Mum’s the Word

Autumn 2011
President’s Letter

Welcome back to Mums and Tots!

We’re all slowly getting back into the routine after the wonderful holidays. It seems like a distant memory now but thank you to everyone who organised a summer meet during those two months. It’s so important to not feel isolated over the long summer months especially if you have just arrived in the area. We’re really pleased to see so many new faces at the hall and have some new ‘blood’ volunteering for jobs!

We’re full swing into toy cleaning for the TWIG Christmas Fayre which for some of us (mentioning no names Kazza!) is the highlight of the social calendar. We really need everyone’s help to make it the annual success that it has become providing our biggest income for Mums and Tots. So please do come along to the weekly toy cleaning sessions (see inside newsletter for all the dates), and please sign up to help on the stall during the day.

Enjoy the half term break and don’t forget our fab Halloween Party on Friday 28th October!

Stephanie

Fall is my favorite season in Los Angeles, watching the birds change color and fall from the trees.

-David Letterman
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 (Karen Holland, Sophie Tsui and Ali Dowson 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. On Friday 25th November from 2pm we will be taking the toys 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.

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

As many of you will know, Association Dominique will continue to be our designated charity this year. Penny Dickinson, our treasurer, reports on Mums & Tots’ recent contribution to this very worthy cause.

Well done to everyone for raising over 1200€ for Association Dominique this last year through Book swaps, clothes swaps, the nativity play & Kazza’s café (well 1214.31€ to be exact!). Bit of background: for 25 years now, Association Dominique has been offering solutions to families and their brain injured children. In its Centre located in Fonsorbes, the Association welcomes and enables the parents of affected children to meet with professional teams of therapists: psychologists, medical doctors, instructors and trainers.

One of the most humbling experiences I’ve ever had was a recent visit to their facility in Fonsorbes to present them the cheque on behalf of Mums & Tots. Every last cent of the money that we raised goes to directly help patients & their families and believe me there is no waste, for instance, whilst we were there Mr Delpech was cutting the grass & he also does the gardening. Mme Delpech showed me round the facility highlighting all the ways locals help e.g. in the kitchen & dining room she explained how all the meals are prepared by local volunteers or people become ‘host families’ providing accommodation, meals & support to families whose home may be many miles away.

We have received very emotive & profuse personal thanks from Mme Delpech & their whole team both on the day and through a written letter of thanks.

Taking Edina & Aiden with me really brought home the stark differences: how blessed are we to enjoy smiles from a few weeks old, yet some parents wait years & then thanks to the pioneering team & facilities available at Association Dominique children are able to experience what may previously have been thought unobtainable. During the journey home I cried – a lot (with Charlie & Lola on max volume mind you to disguise it) – I couldn’t help feeling that we must do more to help those who need it the most... For me one of the benefits of an organisation like ours is that with so many members we can make a real difference to local organisations – 50c for an item can soon mount up with everyone behind it. So let’s see how much we can raise this year for our chosen charity – let’s make ourselves proud!

For more information see www.associationdominique.fr
Summer Meets Recap

The gorgeous Indian summer that lingered throughout most of September (and even into October!) was great compensation for those wet and windy days of July, which unfortunately led to some of our summer meets being cancelled.

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

Mums’ Night Out

Our September outing took us to Mami-Wata, a hidden gem of a restaurant specializing in African and Caribbean cuisine on one of Toulouse’s backstreets.

Ann Donnelly, our social secretary, excelled herself once again in her choice of venue. The food was beautifully presented (and delicious!) and the setting, with its abundance of natural materials, wood and bamboo was very relaxing.

We all agreed that not only do the Mums’ Nights Out get us out, they get us out to some great places!

Sue Schneider
The traditional September rentrée translated as “back to school” for some, and “starting school” for others. So it was for our Kids’ Clubbers.

As our numbers have flourished since the early days and to ensure that everyone is being catered for adequately, we felt a need to divide the group by age. Helen Wiles is now the new leader of the older group (5+), and Jennie Taylor leads the younger group (3-4s).

For the older group, who now go off without their mums into a separate room at Centre Sept, Helen had planned many structured activities. These ranged from “true or false” guessing games, interview sheets (“Have you ever broken a bone?” “Were you born in France?” etc.) and “show and tell” holiday memories, aiming to get the children expressing themselves in English as much as possible. The Kids Clubbers also enjoyed making (and wearing!) crowns decorated with some of their favourite things, which each child then described to the group.

The twenty or so members of the younger “Mini Kids’ Club”— complete with even younger siblings and Mums — followed the expert guidance of Jennie Taylor, who skilfully orchestrated an action-packed session, incorporating rhythmic movement and chants, and a name sign craft activity. Again the onus is upon getting the children to communicate in English as much as possible — ‘cos that’s what we’re all about!

Come and Join Tiddlers!

Tiddlers was so named to entice members of Mums and Tots with children who (in their eyes) are too young to appreciate the more lively aspect of the hall. I have a fourteen-month-old son who I have only just started taking to the hall but I would say that Tiddlers would suit children from birth to about two years of age.

We meet at least twice a month and once a week when a host is available. At the moment there are ten active members of Tiddlers. We live on every side of Toulouse. Three of us
are in the town centre, I am in Portet sur Garonne, one of us is in Daux, another in Pibrac, one in Eaunes and one of our members is from Gaillac (if ever you want to go there for coffee and finish among the vines, though bring a chauffeur in that case).

