

LIFE AND PARENTING IN SOUTH WEST FRANCE

time out



IN THE SOUTH

AUTUMN 2013

The
vaccination
DEBATE

**AUTUMN
RECIPES**

**MEET
GEMMA & VIKKI**
our new
vice-presidents

HEALTH
Weightloss

What's on in
Toulouse

**THE OTHER SIDE
OF MUM**

Penny Dickinson
Laura Fox

TRAVEL
The Pyrenees



President's Letter



Hello everyone and welcome to a new season's newsletter!

I'm afraid this one won't be starting with stories of joy and good cheer. As you all know, this has been a particularly difficult time for Tots & Co. Vandals set fire to a bin outside the foyer rural, and that fire took part of the roof and all of the windows with it, leaving us homeless. The Leguevin Mairie is still sorting out insurance, and repairs to the building have yet to begin. We've been making do as best we can, having meetings in member's houses, and despite everything, we've still had an amazing turnout!

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all of those members who came forward to help, in clearing the hall, storing our equipment, volunteering their homes, and making the effort to come to meetings despite their changing locations.

We now have use of the Eglise Protestante Internationale in Leguevin for our Friday Meets, and for the time being, Tuesday's Musical Bumps will be held alternately at my house in Tournefeuille and Mirjam's in Les Sept Deniers.

There have been other changes this year: the AGM voted in the 2013/2014 committee, and renewed Association Dominique as our nominated charity. This year's committee members are:

President

Catherine Boyle (Tarral)

Joint Vice-Presidents

Gemma Lloyd • Vikki Bordes-Carter

Secretary

Becky Coles

Vice-Secretary

Adele Claux

New Members Coordinator

Mirjan van der Weilen

Website Administrator

Priscilla Deegan

Newsletter Team

Naomi Riviere • Laura Fox

Shazia Bhatti • Charlotte Gibson

Pregnancy Group

Jackie Alcock

Database Administrators

Tracy Moxey • Gemma Lloyd

Kids' Club Coordinators

Emily Solans • Sue Schneider

Kids' Club moved to a Saturday morning, and welcomed Samantha Scholtes as our new Mini Group leader, Marie is now taking the Juniors. Parents now have the use of a third room in Centre

Sept to hang out and drink coffee while we wait!

In other news, we have two very important events coming up this season. The first is the **TWIG Christmas Fair**. For those of you who don't know, the Christmas Fair is our biggest fundraiser, and what allows us to keep our membership fees so low. This year, it'll be held on Saturday November 30th in the salle Boris Vian in La Salvetat-Saint-Gilles. As usual, we need your help to make the Tots stall a success. We're looking for donations of toys and baby equipment, we're also looking for people to participate in our toy cleaning sessions (there'll be one every week), and we'll be looking for volunteers to set up the stall on the 29th and (wo)man the stall on the day.

This is the toy cleaning schedule:

Monday 14th October

2-4pm at Charley's

Tuesday 5th November

2-4pm at Tracy's

Friday 15th November

2-4pm at Charley's

Wednesday 20th November

10-11.30am at Anne's

Monday 25th November

(time to be confirmed) at Tracey's

Finally, of course there'll be a **Nativity Play** and a **Christmas Party** this year, although we don't yet know where or when. We'll be in touch!

Catherine

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Eglise Protestante Internationale • 10 allée des Cordeliers, Leguevin

MEET OUR NEW VICE PRESIDENTS!

What brought you to Toulouse?

My job! I'd been living in Paris for 8 years with my French husband and we decided it was time for a change. The first one to get a job elsewhere would determine where we would go. I got an opportunity with my company and we moved down to Toulouse in 2010. We haven't looked back!

How did you found out about Tots & Co?

I was in early pregnancy and suffering terrible morning sickness and a friend back home told me to try ginger biscuits. While searching for a British shop in Toulouse, I stumbled across the Tots website.

Why did you decide to take a leadership role with Tots & Co?

Tots has given me the opportunity to meet a whole load of like-minded people. It's been so helpful to exchange on all kinds of different parenting subjects so I suppose I just

wanted to give something back to the people who have been a life line to me during my maternity leave.

What's the best thing about Tots & Co?

It keeps me sane. Well, kind of!

What are you excited to improve?

I'm not sure there really is much room for improvement. I just want to carry on with the good work that is being done so many other people can continue to benefit from all that Tots has to offer.

What can members do to help you in your role?

I'm sharing the VP role with Gemma. She's the one on the forefront, sending out all the e-mails to members on different subjects and keeping things running on a day to day basis. I've taken on more of a "back office" role, so while Gemma is busy communicating with the members, I'm beaver away



working on the calendar and helping out with the organisation of the AGM and the forthcoming fairs.

What is your most embarrassing French experience?

I'd not been in France long and I had a trapped nerve in my neck so I went to the doctors. My French was very basic and my pronunciation terrible. I ended up explaining that I had a pain in my bottom (cul) rather than my neck (cou)! It's one of those things I should have never told my husband as it entertained our friends and family for months getting me to pronounce cul and cou!



What brought you to Toulouse?

I have always wanted to move and live in another country and when my husband got the opportunity to move out here with Airbus we jumped at the chance and up to now it been a great decision.

How did you found out about Tots & Co?

I did lots of research on the Internet before moving out here, and came across the Tots & Co. Website and came to my first meeting at the hall with my 8 week old daughter after 2 weeks of being here.

Why did you decide to take a leadership role with Tots & Co?

Tots had been such a good thing for me when I first moved out here, to get me out of the house and enable me to meet great people, that I wanted to give something back. So, at the time there were lots of positions that needed to be filled and I said I would like to help.

Vice President I have to say wasn't my first choice as it sounded like it needed to be someone who has been a member for a

long time and knew what they were doing but after a bit of gentle persuasion from Catherine, I said that I would take on the role, and when I found out that Vikki would be doing it jointly with me it made it a bit less daunting.

What's the best thing about Tots & Co?

I think the best thing is that it helps people who have moved to a new country be able to get out with their children to meet people who are in or have been in the same position as them. I found that everyone is so nice and wants to make you feel welcome, probably because that's what they needed when they arrived here. Also that it allows you children to socialise and play with other children.

What are you excited to improve?

I don't really think much needs improving, apart from at the moment we desperately need a new hall!!! But I would like to make members aware that the people on the committee are not here to

make the rules, decide when and where we go places and do all the work. If you want to organise something, get more involved or have any ideas let me me know and I can help make them happen.

What can members do to help you in your role?

Get involved, volunteer and participate. The more input and help we get from members the better Tots will run. Everything that the committee organises is for its members.

What is your most embarrassing French experience?

We went to a little restaurant in the middle of nowhere and they only served their Plat du Jour, and one course was a cheese board. When it came out there was loads of cheese and we don't like to leave food so we were cutting off huge slices and eating as much as we could, when the man came passed while I was cutting another slice, he said finished!!!, and took the cheese away, to pass on to the next table. I think we ate about six tables worth of cheese!

IF YOU'D LIKE TO GET IN TOUCH WITH VIKKI OR GEMMA:

gemma.lloyd81@gmail.com

vikki.tots@gmail.com



THE DEBATE
RETURNS:
TO
VACCINATE...

...OR NOT?!?

It's a no-brainer!

By Shazia Bhatti

Whenever people say they haven't vaccinated their kids, the first thing I wonder is how on earth they get their children into any form of childcare here in France, where without the form stating said offspring have had the requisite quota of injections, garderie or crèche will not be forthcoming. But I also wonder on what scientific basis they have made their decision. The trouble is, books have been written about why vaccinating is bad, but none of the evidence is accepted by the wider scientific community. And measles has made something of a resurgence since the widespread rejection of the MMR vaccine.

