym – BLW. Read on for everything you ever wanted to know about “Baby-Led Weaning” but were afraid to ask...*

*\* Elimination Communication*

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### Baby-Led Weaning (or The Best Thing About Sliced Bread!)

I don't know about anyone else but, for me, the worst aspect of caring for small children is not the sleepless nights or the smelly poos. It isn't even the trails of baby sick-up I invariably discover down the front of my top just after starting a consultation. No, for me, it's purely and simply spoon-feeding.

When I first started weaning my first born, Francesca, I seemed to spend the vast proportion of my precious evenings preparing an entire rainbow of ice-cubed purées, only to have my daughter ungraciously spit them out with a disgusted grimace or use them to paint the kitchen with a few deft sweeps of the hand. Lucky for me, I soon found out about Baby-Led Weaning or BLW and I think I can credit it with what little sanity I now have left!

To tell the truth, I already knew about BLW before starting to wean, having stumbled across it on the Internet. Yet, despite its excellent credentials (its leading proponent, Gill Rapley, has been a health visitor for over 20 years) it seemed so way-out, so different from what everyone else did, that I more or less dismissed it as a fad.

Until, that is, I started becoming allergic to ice-cubed purées, and suddenly it seemed like a very attractive alternative!

#### What is it?

BLW basically means giving your baby finger foods most of the time, so no purées, no mixing, no mashing, no spoon feeding. You just cook an ordinary meal for the family, leaving out the 'baddies' i.e. salt and any unnecessary sugar, and give it to litt'un in finger-shaped pieces. (Of course, some things don't come in finger shapes but believe me, babies are quite happy working out shepherd's pie for themselves!) As long as the rest of the family is eating a healthy, balanced diet, baby can have whatever you're having – pasta bolognese, steamed vegetables, salad, steak, you name it!



The only real ground rule is not to start before the age of six months. Official WHO recommendations are that no baby should be given anything other than milk for the first six months anyway (although not all health professionals seem to be aware of this fact...). Once a baby reaches six months, though, it's inborn tongue-thrust mechanism starts to disappear, showing a readiness for solids.

### How to Start

As with all weaning, I've found it's best to start with just a few foods and gradually widen the range as you go along. Vegetables and soft fruits seem to be natural 'starter foods' and ones that babies love e.g.:

- Broccoli or cauliflower 'trees' that s/he can hold by the stalks, sticks of cooked carrot, potato, sweet potato etc. With all veg, you just need to practise a little to get the cooking time right, so it's not too hard for baby to chew, but not so soft that it turns to mush in their hands.
- Sticks of nectarine, pear etc. Some people give these fruits whole but after a number of escapades chasing slippery fruit projectiles across the kitchen floor, I prefer to slice them. Bananas work well too – just peel them an inch at a time, cutting off the overhanging skin as you go.
- Thinnish slices of thoroughly-cooked meat. They'll put it in their mouth, suck on it for a while, and then expertly spit out the remains.
- Small veggie burgers or falafels.
- Slices of bread, toast or rice cake, on their own or with a range of spreads or dips.



### The Highs of BLW

#### Choking

Yes, you read me right. One of the main advantages of BLW is that it actually reduces the risk of choking. The reason for this is that your baby has learnt to suck, chew and then swallow foods, rather than just slurping them down as with purées. Young babies are protected from choking by a well-developed gag reflex, which is triggered much further forward on the tongue of a six-month-old baby than it is in an adult. So, your baby *will* gag occasionally but it's OK! Gill Radley claims this gag reflex is a key part of babies' learning to manage food safely. "When a baby has triggered this reflex a few times, by putting too much food into his mouth or pushing it too far back, he learns not to do it." Take note though – for the gag reflex to work properly the baby must be sitting upright. Also, never leave a baby to eat unattended and avoid giving them anything small and hard e.g. whole nuts or whole grapes/cherry tomatoes.

#### Development

Another advantage for your baby is that BLW is fantastic for developing hand-eye-mouth coordination, as well as the pincer grip (which they just love practising – Paolo can spend hours eating boiled rice one grain at a time!)

### Ease

The main short-term advantage (apart from avoiding all those purée shenanigans) is that you can always find your baby something to eat, wherever you are. And you don't have to choose between feeding the baby before the rest of the family eats, or spending your entire meal shuttling between his pot and your own rapidly-cooling plate. He just gets on with it by himself, and loves every minute of it!