What I love about Tiddlers is that you meet so many different people. I find it fascinating to find out what our Tiddlers do when they are not working as mothers! What are their hobbies? Where are they from? How did they get to France? One recent member turned up at my house last week and I realized that I knew her from about eight years ago. We are both ‘cellists and had played in an orchestra together in the centre of Toulouse. She is trying to persuade me to take up playing again after my eight-year break. So, you never know, you may find inspiration to dust down that unicycle or get out your potter’s wheel!

On a more serious note, mothers can be very isolated at the start of their new baby’s life. It can be an extremely daunting experience to be in a foreign country when you do not even necessarily have a society that can support you. Most of us have no family over here. For that reason Tiddlers can also be a life line, something to look forward to during a week of school runs, house work, job hunting or simply sitting watching the clock wondering when your partner will be home. Tiddlers is here to provide biscuits and tea and in the process you can sightsee as you drive around Toulouse to our different members’ houses!

My plans for the group include talks on scarf baby wearing and baby-led weaning, discussions on attachment parenting, French systems of childcare as opposed to the English systems...we can talk about anything you like and I urge you to bring your skills to Tiddlers whether you have a Tiddler or not. Are you a dab hand at baby massage for example? If you do not want to talk you can just eat and chat. Everything organized is to make you feel as relaxed and at home as possible!

You are NOT obliged to host (I run Tiddlers and I have hosted but two meetings)!

*If you are a member of the pregnancy / new mum’s group you are more than welcome to come to our group as well! The more meetings the merrier!* 

Please contact me whenever you like if you would like to join Tiddlers. It is as simple as dropping me a line or ringing me up and learning about the next Tiddlers destination.

See you soon...

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Mums the Word Autumn 2011
Before summer, I spoke to Steph, Mums and Tots President, about an idea I’d been pondering. I had been wanting to raise some money for a Breast Cancer charity and thought that October, Breast Cancer Awareness Month, would be the ideal time. I had thought that having an Usborne book party and giving all profits to charity might be the ideal route.

However, I should not have under-estimated the ambitions of Steph! “Great idea,” she said. “But I think we should do something a more ambitious … I have always wanted to do the Moonwalk.” And so an event was born!

A few phone calls later to the official Moonwalking charity “Walk the Walk” and we had the seal of approval. The walk was set for Friday 7th October - the first Friday in BC Awareness Month and hoping for a sunny evening as we bare ourselves around Toulouse!

Who are “Walk the Walk”?

Walk the Walk was launched 14 years ago when just 13 women power walked the New York City Marathon in their bras to raise money and awareness for breast cancer. What started out as a one-off fundraising event has blossomed into a thriving multi-million pound charity, raising to date in excess of £72 million for vital breast cancer causes.

The charity was founded by Nina Barough, who at the time knew nobody who had suffered from the disease. However, only 2 months after the adventure to New York, Nina discovered she had breast cancer herself.

The charity continued to go from strength to strength and the 1997 London Marathon was another huge success for the Walkers raising in excess of £25,000. Only 3 days after the marathon the first Walk the Walk auction was held to sell their bras that had been designed by celebrities such as Paul Smith, Mary Quant, Richard Branson and many more.

In the spring of 1998, Walk the Walk entered its second team into the London Marathon. 25 Walkers claimed their place, however there were 25 who were not so lucky. Not wanting to disappoint them or waste their hard earned fundraising or training, Nina decided to create a one off marathon for these girls. The intrepid 25 grew to 65 and, on the eve of the London Marathon, they set off at midnight on Saturday with the intention of completing their marathon by 7.00am Sunday morning and passing on the ‘baton’ in Trafalgar Square to the girls that would be walking the official event. Nina and a girlfriend actually completed both The Moonwalk followed by the London Marathon, a total of 52.4

On Friday October 7th, Mums & Tots held a Think Pink Cake Sale in aid of Breast Cancer, October being Breast Cancer Awareness month. That same evening, throngs of scantily-clad M&T members took to the streets of Toulouse, along with other women, for the Pink City’s first ever Moonwalk. Helen Saks tells us more.
miles within 24 hours... The Moonwalk was born! By 1998 it was clear that word was spreading. Nina took the first steps to find sponsors that would help her to fund the setting up of an official charity. The rest, as they say, is history!

As a grant making charity, it means that everybody taking part in their challenges is raising money for Walk the Walk. The charity then looks at various projects and campaigns that are involved with breast cancer and grants funds to where we know it will make the most difference. It is the policy to look at projects that perhaps would not easily find funding, and to those that would perhaps take many years to achieve their goals and assist them in reaching them in a shorter time. They support research, and over the past 13 years some ground breaking research has been made, not only into the causes of breast cancer but also identifying cancer genes and consequently improving the treatments. The charity also funds emotional and physical support for those that have cancer now.

**We Walked the Walk!!!**

If you happened to have been in Place du Capitole on the evening of Friday 7th October, you would have witnessed a sight never seen before in the centre of Toulouse. Over one hundred, bra-clad women were preparing to walk 5km in the name of breast cancer awareness. Television cameras captured the bespangled brasiers, some with flashing lights attached. The atmosphere was electric.

The idea for “Moonwalking” came about after a brief conversation between two Mums and Totters. Organisers-to-be, Helen Saks and Steph Dickinson were discussing how best to raise money for Breast Cancer Awareness Month in October. Perhaps we could sell Usborne Books and give the profits to charity? Very quickly, the fundraising web spun much bigger, as Steph casually muttered “I’d always wanted to do the Moonwalk.” And so, an idea was born.