In Pakistan, polio workers are being targeted and killed on suspicion of their being Christians spreading their corrupt influence. My dad once had TB. I have had hepatitis A after a visit abroad, and really, I dearly wish I'd had the vaccine as it was a horrible disease to have and it had a lasting effect on my health. I'm sure parents mean well, but it cannot be responsible to not vaccinate your child as immunity to deathly diseases such as cholera, typhus and diphtheria and so on are built on community wide resistance. Not only that, how can you possibly take a child to a non-Western country if they are not vaccinated? Vaccines are thoroughly tested and they transformed life in the twentieth century. How can we so soon forget?

I'm all for homeopathic remedies and whatnot, and I love a bit of New Age philosophy. But I think to not vaccinate a child is a risk not worth taking.

Against

By Sarah Higgs

As a mother, few things have made me put my thinking cap on like vaccinations have.

Well, it would have been simpler had my mother not introduced me to the world of conventional medical skeptics. Because when you start reading up about the cons of vacci-

nations, it's hard to remain stoical. Of course, the thought of my children catching a horrible disease like polio or tetanus, or most of the ones you can get vaccinated against, is unbearable. But unfortunately, things are rarely black and white, and vaccinations are definitely in the grey area when you scratch the surface.

I'm not going to recommend reading a very serious French book written by a reputable scientist, Michel Georget, because it's so long and complex that I think only a doctor could understand it all. I bought this tome (*Vaccinations, les vérités indésirables*) in an effort to make the right decision with my children, but despite my biology background, I've only managed to realise how little the general public is informed about the risks associated with vaccinations (to name a few, autism, cot death, encephalitis, various auto-immune diseases, or even catching the illness you were supposed to be immunized against).

Yes, you might say some of it is made up, how can I be so sure? Well, the book is very thorough in listing its sources, and they're all articles from medical journals around the world. The guy spent years writing this book.

Without getting into details, if you look at the figures, the assumption that immunization campaigns make illnesses regress is not true. Doctors are still quite ignorant of most mechanisms involved in immunization, natural or vaccination-induced.

So, as a mother, I find the responsibility of vaccinating - or not - my children is huge, with rare but frightening risks against rare but frightening diseases. It's very difficult for me to see which way the scales tip, and my husband can't really be bothered to read much about it, so he leaves it all down to me, which doesn't help!

My first child's pediatrician scared the young mother that I was, enough to make me accept to give James every recommended jab but Hep B, and he's tolerated them very well. But Elliot, my second child, is only getting the obligatory ones (polio, diphtheria and tetanus), and I don't plan on giving James any boosters other than those. I found a GP who isn't very keen on vaccinations, so I don't feel under pressure, which is great. But I am still quite easily influenced, and about a year ago, a doctor I visited made me think really hard

about it all over again. It's an ongoing process, really! Who said parenting was easy?!!!

For

By Anonymous

It is for me a question of cost benefit.

I can understand that one may be suspicious about what is really inside the syringe and that surely not every component is one hundred per cent safe, but people have been having vaccinations for many years and the amount of lives saved is tremendous, hardly comparable to the amount of people who have fallen ill due to a simple injection.

Should we renounce mammograms or MRI scans because they are not totally benign? Should you stop taking pills (as every single one may have a side effect)? Vaccination works: it saves lives for a risk which is closer to zero than any other treatment for the disease it serves to avoid. Although I can understand that one may refuse the 'flu jab' as it does not necessarily work, the main vaccines such as Tetanus or Meningitis for example are simply vital.

To the ones have not vaccinated "because most of the diseases you can be vaccinated against have disappeared", should I remind them that this is the case because most of us "take the risk" to be vaccinated? Should we all act like them, these diseases would reappear and they would suddenly be less keen on their no vaccination lifestyle...

Not against...

By Naomi Rivière

Why would you not vaccinate you child? This is the question I used to ask myself.

Now however I understand better why people suspect that we are being forced into vaccinating our children by various organizations but it does not change my general opinion that vaccinations are essential (I think)!

I have vaccinated both my children. My brother has not. We agree to disagree on this point never raising it in conversation perhaps because I used to think he was very irresponsible, perhaps more recently because

somewhere deep down I may be becoming more open to others' views on vaccination. I feel that he may be right not to vaccinate against everything but there are certain vaccinations that one would surely be mad not to agree to? Tetanus, for example, in view of the fact that so many children play with earth? Okay so there were only three recorded deaths in England and Wales in 2011 (what are the chances of it striking someone in your entourage in that case), but one of the mildest complications is kidney failure. Someone has to be one of those three...and how many cases would there had been had we not been vaccinated against it?

I had the swine 'flu jab when pregnant with my youngest son because my father in law who is a doctor told me that pregnant women have weakened immune systems and could die if they contracted this 'flu. Do I regret it? No, but I am convinced that I got swine 'flu anyway when my son was six months old so I do not think the vaccination served much purpose finally.

Personally, I do not mind what decisions I make for myself but I would feel guilty imposing them on my children. That said, if I were anti-vaccination I would be convinced that I were doing something noble NOT vaccinating them and have I not imposed the decision to inject them with products because I believe it is the right thing to do? As I end my response to the question 'To vaccinate or not vaccinate', I understand more than ever that I am neither for nor against, that I simply not against. When my son's friend contracted Meningitis at three however and I hear that she will be monitored for years to come in case it affects her in later years, I am reminded of the devastation any disease can cause to an individual and its entourage. When I remember that little girl my overwhelming desire as a mother to protect my children means that I lean towards any measure that will potentially prevent the possibility of my children ever succumbing to such illnesses. We read much about deaths from diseases. We read little about deaths from vaccination.

what's on in toulouse?

by Laura Fox

Horla(s) – Repas de Famille

Théâtre Le Vent des Signes

Contemporary Dance

17th october - 19th november
@ 20h30

Oxford Choir • Albi

Saint Collegiate Salvi,
Place Sainte Cécile
81000 Albi

8th November

Bruno Mars Concert

Zenith • Toulouse

http://eventful.com/toulouse/events/bruno-mars-/E0-001-056571296-8?lid=weg&utm_source=email&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=weg-v3

19th November

The Gingerbread Man

Théâtre du Chien Blanc

Shows in French and English

29th October
to 2nd November
@ 10h30 & 15h30

Les "Kid'kino" du mardi

Centre d'animation Saint-Simon

Two Tuesdays a month, a discovery session film is available for toddlers (18 months to 3 years and 3 to 6 years) and their parents, nannies and teachers. This session provides an introduction DVD gently around the projection of the wonders of animation cinema.

Other dates:

19 November • 3 & 17 December • 7 & 21 January • 4 & 18 February • 18 March • 1st & 15 April • 13 & 27 May • 3 June

5th November @ 10h

Pinocchio

Théâtre du Grand Rond

4th - 14th December @ 15h
Wednesdays and Saturdays

Marionnettissimo

International Animation Festival
www.marionnettissimo.com

19th - 24th November

Mamma Mia

Zenith • Toulouse

22nd - 23rd November

Toulouse Womens International Group (TWIG) Christmas Fair

Espace Boris Vian,
La Salvetat-Saint-Gilles

<http://www.twigsite.org/>

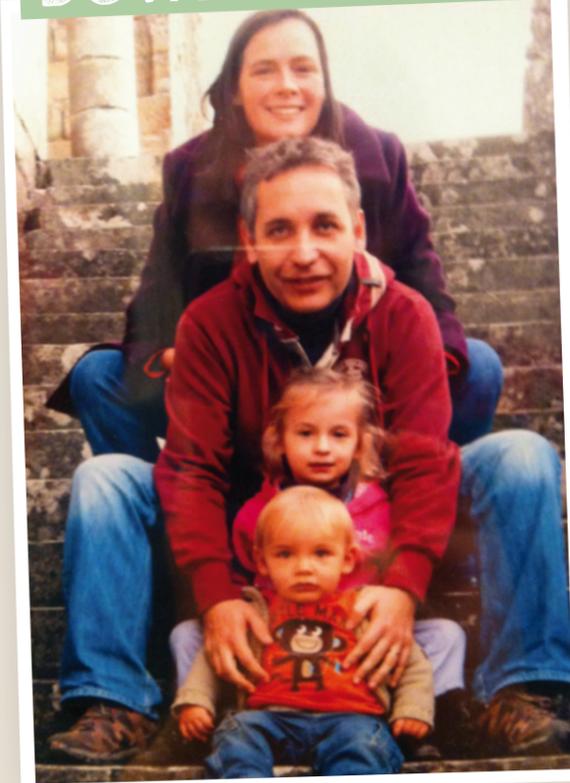
30th November
10h00-18h00

Festival Novelum

A varied mix of concerts, film and shows.
<http://www.studio-eole.com/index.php?category/Novelum>

5th - 26th November

MEET THE DOWNTRODDEN



Name: Christophe Tarral

Age: Confidential

Occupation: Project Manager

Children: 2, Sara aged 4 and Owen aged 2

Favourite things about France: The language, the wine, the bread, the food

Least favourite things about France: The long workday, the RER A

Ambition in life: My family

Favourite thing to say to partner: Laisse-moi dormir!