### They love food!

In the long-term, BLW is said to make for less fussy eaters, and my two certainly seem to be eating me out of house and home already! Apart from the odd food (Paolo won't touch potatoes, with Francesca it's fish), they seem to love everything.

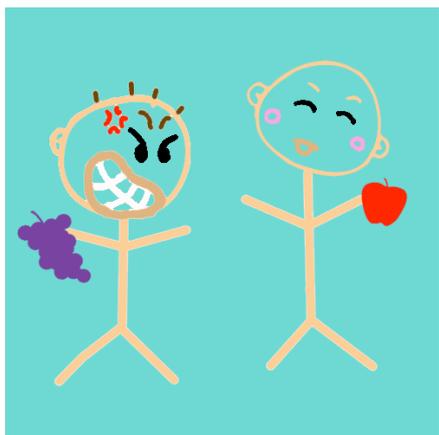
With BLW, because the baby has been able to see, taste, smell and touch each food for himself before deciding whether or not they like it, you don't get the pickiness that arises from a general distrust of food. It makes sense if you think about it. Imagine that you loved most vegetables but weren't keen on carrots. But on a regular basis you were given soup that had carrots in it. You'd just start to avoid soup, wouldn't you? Plus you'd probably think you hated all vegetables, simply because until now they'd all tasted slightly of carrot!

### Food doesn't become an issue

With BLW, food never becomes an issue or a power struggle because the baby chooses for himself what and how much to eat.

### The Lows

#### The Mess.



And OH MY GOD, is BLW messy! Hence what Gill Radley writes in her book – BLW is OK for all children but not necessarily OK for all parents. If you want to do it, you need to be relaxed about getting to the end of each meal looking as though you, your child and any surface or object within a three-metre radius looks as though it's been through a war. At least, for the first few months – it does get better, honestly!

Don't bother with a plate, by the way – baby will either try to eat it or use it as a somewhat lethal Frisbee. It's ideal to have an all-plastic high chair with a tray that has a rim around it. You can then just place the food directly onto the tray, a few pieces at a time.

### The Mother-in Law.

Needless to say, she will be convinced that you've decided to kill her precious grandchild by choking. You can deal with this in one of two ways – either explain the facts to her and then let her see the reality for herself. (If she's somewhat open-minded, like mine, the joy of seeing her 10-month-old *petit fils* happily cramming in mouthfuls of her home cooking may be all you need.)

Or, if it really starts to cause too much strife and you don't see her that often, give your baby purées when she's around.

In any case, I don't think weaning should be an all-or-nothing thing. BLW is great, but sometimes my kids are tired or in need of some extra 'mothering' and want to be fed. Even Francesca! We also eat quite a lot of soups and yoghurts in our house, which I spoon-feed to Paolo just to avoid us all getting coated in the stuff.

And maybe that should be my last bit of advice. Don't forget the all-in-one plastic aprons – for you *and* him!!



If you want to know all the ins-and-outs of BLW, there's an excellent book by Gill Rapley and Tracey Murkett called, unsurprisingly, *Baby-Led Weaning*.

There's also a blog with loads of information, recipes etc, at <http://babyledweaning.blogware.com/>

*Jennie Taylor*

*Spring passes and one remembers one's innocence. Summer passes and one remembers one's exuberance. Autumn passes and one remembers one's reverence. Winter passes and one remembers one's perseverance.*

**Yoko Ono**



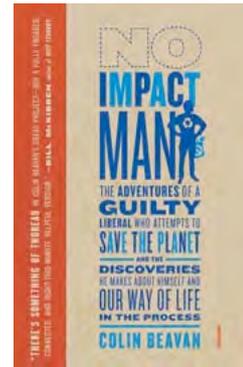


## The Book Corner



### “No Impact Man” by Colin Beavan

“No Impact Man” appealed to me instantly. I found it advertised on Amazon’s front page as the book which attempts the impossible: to live for one year without having a negative impact on the environment. It struck a chord with my own personal mission to waste less, to make as many household cleaning products as possible and to buy fewer unnecessary “things” but Colin Beavan takes this philosophy to its extreme. I am not certain, for example, that I could live without a fridge for twelve months...