The Moonwalk, is a sponsored walk created by the charity Walk the Walk, who give bursaries to breast cancer charities supporting research and patient and family care. Originally it was a marathon event, walked under the light of the moon, by women in their decorated bras to raise as much attention as possible for the cause. The Toulouse version was tweaked to become a 5km walk, intended to be as inclusive as possible. Far rather more women walk and we raise as much money as possible, than just the few fittest.

With very little publicity, the numbers of walkers crept up over the couple of months prior to the event, with numbers peaking 120 on the night. Groups made up from Mums and Tots, The Guides, IST mums, Airbus ladies and other wonderful supporters, all dressed to
camaraderie, and the results were extraordinary. Lindsay Walker was crowned ‘Best Bra’ and won a bottle of champagne after a rowdy judging ceremony!

A 5km route was created, thanks to Penny Dickinson (of Toulouse Walking Tours), which led us through Place St Pierre, over the bridge, through St Cyprien, back over Pont Neuf, into Croix Daurade, Place de Carmes, Place St Georges, and back to Place du Capitole. Stopping along the way to chant our song and shake our buckets, we raised an astonishing 550 Euros in loose change along the way from generous Friday night revelers, to top up the sponsorship money currently tipping three thousand Euros and counting!

Walkers varied in age from teenagers to ladies in their sixties, many of whom had had their lives touched by breast cancer. Some wore T-shirts with painted hands covering their breasts, others were disguised by a mass of feathers, and there were pink wigs and balloons galore!

Toulouse definitely sat up and noticed us as we walked the walk! Returning to a welcoming group of friends and family as we finished at our starting point, the walkers were already asking ‘What can we do next year?’ A wonderful evening and a show of breathtaking support from a group of very special ladies. Who knows what we will do next year, but one thing is for sure, it will be bigger, better, and probably even pinker!!!!

A Breast Cancer Story

Putting pen to paper on a subject so personal as my medical history is a strange process. One part of me wants to hide away and keep it snuggled away under the duvet, safe and private, but the other part of me remembers my thought process at the time. In struggling to make sense of the cancer diagnosis, I knew instantly that some good had to come of this. I had to be open and honest about it so that people knew that this does happen to unexpected people and you CAN be ok.

In 2002 I found a small lump in my breast. I thought it was nothing at first, but showed it to my then boyfriend (now husband), who said “better get it checked out.” Thanks to that conversation, I did. I went to the GP, who said “I’m sure it’s nothing, but better get it checked out.” So I was referred to the breast care unit at the hospital, where I was told more times than I care to remember, “I’m sure it’s nothing but better check it out.” Until the doctor asked if I had anyone with me.

Despite no family history of breast cancer, and a healthy lifestyle including sport and a healthy diet, I was diagnosed with breast cancer at 27 years old.
From there on followed more tests to ensure it hadn’t spread to my lymph nodes or anywhere even more terrifying, in what was probably the scariest week of my life. Very quickly, you get embroiled in a cycle of tests which keep you busy, which is probably what you need to stop you thinking too much. You just get on with it, turn up, have the tests and hope and pray that the results are what you need. Issues like fertility and babies are suddenly thrown in your face, requiring instant, unexpected decisions. Meanwhile, the emotional fallout has hit all the family and friends. I switched my phone off for a long time.

Despite all of that, I can honestly say today that I feel like the luckiest person in the world. Vitally, I caught my lump early. It was small and “highly treatable” - the words one doctor used and I cherished those words like you couldn’t believe. The same doctor said I didn’t have to have chemotherapy, meaning that six years later my first amazing daughter was born naturally.

Looking back now, nearly ten years later, it feels almost like it happened to someone else. But the lessons I learnt will stay with me forever. The clichés are true - I do appreciate the sunny days, my beautiful children, my lovely husband who supported me every step of the journey, in a way I’m sure I would never have taken the time to do before.

I am sharing my story because I feel that it is important for others to know what happened to me. All our lives, unfortunately, will be touched by cancer in some form, whether it is a friend, a relative, or ourselves. What we must remember is that cancer is treatable. If we can catch it early, many cancers can be cured.

I want every single one of you reading this story to check your boobs. Know how they feel at different times of the month and if ever you find a lump or anything untoward, get it checked out immediately. Early diagnosis is absolutely everything. Go for your mammograms and your smears without delaying. Nothing is more important. It is your responsibility as a woman, a wife, a mother. To yourself.

As we’re all too aware right now in the Mums and Tots community, scary things can happen to any of us at any time. What’s important is not to ask, ‘Why me?’ but how can we all move forward positively.

I couldn’t find any reasoning for my diagnosis, but I wanted to make changes to my life to feel like I could prevent a re-occurrence. I met Jane Plant, (www.janeplant.com) who had had breast cancer five times. Her husband (a scientist) travelled to Japan, and learnt that the Japanese who live on an Asian dairy free, soya-rich diet very rarely get breast cancer. When Japanese move to capital cities and eat a more Western diet, more breast cancer cases occur. Jane gave up dairy immediately and her cancer never came back. A link between dairy and breast cancer has not been medically proven, but it was enough information for me to change my attitude to dairy. I picked up other little tips, for example, never apply deodorant directly after shaving, so that it does not go directly into open pores and into your lymph nodes.

Below is information on how to be breast aware. It really is our responsibility to take care of ourselves. We only get one body to take care of, so do take good care.

Helen Saks
Preventing Breast Cancer: The official advice

The following information comes from the NHS / Family Doctor websites and advises how to be breast aware.