Favourite things to hear from partner: Daddy's home!

Hopes for retirement: The sooner the better.

Biggest regret: Not moving to Toulouse sooner

Glass half full or half empty: Half Full

Favourite position: Lying on the trampoline while my children bounce around me

Dream activity: Working for an NGO

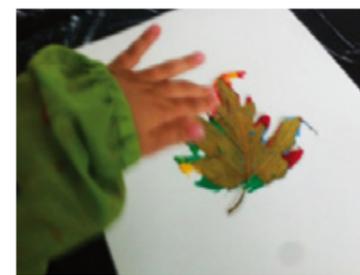
Secret Crush: Sophie Marceau

autumn



craft

By Marta Krajačević



MATERIALS

4-5 different size/ shape (dried and pressed) leaves

4 different colours of tempera

2 x A3 size white paper

1 stick glue

Collect leaves in different shapes and sizes, dry them and put them in a heavy book so they flatten. It works the best if you do that 2-3 days prior your craft.

On the desired day of the craft prepare all the materials and protect your table with the plastic cover. Place one white paper in the middle and take out your leaves. Also take a larger plate (depending on the size of the leaves) and put some tempera colours. Place each leaf in the plate and press down so it gets as much paint as possible. Then transfer the leaf to the paper and make a print. Again, make sure it's pressed well.

Next, put the leaf on the side to dry. Once you do all leaves like that, take another white paper and put some glue on. Take your coloured leaves and glue them on the paper. This way you get 2 crafts in one go.

FROM THE MOUTHS OF BABES

Oscar: "Mummy I love you even if you are killed"...?!?"

Arthur to Oscar: "One day the sun is going to go out and we are all going to die". Oscar cries.

Arthur: "It's true. You are going to die, to explode into little pieces and turn into dust"

Oscar to me: I miss you when I'm at school.

Me: "But I'm always in your heart...where's your heart"?

Oscar (thinking about a heart he made out of beads earlier): "In the salon".

'Look, Almi,' I say. 'We're behind a stripy police car. The gendarmerie!' Almi peers at the car in front of us. 'What can they do to you?' she asks. 'Well, they can arrest you. They can take you to the police station,' I say. 'Can they kill you?' she asks. 'NO!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Of course they can't! Nobody does that! Er, I mean, that's a very, very bad thing to do, Almi!' I say. Phew. Crikey. 'Can they tie ropes around you?' she asks. 'Nooooo!' I don't know what she's been watching on Cbeebies. 'Maybe they're looking for children who don't have their seatbelt on,' she offers, helpfully. Yes, that'd be about it.

INTRODUCING...

Almas Sehr Bhatti



How old are you?

I'm five years old. How old are you?

Tell us about one person in your family.

George. He doesn't like his friends in his playground at his school. (George is imaginary, says mum)

What makes you happy?

Er...flowers and hearts make me happy.

What food do you love eating?

Apples and strawberries

What book do you like reading?

Princess books

Can you sing us a song?

[She breaks into a Martha Tilston song as I've been listening to her CD a lot lately].

When you are not at school what do you do?

I like drawing pictures and skating. I have a cough when I'm not at school and it's a school day. When is it the school holidays?

Where was your last holiday?

It was in September, my last holiday. By the sea in the UK (it was actually in Corsica)

Do you have a favourite place or friend?

Both! They're like mainly angels in their body. They all look like caterpillars. Why do secrets turn into more secrets? You didn't hear me much, Mummy, so I talked louder. (ad infinitum, sigh)

IN THE SPOTLIGHT: NEW MEMBERS

Danielle Davidson



What brings you to Toulouse?

My husband applied for a position at Airbus Toulouse when we both got tired of the work-life imbalance in Bristol. We felt we would benefit from a new challenge; he wanted a more design focused role and I saw it as the perfect opportunity to fulfil a lifelong dream of living in France.

How long have you been here and for how long will you stay?

We arrived in October 2011 and currently have no plans to go home. As long as we are both happy here, we'll stay.

Tell us about your family

I am the middle of three girls and my husband in one of six so family life has always been busy and loud. We have a six month old daughter Mya who now contributes to the noise in our house. Family visit often and we travel back home regularly which has made the move easier. I actually think we see each other more often now than we did when we lived in Bristol!

What did you do before motherhood?

Back in the UK I worked as a doctor, plenty of unsociable hours and stress - good preparation for becoming a new mum! However, on arriving in Toulouse I took the opportunity to try something different and started up a small design business. I produce handmade wedding stationary and cards, a job which gave me some focus before we had Mya, but one that now fits in well with a new baby - I'm actually quite amazed at how much more efficient I've become!

What do you do in your free time?

I love to read and write and paint, and I try to keep fit. I am also partial to a girls' night out especially if it involves dancing in inappropriately high heels.

What are your favourite things about France?

We came out here hoping for more balance, more time together away from work and to be social which is exactly what we've found. The warmer weather means more time outside which I love. Plus the wine is better.

What do you miss about "home" and what noticeable differences do you find between France and your home country?

I occasionally miss the general ease of dealing with life in my own language. My French is pretty good now but there are times when I feel limited by my lack of fluency. In my head I'm thinking 'I'd give you what for, if only I knew how to say it in French...' The differences in culture and expression between the UK and France are so numerous that it sometimes feels like a never-ending challenge; but then I remind myself that's the reason we came.

Lesley-Jayne Desmeulles (known to all as LJ)



What brings you to Toulouse?

My husband, who is French, works for the French army and we have returned to the area after five years in Paris. This summer he took over as head of the regiment in Muret, which will be a challenging two years for him. It is only a two year posting, after which we will most likely return to the Paris area.

Tell us about your family

I have three boys. Cameron who is six and has just started CP, Thomas who is four and is in moyen section, both go to the local French school. My third is little Max who was born on 12th September this year. We are slowly getting used to having a new born and the sleepless nights that you so quickly forget about when the others sleep through anything!

What did you do before motherhood?

I am a Primary school teacher and although have

used to. I did however, belong to a mums netball club and I hear there is also one in the area, which I look forward to joining once my body has returned to semi normal!!

What are your favourite things about France?

I enjoy the weather, lifestyle and the wonderful international communities that I have been involved in, both here in Toulouse and in Paris.

What do you miss about "home" and what noticeable differences do you find between France and your home country?

I do miss a good supermarket and the fact that I can't pop home to see my family as easily as I could when I lived in the UK.

leave and intend to take my parental leave while in the Toulouse area. If we return to Paris I will then return to my job at the British school of Paris. I love my job and I am lucky to be able to continue working while living in France and spend quality time with my children.

How long have you been here and for how long will you stay?

I have lived in France since 2005 and now consider it my home.

What do you do in your free time?

In my free time I enjoy playing sport, although due to a young family I don't get to participate as often as I

airstream retro campsite

By Charley Sheffield

Going to the Belrepayre Airstream and Retro Campsite is like taking a step back in time. Tucked away in a secret location in the foothills of the Pyrenees near Mirepoix, this magical place is the first vintage trailer park of its type in Europe. Run by a British former circus clown and his French wife, the couple have amassed a collection of vintage aluminium Airstream caravans from the 40s, 50s, 60s and 70s and decked them out in period style. Each one is set in its own private garden and is available to rent on a self-catered basis.