The book recounts the true story of a New Yorker (Beavan) who tries to live without electricity, without buying anything new, without throwing ANYTHING away and without using any form of transport (apart from a bicycle) for one year. This also entails never taking the lift which in New York is no mean feat especially when you live with a child on the ninth floor!

Surprisingly Beavan manages his “no impact” goal (although I would call it perhaps low) impact” if one is literal) with wit and honesty. He does admit for example to giving in to a washing machine one night when his daughter was sick twice and he could not face hand washing any more sheets but he refuses to become trivial. For example we never find out what he does about loo paper and whether or not his “Prada-loving” wife decides to use a “moon cup” instead of other more conventional means of sanitary protection.

“No Impact Man” is full of true and extremely alarming figures concerning the effect of human waste worldwide which means that it is not a wholly comforting read at times but it is nonetheless funny and informative without the “preachy” aspect that such books often emit and I found myself enjoying reading it at 4am which is always a good sign! The author is quite self-deprecating and sarcastic especially as his experiments do not always work (how on earth do you find your caffeine addicted wife local coffee in the middle of New York?) It is also extremely amusing to read others’ reactions to his somewhat eccentric ideas.

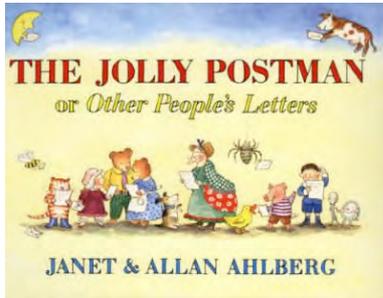
***All in all this is a very good book to read but if you get depressed about facts and figures do not have a good cry into a DISPOSABLE handkerchief! You'll only make yourself feel worse...***

Naomi Rivière



## “The Jolly Postman or Other People’s Letters” by Janet & Allan Ahlberg

This children’s book is a great favourite in our house, although it is quite long so we (that is “I”!) avoid it when we’re (ditto) longing for lights out!



Based on classic tales such as Goldilocks and the Three Bears, Little Red Riding Hood, Cinderella and Jack and the Beanstalk, this amusing book, complete with envelopes and “real” letters, is a joy to read and a real delight for young children (3-6 year olds, I would say). They never tire of taking the letters out of their envelopes and love all the fabulous little details that are true to the Ahlberg style.

*Emily Button*



## “Grosse Colère” (“Big Fat Anger”) by Mireille d’Allancé

While I generally try to read to my children in English, as I’m sure most of us do, I make exceptions for books that I find to be very well-written or entertaining. In the case of “Grosse Colère,” by Mireille d’Allancé, the story is told largely by the illustrations, so you can either translate it as you read, as I generally do, or just use the pictures as a starting point for explaining the story.

“Grosse Colère” is the story of a small boy named Robert who has had a bad day. When he comes home, his father tells him to take his shoes off, so he throws them onto the floor. When he sees that they are having spinach for dinner, he is rude to his father, who sends

him to his room to calm down.

In his room, he gets so angry that he turns bright red and can contain himself no longer. His anger escapes and turns into a big monster, which then proceeds to tear apart his room, damaging his books and even breaking his toy truck. Robert finally tells the monster that he had better make himself very small. He cleans up his room and packs the now tiny monster into a shoebox. Then he goes back downstairs to have his dessert.

“Grosse Colère” is a wonderful book for any child going through the “terrible twos,” or threes, or fours! Children at this age often have a difficult time expressing their anger, and the illustrations in this book give them a better understanding of their own emotions. I recommend it for any parent looking for a way to deal with temper tantrums and other conflicts with a young child.

*Debra Bellon*

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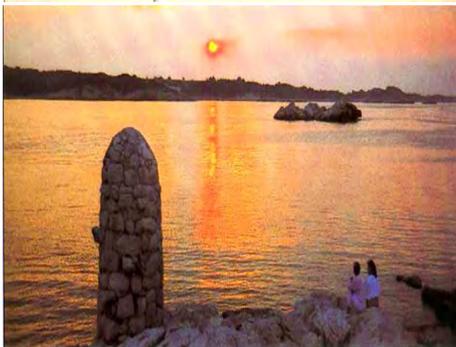
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