It’s important to know how your breasts normally look and feel. That way, you can spot any changes quickly and report them to your GP. A lump could be an early sign of breast cancer. Every woman’s breasts are different. Many women have one breast bigger than the other.

Get used to how your breasts feel at different times of the month. This can change during your menstrual cycle. For example, some women have tender and lumpy breasts around the time of their period. After the menopause, normal breasts feel soft, less firm and not lumpy.

The NHS Breast Screening Programme has produced a five-point plan for being breast aware:

· know what's normal for you
· look at your breasts and feel them
· know what changes to look for
· report any changes without delay
· attend routine screening if you’re 50 or over

Breast changes to look out for

See your GP if you notice any of the following changes:

· a change in the size, outline or shape of your breast, especially when you move your arm or lift your breast
· a change in the look or feel of your skin, such as puckering or dimpling
· any discomfort or pain in one breast, particularly if it’s a new pain and doesn’t go away
· a new lump, thickening or bumpy area in one breast or armpit that is different from the same area on the other side
· nipple discharge that’s not milky
· bleeding from your nipple
· a moist, red area on your nipple that doesn’t heal easily
· any change in nipple position, such as your nipple being pulled in or pointing differently
· a rash on or around your nipple

Breast changes can happen for many reasons, and most of them aren’t serious. Many women have breast lumps, and 9 out of 10 are not cancerous.

However, if you find changes in your breast that aren’t normal for you, it’s best to see your GP as soon as possible. This is because the sooner breast cancer is diagnosed, the better the chance of successful treatment.

How do I check for lumps?

Start by standing in front of a mirror. Look at your breasts with your arms at your side, with your arms raised behind your head, and with your arms on your hips and your chest muscles flexed.

Next, lie down with a pillow under your left shoulder. Put your left hand behind your head and feel your left breast with the pads of the 3 middle fingers on your right hand. Start at the outer edge and work around your breast in small circles, getting closer to your nipple with each circle. After you’ve finished checking your breast, squeeze your nipple gently and look for discharge (fluid coming out of the nipple).

Do the same to your right breast with a pillow under your right shoulder. Be sure to include the area up to your collarbone and out to your armpit. You have lymph nodes in this area. Cancer can spread to lymph node tissue.
Don’t be a dummy - Chuck your backless booster seat away!

When a friend told me a few months back that there was a move to ban backless booster seats (or booster cushions) in the UK, I groaned. I couldn’t see what was wrong with them. Booster cushions can be comfortable, they lift the child up into a good seat belt position, and some even come with handy little cup holders! What more could you ask for? But then I watched this video:


Using a crash test dummy, it shows the child in a backless booster seat being slammed against the side door while the neck is violently flipped to the side and the head smashes into the door where it meets the window. Such a collision could cause serious cuts, skull fracture and even brain damage.

Booster cushions may be cheap and easy to install, but as you can see, they do not protect your child in a side impact collision (one in four crashes in UK).

What should we be buying then? Well, firstly do a bit of research. The Which? Consumer guide is a brilliant place to start. It’s where I learned that “you shouldn’t place a child in a carry cot in the car because very often the child’s head is placed near the side door, making it extremely vulnerable in a side collision crash”. It’s also where I learned that an Isofix seat (where the seat is fixed to the chassis of the car instead of fixed by a seat belt) is not necessarily the safest option because there is often a “trade off between easy installation and the energy absorbing capacity of the seat, which testing shows can lead to the child being exposed to slightly higher loads in crashes than the same seat with a belted installation”.

I haven’t yet made my purchase for Martha and Joe, but I think I’ll be going for a backed booster seat, with deeply padded wings that protect the child in a side impact crash. But I’m not in a hurry to move them out of their current car seat. A seat with integrated straps is still the safest option until they have grown out of it (when their head is higher than the back of the seat, or the straps no longer come from above their shoulders).

So watch the video and I’m pretty sure you’ll be in the anti-booster convert camp within two minutes. Remember that a car seat only performs its primary purpose in the case of a crash. If it doesn’t perform well, you might as well not have one at all.

Karen Holland
The Code de la Route: How to Be Driven Mad in 5 Easy Lessons

I’ve spent the past eight years nearly car-free. Before moving to Toulouse four years ago I lived in Manhattan, where no one in their right mind owns a car, and before that I lived in Bangalore, India, where there’s always a rickshaw ten feet away to take you where you want to go, and often where you don’t. And before that we were in Paris, where I knew I would never manage to drive until I got over my rule-abiding American mentality and learned to park on the sidewalk.

I say nearly because we do own a car, only I’m not allowed to drive it because I only have a California driver’s license, which, unlike licenses from several other U.S. states, cannot be exchanged for a French one. As we live close to the center of Toulouse it’s not difficult to get around by metro, bus, tramway, bicycle, or even on foot. I don’t envy people who try to maneuver their cars through the Place du Capitole or even through the maze of one-way streets close to my own home in Saint Cyprien. I can do without the honking, shouting, and near-misses that my husband is always complaining about. Still, people are always telling me that my life would be easier if I started driving, and after spending two months this past summer driving around Southern California, from swimming lessons to shopping malls to the beach, I almost started to believe them.

And so I began the adventure of applying for a French driver’s license. This is a pleasure most of you will never experience – that is, if you come from an EU country, Australia, Ontario, or Ohio. France has a strict policy of reciprocity – you give our people a driver’s license and we’ll give one to yours. What people don’t realize is that if you want a California driver’s license you walk in, take a written test, then take a practical test that lasts about 15 minutes, pay a few dollars, and there you are – a legal driver. In France, the first major challenge is signing up.