Staying in a trailer rather than a tent for our summer holiday appealed to us, as any sleep-deprived parent of a nine-month-old baby will understand. Having both been conceived in the 70s we decided to stay in one of the largest trailers from that decade, the Starship, which also had a separate room we could put our son in. The owners of the campsite, Perry and Coline, keep the exact location of the campsite secret until you have confirmed your booking, which only adds to the magic of going there. Our home for the week came complete with orange flowery curtains and a padded silver interior that Ziggy Stardust himself would have adored. It even had an old 8-track player with cassettes too. We spent our first night tucked up in our trailer with the rain battering down on the roof listening to the futuristic sounds of Jean Michel Jarre.

Exploring the campsite the next day is a dream come true for vintage vehicle enthusiasts – there is everything from a red London Ticketmaster bus to Citroen 2CVs and with a 10% discount for people who turn up in their own vintage vehicle you can be sure to find someone willing to talk you through their painstaking restoration of their VW camper van or similar.

We went for a long walk in the beautiful countryside, through the campsite's own woodland, and then on to a nearby village, coming across a grass snake along the way. We picked blackberries and Perry and Coline let us have apples off their trees to make a crumble which we shared with the others on the campsite. It is such a friendly atmosphere that you get to know almost everyone on the site fairly quickly. This is helped along by the magnificent Apollo

Lounge, whose opening each evening is heralded by a classic 70's song played on loudspeaker to the entire site. Set in a big top circus tent, an enormous 32ft Airstream has been converted into a bar, diner and DJ booth. There is also a cinema screen with old footage from the Airstream company explaining how each trailer was made. Just around the corner there is a hot tub and spa inside a Mongolian yurt tent with regular visits from a masseuse if the excitement of it all gets

too much.

The place itself is magical enough, but the couple that runs it are just so welcoming and friendly it made our stay that much more enjoyable. They kept us all entertained with tales from their circus days, brought us fresh croissants and bread every morning and were always ready to stop for a chat or help out with the odd inevitable breakdown. Thoughtfully, and rather embarrassingly, Coline even went to the pharmacy to buy me

homeopathic sedatives for my son when he kept us awake for hours on end overnight. Overall they welcome children to the site, but be warned, you have to keep a close eye on them, as the old vehicles are not suitable to be used as climbing frames or hideaways. But they will love the site, love the trailers and, if you ask nicely, they will especially love the magic shows put on by Perry and Coline's son Coreo.

www.airstreameurope.com

a view from the top! the pic du midi

By Laura Fox

France has many beautiful and breathtaking places. The beaches, small villages, canals, lakes and mountains are all worth exploring. One place I have always wanted to visit was the Pic du Midi and “Boy was it magnificent”. On a clear, sunny day, we were able to see for miles.

The Pic du Midi (2,877m or 9,439ft) is a mountain in the French Pyrenees famous for its astronomical observatory began its construction 1878. The observatory is

located at 42°56'N 0°8'E, placing it very close to the Greenwich meridian.

We went for a weekend and stayed at a nice hotel, Carré Py' Hôtel, in Bagnères-de-Bigorre. From our hotel, the pic du midi was visible in the distance. The hotel was set along a babbling brook and within walking distance to the town where there is a spa and a few restaurants.

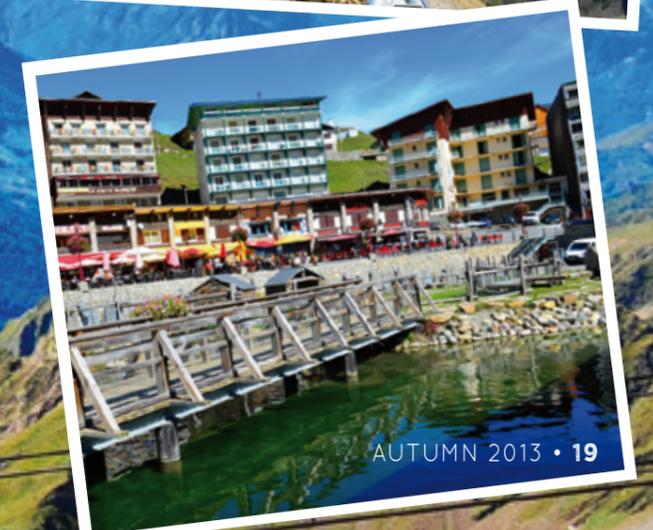
In the morning we drove the Col du Tourmalet, passing many cyclist braving

the famous Tour de France climb, to La Mongie. From there, we rode the double cable car to the observatory of the Pic du Midi. The views were perfectly picturesque. After soaking in the sun, views and relaxing in the chairs while my daughter (almost 4 years) played with some small toys she brought along. After returning to the foothills in La Mongie, we ate outside at a café where the views were still nice, the staff friendly and the food delicious.

It is important to visit on a clear day, otherwise you will be looking at clouds and through mist. The cable car is a little pricey, but luckily we had cheque vacances which are accepted for the cable car and several restaurants. At the top there is room to look around all sides, a small museum (we did not visit), gift shop, small restaurant (expensive and limited menu) and chairs to sit and relax. I recommend taking a picnic or snacks if you want to eat while at the observatory. Remember to pack a coat, hat, sunglasses and sunscreen. The cable car and Pic is open throughout the year.

Pic du Midi de Bigorre has a stunning panorama of the Pyrenees! I highly recommend visiting!

<http://www.picdumidi.com/>



Penny Dickinson



I first became a member of Tots & Co. after my daughter was born in August 2006! I can still remember my nervousness on my first visit to the hall but that soon disappeared with a lovely, warm welcome hello & chat from Gemma White (yes Gemma, one of my defining moments of motherhood). The Thursday baby group saved my life & together with the meets in the hall I soon got addicted to the drug of 'Tots & Co' I literally could not survive without a twice weekly fix. Not only did it help with overcoming baby brain, but the support network to help me get through the challenges of being a mother was invaluable. When the end of my maternity leave rolled around it was with great sadness that I went back to work (then at Airbus) & so I decided it was time to develop a plan to follow my dream - having a living time clock in front of me made me realise if I don't do it now I never will and so the seed was sown....

Before I knew it we were expecting number two and it was time to rediscover Tots & Co - with faces old and new and great local groups that were a fabulous addition, especially in the Gers. So what became of my dream? Well, after my son was born I took a 'Congé sabbatique création entreprise' and tried to fit

developing a business plan in around having two young children. Tots & Co again provided such a lifeline and a chance for my children & I to make friends - important for all of us to have that English speaking peer group, kids and parents alike! You might remember me from this period as someone who came to hassle you all for money or receipts as I had the dubious honour of being treasurer and ensuring we always had money for Carrefour Discount Jaffa cakes (no Friday morning was complete without a missed breakfast - for me I hasten to add, I did ensure the kids were always fed - and a catch up, cuppa & Jaffa cake in the kitchen of the hall.... aaaahhhh getting nostalgic...).

So plan in hand, after months of research on & offline, in the archives and round the streets of Toulouse with my son in a sling, the inaugural Toulouse Walking Tour took place in March 2010 when my son was one. The nerves and excitement gave way to excitement and the biggest adrenalin rush (short of that post partum moment when giving birth) ever! Tots & Co. enabled me to make the most of my life as a Mum and then I balanced that with the days when I'm an entrepreneur. The rest as they say history but Tots & Co. is firm part of mine!

See page 30 for a review of Penny's Walking Tours



THE OTHER SIDE



OF MUM



Laura Fox



What is your profession?