After I was issued a ten-year carte de séjour, I swore that I would never set foot in the prefecture again unless my life depended on it. For those of you unfamiliar with this particularly French institution, the first step in getting a carte de séjour is waiting in line for about an hour so that you can be handed a blank form. I tried to introduce the concept of “pdf” to the woman at the counter, but she looked like I was trying to put her out of a job (which, of course, is a purely fictional construct for French civil servants - but that doesn’t mean they’ll accept any new-fangled technology invented “à l’étranger”).

Luckily for me, they recently moved the driver’s license issuing office to a completely different building in the Cité Administrative. Great, I thought – it’s only a 10-minute bike ride away. I assembled my application packet – a copy of my carte de séjour, a few photos – and headed off on my way somewhere else. Of course, I should have known better than to think a French administrative office would be open at 3 PM on a Thursday afternoon. I arrived at the correct building to be greeted with a flyer saying that the office was “exceptionellement fermé” for the day. Fine, I thought. I’ll go back on Monday. In my naïve American way of thinking, Monday is a perfectly reasonable day to attempt an administrative task. Or should I say “feat.”

On Monday I loaded my two-year-old into the stroller and headed back. This time the building was open, allowing me to enter the lobby, travel up to the seventh floor, and read the sign on the door of the driver’s license office, which read “Open 8:30 to 11:30, Tuesday and Thursday.”

I did make it inside the office eventually, the following Thursday, but only after waiting...
rather idiotically in the hallway for the door to open. Finally a woman in traditional Afri-
can dress walked in and said “Have you knocked?” She did knock, and got through the
door; she even kindly held it open for me on her way out, undoubtedly aware that I would
never muster up the courage to open it again once it had slammed shut. The woman
inside politely informed me that I should go to the next office down.

At any rate, once inside the correct office I found that the registration was surprisingly--
almost shockingly--easy for a French administrative task. The concept of allowing people
to take the driving test on their own, without the approval of a profit-making driving
school, is relatively new in France, and the streamlined procedures are intended to allow
more drivers to obtain a valid license. Now I just have to wait 4 months to get a test date.
While this may sound long, after taking a few practice tests I realized that someone like
me, who has been driving for a mere 19 years, does need this time to prepare. I can only
imagine that the test questions were written by frustrated high school philosophy teach-
ers whose questions never get accepted for the bac. Some examples:

1. This sign indicates that passing is forbidden. True or False.

   Answer: False. You are allowed to pass bicycles, farm vehicles, and horses.

2. Do you stop at the sign?

   Answer: No. You stop at the line painted on the ground, not the sign.

3. It’s the fifteenth of January as you drive into this village. What side of the street can you park on? (Note: I believe that for this ques-
tion to be considered valid, the numbers on the sign must be completely illegible.)

   Answer: The side with odd-numbered buildings
After seeing examples of questions from the written driving test, coupled with examples of how French people actually drive, I have a few questions of my own to suggest:

1. It’s raining heavily. You see a pedestrian with two small children, one of whom appears to be throwing a tantrum, in a well-marked crosswalk. Do you think it might possibly be a good idea to stop?

2. You would like to stop your car on a residential street in order to play petanque nearby. There is ample parking within 5-minute walking distance. Do you really have to park your SUV on the sidewalk at a ninety-degree angle?

3. A traffic light has been placed on a busy street in the city center in order to protect the large number of pedestrians who have the nerve to want to get to the other side. Knowing that this traffic light is there for pedestrians only, some of whom might be elderly, blind, or under the age of 12, would it be so difficult to observe the red light, even though it wasn’t there when you were growing up?

At any rate, if you see me riding the bus to Leguevin a year from now, you’ll know what happened. And if you don’t see me at all, then I might have moved to Belgium, Switzerland, Austria, or Portugal, where I’m allowed to drive with my American license for as long as I want...

Debra Bellon

English-Speaking Services Guide

Some of you may remember that many moons ago (well earlier this year), I agreed to take on the task of updating the English speaking services document......I am pleased to announce that it will soon be landing on the Mums and Tots website members area. Hooray!!!!!

All the contacts have been freshly supplied by our very helpful M&T members. I have not duplicated anything from the previous document, as I do not wish to risk giving anyone out of date, incorrect information. The new version will be updated as and when needed unlike its predecessor which sat untouched for quite some time.....Whenever you come across a suitable new contact, please let me know. Likewise should you discover an error, please don’t be shy to tell me. Until July 2012 I will be responsible for updating the document.

There are several new members, since my last call for information to go into the document, so please be bold and put your fingers to the computer keyboard, ipad iphone, blackberry etc.... and email me at mnyogi1@yahoo.co.uk. Please note that it is now too late for any new contributions to go into the first version of the new document. However they will definitely be included in the first update planned for publication before the end of year. Send the info now before you forget!

Finally, I would just like to say a big thank you to all of you who have sent contributions so far. The more of these we have the better the document will be for all of us!

Melanie Norwood

PS: If you know of any activities in English aimed at English-speaking children, please let me know, as I am thinking about putting a document together for us all.
A Taste of....

UK Supermarkets

When I first moved to France, what did I miss? Well, there was the UK playgroup for my children, but I was lucky enough to discover Mums and Tots soon enough.

One of the topics of conversation that seemed to come up quite a lot was the price of Baked Beans (!) and the fact that you just can’t get certain foods over here. How many of us have asked our visitors from the UK to put Sausages/Bacon/Quorn, Cheese or other food stuffs in their suitcase?!

I do miss my UK supermarket shopping, and added to this, the fact that I have two children (one is 2 and a half and the other is 6 months old) makes shopping very challenging, especially since the trolleys over in France have no safety clips, so my daughter thinks it’s great fun to stand up in the trolley or even try to climb out!

I then discovered an article in the Guardian online (check me out posh or what!). I got very excited and decided to get in touch with the company mentioned in the article - Sterling Shopping (http://www.sterlingshopping.co.uk). This is a brilliant service, and I have been using them since I returned to France in January. I have shared my shopping secret with several people already, and I feel a little bit like Santa Claus, as people get so excited over the prospect of on-line food shopping from the UK. It is literally like being a kid in a sweet shop, and a lovely feeling when you pack your English shopping into the boot of your car.

There is no VAT in the UK on items for children/babies, whereas in France TVA is 20%, so I buy SMA baby milk at around £8-9 a tin - it’s much cheaper than the French counterpart which can set you back around 18 euros. Also, two boxes of Pampers with 84 in each box is £20, whilst in France it’s one box of 78 for 25.38 euros. With the savings I make on baby items, I treat myself to all those items I miss from back home - you can even get a takeaway curry!

All you have to do is set up an account with ASDA, TESCO, Waitrose, or any other place that does home deliveries, do your shopping online, and have it delivered to Sterling. They will then ship it over to France for you. The company charges delivery by adding 25% to the cost of your shopping, then they charge 20% VAT on the charges only. So spending £100 costs £25 + VAT (£5): total charge for delivery £30. You can pay in either pounds or euros and they accept French or English cheques.

So why not give it a try? Whether it be for those Nigella cake ingredients you just can’t get here, cheaper baby products or simply a pack of Jammy Dodgers, a trip to the supermarket has never been so exciting. In one or two clicks, you can bring a bit of “home” home.

Tracy Durville

Tomato and Lentil Soup

1-2 tbsp olive oil & knob of butter
1 large onion, roughly chopped
2 celery sticks, roughly chopped
2 garlic cloves, crushed
1/2 tsp cayenne pepper
1 tsp ground cumin
1/2 tsp ground coriander
150g split red lentils
1 litre vegetable stock
400g can plum tomatoes
2 tsp tomato purée
2 tbsp Greek yoghurt
Salt & Pepper

Prep: 20 mins | Cook: 40 mins

1. Heat the oil in a saucepan. Add the onion and cook over a low heat for 7–8 minutes, stirring occasionally, until beginning to soften. Stir in the celery and cook for 3 minutes, stirring frequently. Add the garlic, butter, cumin and coriander and cook for a further minute, stirring constantly.

2. Wash the lentils then add them along with the stock, tomatoes with their juice and tomato purée. Bring to the boil, reduce the heat, then half-cover the pan with a lid and simmer for 25–30 minutes until the lentils and vegetables are very soft.

3. Blend the soup in the pan using a hand-held blender. Check the consistency; it will be fairly thick, so if you prefer it thinner, dilute with a little more stock. Season to taste, then reheat until just bubbling, add the yoghurt and serve.
Cooking in France: A Traumatic Experience

My mother-in-law is pretty much perfect. She’s a doting grandmother, unfailingly stylish, terribly slim, a talented seamstress, and a very good painter; she’s bright, has excellent business sense and is, most irritatingly, a really nice person too. But the bit that really gets me is how well she cooks. It's not just the cuisine itself, which is always delicious, it’s the presentation. A casual lunch with her is never without a fully laid table, a pristine but appropriately low-key table cloth, matching cutlery and glasses (or does everyone do that?) and usually some kind of simple but effective floral centre piece thrown together with flowers from the garden. It's enough to put you off your meal.

As a result my father-in-law is utterly spoilt, to the point where even eating in a good restaurant becomes a problem since it simply won’t match up to her level of cuisine. She is just too good. So in the weeks before a visit from Mamie and Papy, I finish any meals Olivier (my husband) appreciates with “Do you think your parents would like that? Shall we make it for them?”

It was bad enough when we lived in England but the problem is slightly broader here. There's something generally intimidating, I find anyway, about cooking for the French. British cuisine has such a terrible reputation that people come with preconceptions and breaking those down is a challenge I'm not sure my slightly improvised skills are up to. If I overcook the fish will they tell their friends “British people like their fish really dry”? If I burn the usually perfect crumble (I can do crumble) will they say “why do they like their desserts burnt?” My neighbour came to lunch the other week and actually brought her own lamb (claiming she had some that needed eating up – I tried not to take it personally). But she was impressed by my fig chutney and loved the crumble. Phew.

Luckily Olivier is a good cook and a bit of a glory chef – often bringing out the big guns and creating marvels when his friends come to visit. He's inherited that presentation thing too, so while I would plonk a hearty dish on a plate he will craft a little work of art out of it. The thing is, when you worry about whether your cooking will be met with approval it makes it a thing of joy when they genuinely love it.

It’s not (I hope) that I am a terrible cook, exactly. The children love what I make for them, which is a lovely thing in itself. And sometimes we have a hit with the in-laws and get the ultimate in compliments when they take home an idea and use it themselves. Tagliatelle with creme fraiche and smoked salmon with fresh peas was a quick and successful one, and good old lasagne has also made the Haurant Snr repertoire after seeing how well it went down with the kids at our house. And I’ve learned things from my mother-in-law too – tuna in béchamel sauce on a slice of bread, topped with cheese and browned under the grill is a sure-fire winner. And I can now fold whipped egg whites into a cake mix so that it actually rises, which I never managed before. I’m sure one day I’ll get over it, but for the time being I’ll carry on fretting. And at least that means I’ve already sorted what I’m doing for aperitifs on Christmas day.