I am a Registered Dietitian (RD) and Registered Dietitian Nutritionist (RDN). I completed a bachelor's degree, a nine-month ACEND-accredited supervised practice program, passed the US national examination administered by the Commission on Dietetic Registration and complete ongoing continuing professional educational requirements. A Registered Dietitian is a food and nutrition expert who has met the minimum academic and professional requirements. The majority of RDs work in the treatment and prevention of disease (administering medical nutrition therapy, often part of medical teams), in hospitals, HMOs, private practice or other health-care facilities. In addition, a large number of RDs work in community and public health settings and academia and research. A growing number of RDs work in the food and nutrition industry, in business, journalism, sports nutrition, and corporate wellness programs.

What is the difference between a nutritionist and dietitian?

Every Registered Dietitian is a Nutritionist, but not every Nutritionist is a Registered Dietitian. Many states and countries have no regulatory standards to protect the title Nutritionist; therefore anyone could call themselves a Nutritionist. If you are taking advice from a Nutritionist, it is

recommended to ask about his/her education, training and experience.

Where did you work before moving to France?

I worked in an acute care hospital in Cincinnati, Ohio for five years. I specialized in working with patients with kidney failure on dialysis or with a transplant and also in the intensive care unit with patients on nutrition support (patients requiring intravenous nutrition or a feeding tube). At that facility, all of the dietitians were required to be able to cross cover consults on any of the patients in the 555-bed hospital. I have experience working with people in a vast number of acute illnesses. Prior to working in clinical care, I was a food service manager in an acute care and trauma hospital.

Why did you decide to be a stay at home mom?

I took three month maternity leave after I had my daughter and returned to work full-time. As a new mom, I would have preferred to work part-time, but this was not an option at the time. When my husband was offered a job in France, we could not pass on the opportunity to live abroad and we were financially sound enough that staying at home was an option. At the time, the decision for me to become a full-time stay at home mom was easy.

Have you thought about working in France?

I studied Spanish in school and upon arriving everyone laughed at the way I said "bonjour" and "merci". I continue to struggle with my French, therefore limiting my options. I have thought about working as a Dietitian with the English speaking population and even had several doctors ask me if they could send me referrals. I am not been "working" in the typical sense since we arrive in France, but have been putting my knowledge and love for books to good use. The last two years I

the adults who read to them, while also encouraging knowledge of variety of vegetables, nutritional facts and the desire to taste new ones.

What are your future career plans?

My hobby as an editor may one day lead me to a new career path, however I foresee myself returning to the clinical dietetics arena. I have a passion for helping others and working with other health care professionals in an interdisciplinary approach to medical therapy. I truly



Dietitians Coworkers at Hospital in Cincinnati, Ohio

spent helping a former coworker and friend write a nutrition related Children's book. I am excited to say that the book has been published, and I am more than just a TOTS newsletter editor!

enjoyed the challenge of working with the kidney failure and intensive care patients, although they are often some of the most frustrating clinical cases.

Tell us more about the book.

The book is called *ABC's the Veggie Way: Mai Lin's Garden Adventure* by Patti DeWitt MS, RD, LD. It is now available to purchase in the US in print and Kindle version. I am noted as one of the editors for the book. The book is about a young girl's journey through a colorful, vegetable garden. The book is fun and educational. It teaches the alphabet, colors, vegetables and nutrition information to children and adults. We wrote the book in hopes of capturing the attention of children and

For you, which do you prefer being a stay at home mom or working full time?

I find both equally challenging as well as rewarding! I would love to try part-time, as I feel it would be the balance that I would enjoy. I do not regret taking the time away from my career and spending the invaluable time with my daughter. I love being a mom! The things I miss most about working at my previous job are helping people, mental challenges that come with working the medical field and my wonderful coworkers who were my family away from home.



in defence of french tv

By Shazia Bhatti

I know, I know. You're over here, and you love the sunshine. You're raking in the benefits of your or your husband's generous employer. You've made friends. You've joined Tots and Co. You have your satellite TV and you can still watch Downton Abbey or X Factor whenever the need takes you.

But wait a minute. You do know you live in France, don't you?

If you're here to stay, you may have French grandchildren one day. You may want to build a career here. You may need to buy a house or talk to teachers at school or... or just get to know where you live. For that reason, I really recommend you

replace watching English TV with...French TV. Yes, save the BBC for the weekend. As a treat. When you snuggle up on the sofa with chocolate, wine

Here are some of the better points about French TV:

It's seriously earnest.

They debate, they discuss, they worry about it all.

and partner, try to soak up some of the culture of the place you live. French TV has a terrible reputation among expats, but you know, it's not

all bad. Here are some of the better points about French TV: It's seriously earnest. They debate, they discuss, they worry about it all. You can learn a lot about the books being read in France, the political debates being had and...sorry, you're yawning already. I'll try again.

They love France. So they have an awful lot of programmes about what's going on in France, in your local area too. They show local farmers, local gardeners, people practising alternative lifestyles, they show an awful lot of what there is to see and why – they really are quite connected with what is going on in France. It has a more ad hoc, low budget, on the ground quality than British TV – so it feels quite sincere, and quite



enthusiastic. It can really teach you a lot about what the French feel France is all about.

They import an awful lot of (crap) drama. And you can watch this all in French, with French subtitles. Swedish noir, Doctor Who, Sherlock, NCSI, etc etc. It is true that French TV does not have anywhere near as big a budget as British TV. So they import an awful lot and dub it. You can also choose to watch all this in the original language, but that kind of defeats the object. My mum once said she learned English through watching TV, and that was without subtitles. It really is worth it!

They import and make interesting documentaries. About all sorts. Andrew Marr's history of the world was on (with Andrew Marr helpfully cut out). Lots of documentaries about weird and wonderful places abroad. Again, you can learn

something new while improving your French. What's not to like?

They do godawful reality TV same as everyone else. This is not a draw for me, but hey... Fais Pas Çi, Fais Pas Ça! You can, in fact, watch French films on French TV too. That's how I got to learn who Jean Dujardin was before he won

the Oscar – in the hilarious OSS 117 films – as well as raking in the pleasure of watching Jean Reno in Les Visiteurs, a

laugh-out-loud funny time travel caper. But for a comedy serial that takes some beating, Fais Pas Çi, Fais Pas Ça is not to be missed. The ongoing comedy soap opera of two families who are quite frankly as insane as each other, it contrasts the stiffest most-proper very-French Lepic family and their longsuffering, rebellious children with the New Agey Bouley family, whose dad, Denis, works as a freelance life coach. The daughter goes out with the son of the Lepics... anyway, it has to be seen to be believed. It is extremely funny and if you watch one thing on French TV, I would recommend this. But they speak very fast, so stick your subtitles on if you're not fluent!

Not everyone can bring themselves to do it. But I urge you – take the plunge. We live in France and it can't do any harm. Can it?

AUTUMN RECIPES

PUMPKIN SOUP WITH COCONUT, CHILLI AND CURRY SPICES

Submitted By Charley Sheffield

1 pumpkin (the small ones you buy whole called potimarron), deseed and cut into chunks but don't peel • 1 potato, cut into chunks • 1 onion, sliced • 750ml chicken or vegetable stock • 200ml coconut milk • 2 cloves of garlic, chopped • 2 heaped tsps of curry powder • 1-2 small red chillis, sliced • olive oil

In a large saucepan fry and onions, chilli and garlic in the oil until soft. Add the pumpkin and potato and sprinkle with curry powder. Fry gently for a minute or so. Pour in the coconut milk and stock, cover and simmer gently until the potatoes and pumpkin are cooked (10 mins?). Allow the soup to cool and then blend until smooth and creamy.



RISOTTO WITH PUMPKIN

Submitted By Laura Fox

2 tablespoons Olive Oil • 1 tablespoon Medium Onion, diced • 250g pumpkin, peeled and cut into 2 cm

cubes • 2 cups Arborio Rice • 3 tablespoons Dry White Wine (Optional) • 6 cups Chicken Broth, heated • 1 sprig Fresh Rosemary, leaves removed and roughly chopped • 4 to 5 Dried Porcini Mushrooms, broken into pieces • 2 tablespoons Unsalted Butter • 3/4 cups Grated Parmesan Cheese • Salt And Freshly Ground Pepper

In a large saucepan over medium-high heat, heat olive oil. Sauté onion until soft, about 5 minutes. Add pumpkin and cook until softened, 6 to 8 minutes, stirring often. Add rice, stirring with a wooden spoon until each kernel is coated with oil. Add wine, if desired, and stir until combined.

Add 3 cups chicken broth, rosemary, and mushrooms to rice mixture. Bring to a boil, then reduce to a simmer, stirring frequently. As broth is absorbed, add more, 1/2 cup at a time, stirring frequently—you may not need to use all the broth. Cook until most of liquid has been absorbed and rice is slightly al dente, yet creamy and porridge-like, about 18 minutes. Add butter and 1/4 cup Parmesan and stir to combine. Season with salt and pepper and serve with remaining Parmesan.



PUMPKIN TIRAMISU

Submitted By Laura Fox

1 cup mascarpone cheese • 1 1/2 cups cold heavy cream • 3/4 cup confectioners' sugar • 5 tablespoons almond-flavored liqueur, such as Disaronno Originale • 15 ounces pure pumpkin puree • 2 ounces semisweet chocolate, roughly chopped • 1 tablespoon unsweetened cocoa powder, plus 1 1/2 teaspoons for dusting • 27 to 30 ladyfingers • 1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon, for dusting

In a large bowl, whisk mascarpone until smooth. Add 1 cup cream, confectioners' sugar, and 2 tablespoons liqueur; whisk until soft peaks form, 5 minutes. With a rubber spatula, fold in pumpkin puree until completely incorporated.

In a small microwave-safe bowl, combine chocolate and 1/4 cup cream. Microwave in 10-second increments, stirring each time, until chocolate is just melted. Stir until mixture is smooth. Transfer one third of the pumpkin mixture to a medium bowl and fold in chocolate mixture until combined. In a small bowl, whisk 1 tablespoon cocoa into 1/3 cup hot water; add 3 tablespoons liqueur.

Cover bottom of an 8-inch square baking dish with

ladyfingers (about 9). Liberally brush with cocoa mixture and top with half the pumpkin mixture. Add another layer of ladyfingers, brush with cocoa mixture, and top with all the pumpkin-chocolate mixture. Add a third layer of ladyfingers, brush with cocoa mixture, and top with remaining pumpkin mixture. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate 4 hours (or up to 3 days). To serve, combine 1 1/2 teaspoons cocoa powder and cinnamon in a small fine-mesh sieve and dust tiramisu.



PUMPKIN, LEEK AND SPINACH QUICHE

Submitted by Laura Fox

700g pumpkin, peeled and cut into 2cm cubes • Olive Oil Spray • 1 leek, pale section only, halved lengthways, washed, dried, thinly sliced crossways • 2 garlic cloves, crushed • 100g baby spinach leaves • 4 eggs • 2 egg whites • 1/4 cup skim milk • 1/3 cup fresh low-fat ricotta • 1/3 cup fresh basil leaves • Mixed salad leaves (optional), to serve

Preheat oven to 200°C. Line a large baking tray with non-stick baking paper. Place the pumpkin on the lined tray and spray with olive oil spray. Season with pepper. Bake in oven for 25 minutes or until golden.

Meanwhile, heat a large non-stick frying pan over medium heat. Spray lightly with olive oil spray to grease.



FOOD

Add the leek and cook, stirring occasionally, for 5 minutes or until soft. Add the garlic and cook, stirring, for 1 minute or until soft. Add the spinach and cook, stirring, for 3 minutes or until the spinach just wilts.

Line a 26 x 16cm (base measurement) slab pan with non-stick baking paper. Spread the pumpkin and leek mixture evenly over the base of the pan.

Whisk together the eggs, egg whites and milk in a jug. Pour egg mixture evenly over pumpkin and leek mixture. Sprinkle evenly with ricotta. Bake for 20 minutes or until puffed and golden. Sprinkle with the basil. Serve with mixed salad leaves, if desired.



PORK CHOPS WITH FRESH PEACHES AND BASIL

Submitted by Laura Fox

4 bone-in rib or center-cut chops (4 to 6 ounces each) • Salt and freshly ground black pepper • 3 tablespoon olive

oil • 4 peaches, pits removed, cut into slices • 3 teaspoons zest and 3 tablespoons fresh juice • 2 teaspoon sugar • 1 teaspoon salt • Pinch of dried red chili flakes • 4 cups fresh raw baby spinach • 1/4 cup fresh basil leaves, roughly chopped • 1 tablespoon butter

Season the pork chops generously with salt and pepper. Heat 1 tablespoon olive oil in a 12-inch skillet over a high heat until lightly smoking.

Add the pork chops and cook until first side is nicely browned, 4 to 6 minutes. Flip and continue to cook until the internal temperature registers 145°F on an instant read thermometer, about 3 minutes longer. Transfer to a plate and tent with foil. Do not wipe out skillet.

Lower heat to medium low and add the peaches, lemon zest, sugar, salt, and dried chili flakes. Stir gently until the peaches begin to soften but don't lose their shape, 2 to 3 minutes.

Divide the spinach between two plates and put the pork chops on top. Pour any juices from the plate back into the skillet and add butter and

lemon juice. Cook, scraping up any browned bits from the bottom of the pan and swirling pan until butter is melted and incorporated into the sauce. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Stir in half of basil. Divide the peaches between the two plates and then pour the pan juices on top and sprinkle with remaining basil. Serve immediately.



SPLIT PEA VEGETABLE SOUP

Submitted by Mirjan van der Wielen

2.5 litres of water • 500g pack of split peas (don't need soaking) • 500g pork loin/gammon steak (I usually only put in about 300g) • 1 or 2 carrots (depending on the season, 1 large winter carrot)

• 1/2 celery cut into cubes • 3 potatoes (medium sized to bind the soup) • 1 leek • 3 or 4 beef stock cubes

Put all of it together in a pan and cook on a low/medium heat for about 1 hour. Stir occasionally (I normally stir about every 15 minutes) to stop the peas from sticking to the bottom.



PUMPKIN SOUP

Submitted by Tracy Durville

1.5 kg pumpkin cubed • salt and pepper • 1 large or two small fresh garlic bulb crushed • olive oil • 1 diced onion • 1 level tsp nutmeg • 1 tblsp fresh parmesan • 750 ml chicken or veg stock (I use veg. bouillon) • 100ml (a big glug) cream • 2 tblsp creme fraiche

Cook onion & garlic in olive oil soften not brown - add pumpkin & cook for about 10mins to soften a little, add salt pepper and nutmeg whilst cooking pumpkin, then add the stock and cook for around 15 - 20 mins until pumpkin is soft - Don't be too fussy about the weight of the pumpkin, but make sure the stock only just covers the pumpkin, better to have some left over and add at the end, otherwise the soup can be a bit too liquid - I use a deep frying pan to cook mine. After pumpkin is cooked, whiz with a handheld food processor, then add the cream and the creme fraiche. To finish add a heaped tablespoon of parmesan, taste as you add because too much can overpower the pumpkin - I use ready grated from Lidl.

PROBLEM PAGE

Dear Agony Aunt,
Lately I have noticed my child is reluctant to go to school. He makes excuses, feigns illness and stubbornly says he doesn't want to go. He loved being in the maternal section last year. He is five years old. What can I do?

Yours, Worried

Dear Worried,
Oh dear, this sounds like a real pain. As our children begin to grow up a little, they move further away from us and they can begin to keep their own secrets. The first thing I would say, is that have you tried chatting to your child about this? Not by talking about it directly, as that would just lead to evasiveness, but by asking small questions at a fun time of day, say at bath time (if that's a fun time for you) and building up a picture of what is going on. The next thing I would say is that it is very much worth you meeting up with your child's form teacher at school. Your child may be worried about friendship groups, he may be being bullied, he may feel his new form teacher dislikes him. You really will need coordination and cooperation with the school to work this one out.

Good luck!

DO I CHUCK THE FAT CLOTHES OR DO I KEEP THEM?