Sandra Haurant
Dear Totters,

I am tearing my hair out trying to get my children to eat anything other than pasta, pizza and baked beans on toast! Fruit they accept in the form of compotes but vegetables are a real no-no. Please please help!

from A Mum Worried about Scurvy!

I have heard that a child has to try something many, many times before they can learn to like it. My daughter refused broccoli over and over again but I kept on putting a very small piece on her plate each time and asked her just to nibble the leafy bit. Gradually she stopped turning her nose up and shouting “yuck” and will now eat the “leaves” of broccoli without fuss. Haven’t managed to get her to eat the stalk yet but I still consider it a victory!

We play a game which involves me turning away until I’m told I can look and then I feign utter amazement when I see that there are no green beans left on my children’s plates. I say, “Oh no, you haven’t thrown them on the floor again, have you?” and bend to look under the table. Then I say, “Oh! Have you hidden them in your bib?” and take a look in there. “Where are they then?” I end up saying and am awarded with a huge grin, a pat on their tummies and a view inside two green bean-stained mouths. Then we all fall about laughing. It works every time!

Have a question you’d like to ask your fellow Mums and Tots members?
Send it to mums-the-word-newsletter@googlegroups.com

from Laura Fox, registered dietician

Five E’s to get your kids to EAT fruits and vegetables:

**Example** - Eat them yourself. Offer them at every meal. Try new recipes.

**Early** - Introduce them into your child’s diet as early in life as possible. If they try one and don’t like it, try it again in a few months.

**Enjoy** - Be excited when they try a new one or if they eat them all. Always try to maintain a positive attitude and avoid pressure.

**Encourage** - Ask your children to help shop, plan and prepare the fruits and vegetables for snacks and meals.

**Entertain** - Serve them when the kids are hungry (before dinner or at snack time) with salad dressing, hummus or other healthy dip.
Behind the Mumma-mask

Tiffany Colombie

We all exchange pleasantries and anecdotes at the hall, but how well do we really know each other? We all had a life b.c. (before children) but what were they like? Autumn’s ‘Mums the Word’ is launching a new feature, getting to know our members and their lives .... ‘Behind the Mumma-mask.’

Where was home, pre-babies?
I lived in the Big Apple, in the heart of the East Village. I absolutely loved my neighborhood because it was a self-contained little village. I had my best friends living close by, I knew all the merchants in the hood and there was everything you needed open almost 24/7 in walking distance.

What was your job?
I was a Producer. I produced interactive ads for one of the largest global advertising agency and my clients were big brands like Guinness and Fedex. I think that this type of job has somewhat prepared me to becoming a multi-tasking mom for sure. For example, I can stress out at moments notice, go over budget on things totally unnecessary, always saying yes when you really want to scream no, and calming disputes by acting like an overbearing maniac.

What was your 9-5 like in those days?
I worked 9-9 if I was lucky otherwise later. Most weeks were about 70 hours or more. Because of my hectic schedule, I almost never ever cooked, I hardly ever had time to do my own laundry (so it was sent out). Grocery shopping meant getting coffee and milk and I didn’t drive a car for over 10 years. During my lunch breaks, which were few and far between, I would go for my once a month $20 manicure/pedicure (which I totally miss) and a venti iced Soy Chai from Starbucks. And in my spare time, I have taken flamenco, sewing, jewelry making, pilates, yoga and knitting classes. So imagine how I felt when I asked, um, where’s the dryer? or when eating out meant, eating outside, literally or no Starbucks for miles and miles and miles. At first I thought how quaint, and then it just seemed plain uncivilized. ha :) oh, how we adapt.

And after dark?
If I wasn’t having cocktails with co-workers then it was with friends and my monthly budget was spent mostly on trying out the newest wine bar or the next best japanese noodle house. I loved going to see concerts and local bands, art openings and dancing. I loved to go out dancing. Now I dance with my kiddies.

Did you ever imagine a life in Europe?
I love to travel and I did travel to many parts of Europe after university and also for holidays during my early pre-Fred years but never did I imagine to be living as an expat.

How did you meet Fred?
We were introduced by a mutual French friend in New York and the rest is history. I moved from New York to Brescia, Italy where Fred lived. But after a year in Italy and being pregnant with Mira we both decided that Toulouse, his hometown, was a good place to raise our growing family. Ciao Italia, Bonjour France.
Any reflections looking back ... good old days ... or do they have their place firmly in the past?

Of course I am nostalgic at times, and with time passing you lose touch with a lot of friends and you feel like you’re missing out on the fun, but the past is the past.

I know I can’t do the late evenings of burning the candle at both ends anymore. And now at the end of the day, I love being a mom, it is THE most rewarding and difficult job I have ever had. And after several difficult years of adjusting, I do feel lucky to be in France (especially, when I’m not driving) and I enjoy working part time at the business schools. I don’t know if I would ever move back to New York but we like to always keep our options open as life can be an adventure in one form or another.

Helen Saks

If you would like to be featured in a future article, please contact helensaks@gmail.com.

Toy Review

Plan Toys Wooden Pirate Ship
approximate cost: 40 euros

This wooden pirate boat was a gift for my son’s third birthday and I have never enjoyed playing with a toy as much.