By Anonymous

I never used to be over-weight. But then I moved to England, got married, had babies, gave up work, moved to France and lost my Dad. Gradually the weight crept on. I blamed it on so many things... stress, getting older, having babies, grief, slow metabolism and actually doing anything about it seemed such a daunting task that I tried not to think about it really.

Moving to Toulouse three years ago and no longer working gave me a lot of free time and so I started running. I had to start slowly as I couldn't run very far without feeling like I was dying. Once both my girls were in school I ran even more. Four times a week sometimes more and I felt fit



and healthy and happy-ish. I was annoyed that I wasn't getting lighter only heavier and I wasn't getting any faster either! How could this be?

Breaking point came for me when I went for a run with two friends who basically just left me in the dust. My one friend said, 'Shouldn't we wait for her?'. The other friend said, 'No, tough love!'

That really hurt. But it was the kick I needed to do something. So I spoke to my 'tough love' friend who has experience in coaching and fitness and has run a good few marathons and half marathons. I told her my dilemma how I wanted to be a better runner and that no matter how much more I ran, I wasn't getting any faster and I just couldn't shake my weight either.

She weighed me and worked out my BMI and we discussed my eating habits, etc. We agreed that if I lost some weight it should help with my running. I weighed a whopping 84.4kg. We agreed that losing 10kg was an achievable aim.

The most obvious reason why I was over-

weight was because I love my food and I hate diets. I felt that because I was doing so much exercise my body needed more food. I have never been any good at diets. They just frustrate me because I don't want to have to weigh my food or work out what a protein from a carbohydrate is. So given my feeling on diets, how the hell was I going to achieve my goal?

We made some very obvious changes. I swapped white bread, pasta and rice for brown/wholegrain. I increased the amount of water I drank in a day and I reduced my portion size by eating off a smaller plate. I tried to vary my diet too, eating more beans and lentils, peppers, etc. And the

weight started to shift. I also changed my exercise regime by continuing the running but by adding an hour and a half of boot camp once a week which gives me a proper overall workout.

Nine months on and I am delighted to say that not only did I achieve my goal of losing 10kgs, I actually bettered it by losing another 10kgs on top of that! I feel amazing. I am pleased that my changes were lifestyle changes and sustainable ones at that. I have never deprived myself. If I want chocolate or cake, I have it, but only half the amount I used to have!

I cannot thank my good friend, Sharon Ritchie, enough for all her help and advice. She helped me to believe that I could achieve my goal! Her boot camps have been instrumental in that too!

And now, back to that important question... do I chuck the fat clothes or do I keep them? I have decided to chuck most of them but I will keep a few just to remind me of what I have achieved!

Toulouse Walking Tours

Tour guide: Penny Dickinson

Reviewed by Naomi Rivière

For two hours I felt like a character in the fascinating story that is Toulouse...

I have lived in Toulouse for eleven years but I have never known the story behind so many of the main landmarks...and what a shame!

When Penny told me the reason behind some of the names of streets, landmarks and unveiled coats of arms visible across the centre of the city (that I had also somehow missed), the story unfurled before my mind's eye. I could see the capitouls, the huge barges on the river...the story came alive with Penny's incredible gift for imparting historical facts in a fascinating and interactive way and I began to recognize style and it was as if a code was revealing itself to me for the first time.

Penny is a natural guide, full of charisma and utterly charming. I think one would be hard pushed to find a better tour because she has the entire insider's knowledge. During the tour (and I had the miraculous luck of having her all to myself) she gave me ideas of where my guests could stay and have homemade jam in a charming B and B in the city, of good and affordable cafés where one can have savoury scones for lunch and she notices instantly when new shops appear. Not a thing

goes unnoticed so clued up she is on her city. We have been in Toulouse for an equal amount of time but her knowledge of "la ville rose" knows no competition. Of that I am certain! She is passionate about Toulouse and at the end of her tour I decided to go on the next tour as soon as I can, send my French husband on the first and do everything I can to stay in this region!

I can not believe that so few people know Toulouse because it is a pearl and steeped in a fascinating history that thanks to Penny we all have access to. Thank you, Penny! I really enjoyed my walk and seeing my city in a whole new light! AND mid walk I had a real cup of English tea and homemade cakes in a very distinctive Toulousaine form...delicious!

<http://www.toulousewalkingtours.com>



Oi Stop Eating the Roses!

Written by Emma Mountcastle and illustrated by Deborah Preston

Reviewed by Melanie Norwood

I bought this book for my eldest son Nathan, aged 5 at the time, almost two years ago. You ought to have seen his face when he first saw his photo in the book! It makes a

fantastic present, so if you are stuck for Christmas gift ideas read on....

Oi Stop Eating the Roses is a beautifully illustrated hard back book featuring your child or that of somebody you know. It is a story about a dragon named Desmond, who has lost his voice and how your child helps him to find it again. There is a girly pink cover for the little princesses and a green one with Desmond the Dragon for the little princes.

It is also very different to all the mass-produced so called 'personalised' books currently available. Each book is truly individual and personalised to your requirements. To enable Emma and Deborah to do this, a list of questions need to be answered by you after you have placed your order. As well as the usual name, town, siblings, pets etc, they ask about Daddy's favourite sports team, favourite toys, favourite thing to do with Mummy, favourite dinner and more. Do not worry if you can not answer them all, as where you have not answered they will come up with something original instead. Once they have received this, they will email back and ask a few more questions about your child based on the answers you have given. They also ask you to email a photo of him or her. If you have any specific requirements, for example it is for twins they will incorporate that too.

The story is then written entwining this information

and lovingly printed and put together by them in the county of Devon, UK. Yes, you did hear me correctly, I did say "Made in Britain". Even in early December it only takes about a week or so from order to shipment. The book costs £19 plus plus £4 delivery to France (Free to UK addresses). Whilst this is more expensive than many personalised books, I guarantee you this book is truly a work of art and you will not be disappointed.

For further information check out their website and see for yourself.

www.snapdragon-books.co.uk



Usborne "One hundred Illustrated Stories"

Reviewed by Naomi Rivière

This is a classic story chest. A thick handleable hardback book with attractive and colourful fairy tale style front cover, it is an extremely satisfying object to own. My sons could not believe how heavy it was and argue over whose turn it is to choose a story from within. It has become a precious book for shared reading.

The stories include classics such as: "The Emperor's New Clothes" and "Rumples-

tiltskin" but also lesser known tales: "The Wild Swans", "Brer Rabbit and the Briar Patch" and "Why the sea is salty". The content ranges from folk tales (Norway, China, Ireland) and fairy tales (Grimm, Anderson) to Greek Myths and Arthurian legends. Everything you wish to read to your children is in here and everything you did not know you wanted to read to your children is also within.

The type face is quite big and never alters and the stories span from two pages for tales such as "The Milkmaid" and ten for "Baba Yaga". Each story is however illustrated by a different person which lends a different tone to each reading.

I discover new stories each time we sit and read together as a family and it is enriching the children's knowledge of traditional stories not only from their own countries but also from those that they are yet to encounter.

A brilliant purchase!



Press Here by Hervé Tullet

Reviewed by Laura Fox

When I travel to the US, one of my favorite places to visit is a small children's bookstore in

our old neighborhood. I was particularly excited to visit this summer as my daughter and I need a new fun book to read. I searched for something new and unique, but did not find anything that caught both of our attention. Surprisingly, my eight year old niece had already picked out a new book for my four year old daughter, which met all my expectations and more.

Press Here is a simple yet magical book. The book is composed of a story of dots in primary colors. Follow the instructions, press, rub, clap, shake, tilt and turn the page and see what happens along with your child's face light up.

The book itself is a perfect size made of stiff cardboard cover and sturdy pages, but not as thick as board book. It will not get worn out after countless reading and interaction. The children are learning fine motor control, counting, colors and following direction while being entertained.

There are no memorable characters, beautiful artwork or compelling plot, yet I was surprised how engaged I became reading the book.