Everything about it is pleasing: its round, smooth wooden figures, its beautiful boat, the mini rowing boat and the crocodile...I am not very good at imaginary play but I was full of glee pushing the boat across the kitchen table and pretending to row it back to the ship after searching for treasure in the sea of our kitchen granite. The children by this time were in bed so I had it all to myself. The cannons move up and down, the plank is bouncy and the rope ladder reminds me of something out of a dolls’ house. My son plays with it for hours. He bases his games on Pugwash. Pirates jump off the plank and are rescued by the rowing boat below, ‘naughty’ pirates are ‘punished’, the cabin boy sits on the mast crow’s nest looking for ships...the possibilities for play are boundless. This is the most beautiful toy we own and at a fairly reasonable price in view of the fact that it is manufactured by PlanToys:

“Plan Toys are made from organic rubberwood recycled from trees no longer able to produce latex. Made with non-toxic non-formaldehyde wood glue, coloured with water based non-toxic dyes”.

Well worth a chest full of coins me thinks.

Naomi Rivière
Things I have learned about the French and France in my Nine Years Here...

Children belong to everybody, not just the parents
“Oh, how cold he must be, the poor thing”... (see photo of said cold baby). “It’s too tight”! Exclamation from elderly lady on seeing Arthur in a baby scarf carrier tied to me. “He’s teething” (he was apparently teething for six months).

The French mostly entertain at home.
This can be difficult as you want to make friends but you do not yet know anyone with whom you can have dinner and you can not meet anyone as they are all having dinner at home...hmmm...tricky one!

It takes time to make a French friend but once you do they will be a friend for life.

You can not ask the French who they vote for but... you can ask them how much they earn.

France has Molière, Flaubert and Sagan. With such literary renown it is surprising just how many swear words they have. I met a very elegant woman in the park today. “Ça me fait chier d’aller faire des courses plus tard” (translated literally as: it makes me shit to go shopping later. I had to remember to close my mouth after the shock of incongruence had worn off!

France is full of engineers!

The French do eat the last biscuit on the plate and do not understand why the English do not!

Not everybody has a poodle, yet if you look through a dog parlour window there is bound to be a poodle.

“What did you eat for lunch?” is not a dull question in a country where food is about culture.

Some French people walk past a bakery... and buy bread in the supermarket!

French trains drive on the left!

French school bags look like wheeled airport bags. They must have a lot of homework in there!

The French do not seem to know how to make cream which is odd considering that they are quite good at cooking and have lots of cows. French cream is “crème anglaise”.

There is no satisfactory translation for snug or cosy...

I am not sure that the concept of zebra crossing has totally been understood should the person be on foot or on wheels.

For some odd reason nobody thought of the “pub”.

Watch the weather forecast on television and you will know what saint day it is tomorrow.

Every other building is a hairdresser’s.

“La pièce de resistance”? There is none. Most French people have never heard of this phrase!

Naomi Rivière
Would you believe it - Avon is 125 years old this year? Gone are the days of the “old-fashioned” Avon Lady, Avon is now a modern, exciting and friendly company. As their slogan says – THE company for women.

It all started back in 1886 by a bookseller who started making perfume in California. How things have changed and now Avon is a global brand with brand representatives such as Reese Witherspoon and Fergie from the Black Eyed Peas!

I recently joined Avon as an “Ambassadrice” and I’m really excited about all they have to offer. The product range is massive incorporating make up, hair products, jewellery, accessories, underwear and even kid’s stuff.

So if you’d like to discover Avon and their range of products, contact me by email at celia.a.mcmahon@gmail.com or phone 06.49.29.06.79.

Check out the latest brochure here: http://www.avon.fr/PRSuite/static/widgets/ebw/fr/ebrochure.html?rf=Celia&rl=McMahon&rp=06%2049%2029%202002%2079&rm=celia.a.mcmahon%40gmail.com&c=ebrochure&s=brochurewidget_ebrochure
ENGLISH CHILDREN’S BOOKS

The best children’s books are available in Toulouse. No need to buy online or carry heavy books back from the UK. The books can come to you!

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Due to unprecedented demand for Usborne books, I am looking to recruit another Usborne organiser in the Toulouse area.

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If you would like more info please call me for a chat on 06 40 19 34 45 or email me at helensaks.usbornebooks@gmail.com. Thank you.

Can you help?

Mums and Tots has been based at the Foyer Rural in Leguevin for a number of years. The hall has parking, a kitchen, a store cupboard solely for use by Mums and Tots, is easily accessible, is fairly central and importantly it is free for us to use. However the hall is not large and can get crowded on a busy Friday. Do you know of somewhere that Mums and Tots could relocate to? It would need to have all of the above positive points but also offer more, especially extra space for our expanding group. If you have a suggestion for a venue then please let one of the committee members know, or e-mail alisondowson@hotmail.com so that Mums and Tots can investigate the option further.

I’ve recently finished the first part for the qualification as a swimming teacher and I need to get experience before finishing the full course. I’m ready to offer reduced rate swimming lessons (until full qualification) but have nowhere to go thanks to Colomiers Piscine closing until next May! And other local pools have inconvenient opening times.

So my plea is to anyone who has (or knows somebody who has) a covered or indoor pool they may be interested to rent out (or exchange for free lessons for their family). I live North West of Toulouse so that area would be ideal, but I’m happy to travel a little bit further.

Thanks,
Abby Rice (riceabigail@gmail.com)