I have loved this book for the past month and as I sit down to write a review on it, I realize the author has a French name, Hervé Tullet. I quickly ran to the internet to look it up and sure enough, this book was originally published in France in 2010. French title *Un Livre*. Now it is an international best seller and has won countless awards.



out with indoor soft play parties?!

By Naomi Rivière

I turned up at the required 4.30pm. Outside the building were a lot of excited children.

Inside it was worse. The very friendly staff were doing their utmost to make sure the right children were registered for the right party, taking parents' permission cards and names etc. Once the children were registered they were each given the basketball style vest that corresponded to their party. My

two boys were struggling to get into their orange ones, visibly stressed by the crowd pushing them into a corner. The noise was incredible. Suddenly a whole hoard of pink vests were allowed into the play area and the effect was that of a long fluorescent ribbon streaming past.

"Move back...everyone make room please"! I had an inkling of what was to come.

Once inside we were shown to a table with bottles of syrup on it and paper plates. Next door was an identical table, and beyond that another...oh, and another...in fact it was a canteen of birthday tables with "Joyeux Anniversaire" hanging above each one so that everyone could celebrate their birthdays at once in unison (except believe me it was anything but as I will inform you

later)!

There was something bleak about the inevitable waiting to happen. All those babies born in all those clinics possibly the same year, possibly not...they would have to have had identity bracelets in this place lest they would all just merge into one mass of birthday boys and girls.

"I thought it may have been in her contract to make a certain number of expressions per half hour it seemed so artificial."

"Put your presents in the basket" said the "animatrice". "The right for the birthday girl and

the left for the birthday boy (I was at the party of a brother and sister born on exactly the same day two years apart: this play centre were loving the fact. Cloning: it seemed to be what place was all about). Next, we were informed of the rules, what to do, what not to do, then left to our devices. I would have been able to leave my three year old there. For the price of the party I imagined that it would be well supervised. I could not have been more wrong: it is simply a public place with birthday parties incorporated into that space and the "animatrice" disappeared to reappear twice only and to make silly faces at the birthday boy and girl at tea time. I thought it may have been in her contract to make a certain number of expressions per half hour it seemed so artificial. She

did it to one birthday boy or girl at one table then moved on to do the same thing to every table in the room.

Had I left my child I would only have been sure that he would not have escaped as the doors at reception are locked but nobody would have taken him to the loo (which anyway I would have been horrified to have learned had that been the case) and had he fallen, nobody would have known where to take him nor to whom he belonged. He was wearing orange so they may have found the host eventually I imagine (as the parents of the birthday children are obliged to stay) but it would have been ridiculous to have left without him. Regardless of this fact, everyone leaves their five year olds and nobody bats an eyelid.

The children all ran off to play. I chatted to other parents who had stayed for the same reasons as mine and I felt reassured that I was not just another paranoid clingy mother. Tea time came and the children sat red-faced and thirsty waiting to be served drinks (well I hope I served them drinks because the colour of the "syrop" made me wonder: bright green and red mouthwash seemed more likely as to their use.

"Arthur's mummy gave me green. I wanted RED" said one little boy in my son's year. I wanted to pour the green on his head as I wondered where the "animatrice" had got to. After all, she was being paid to work here. I was doling out fourteen drinks for free.

"How do you think they cope working here full time"? I asked another mother.

"...by taking ample doses of paracetomal" was her reply.

Finally someone came to the table with a cake. I thought it looked suspiciously like all the others that were being walked across the room at the same moment. Oh, they were. Cloning. Of course.

One of the children started to look a bit odd. He had a tummy ache and was on the verge of tears. I could not blame him. It was hot, it was noisy and a cacophony

of "Joyeux Anniversaire" and "On a faim (we are hungry)"! started to ring out round the vaulted room. A phone call later and his father turned up to take him home. I wished suddenly that someone would hold me tightly and whisk me out of the room too. Present time came. The mother was busy photographing her daughter opening her presents. The book I spent forty-five minutes choosing slid into the mound of wrapping paper behind the birthday girl's throne, discarded in one fail swoop. She opened present after present. Nobody was thanked and like an idiot, I asked the parents if they were noting who gave what as all the names were on the wrapping paper.

"No"! Laughed the mother and shrugged her shoulder as expensive Playmobil and Lego sets stacked up on the birthday boy's side of the table. One invitee meanwhile had started to unwrap the present his father had brought for him to give to the birthday boy. It was a fascinating study in human nature. What were we doing to these poor children? My eldest son started to chat to the birthday

boy about his presents but was quickly drowned out as more paper was ripped off. Ten presents must have been opened in a record four minutes. I thought about all the effort that had gone into choosing the gifts and realized later that culturally France and England are a pole apart in terms of thanking people for gifts. I felt foolish for having suggested that the parents note who gave what as thank you letters are not the done thing here. My childhood was spent writing thank you letters. Doing so is ingrained in me. I can not imagine the freedom French children have in not having to sit down on Boxing Day with note paper and write to Uncle John and thank him for the "lovely present that will be so useful"...on the other hand I find it respectful and something within me is annoyed that I will not get acknowledged for the books I so carefully chose Birthday boy and girl. It all seems to add to the horror of consumerism that I felt in this play area yesterday.

By 6pm I had had enough. There was a music festival in my village. The sun was shining. I wanted to expose my boys to jazz as an antidote to their mass produced party afternoon. We all left as soon as the automatic doors would let us out. The eldest (who incidentally has never eaten that many sweets in his life so was probably very happy) still stated with a plaintive note in his voice: "Mummy, it was a bit loud"...and unlike play places outside where there are also assault courses and animals and places to picnic he has not once asked me to go

back to the party which he usually does after so much "fun". It struck me as engineered and artificial and I was reminded of the concept of headless chickens whilst watching the children career into each other. One got winded and one got 'arm burn' on one of the rubber slides. It was chaos.

At the jazz festival, back in fresh air in a park, I watched my youngest son dance with pure glee to "my hat it has three corners" and my eldest make a bracelet out of Ivy leaves. Afterwards when as a family we walked along the river, my five year old and three year old picking up sticks and running across the open land I thought about something a mother at the party had said: "We come to this play place when it is too cold to come out". When is it ever too cold to go out? We live near the Pyrenees. Most people are used to the "grand froid" and it is a dry sort of cold here. Surely if you put on a thick jumper and coat, scarf hat and gloves you can take your child out in the winter? What would the Scandinavians say? They put their children outside in their prams to nap whatever the weather.

A friend came round today and asked my boys to her children's birthday party. I am not sure we are ready for yet another mass-produced birthday party so I took the plunge and said we would love to come...if it was not in the indoor play factory!

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"It was a fascinating study in human nature. What were we doing to these poor children?"

"I was reminded of the concept of headless chickens whilst watching the children career into each other."



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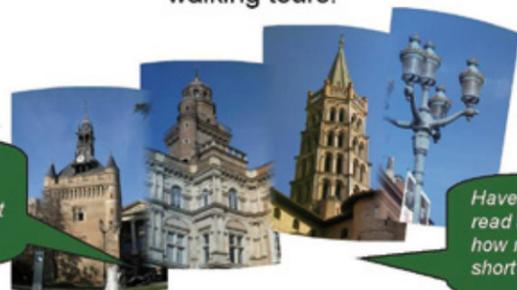
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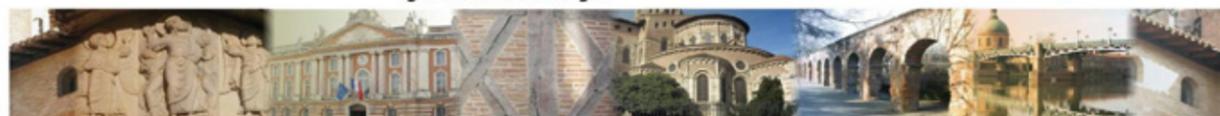
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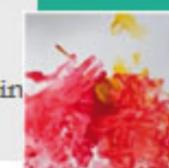
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