

# TIME OUT IN THE SOUTH

*Life and Parenting in South West France*

*Summer 2013*

## *Travel Special*

*Learning to swim, staying safe*

**THE DEBATE...**

**French  
schooling**

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Summer is here! And with it, another edition of Time Out in the South! And a very interesting edition this promises to be, with tips on the best summer breaks, some new recipes, reviews and of course, the debate on school systems!

On Tots & Co. news, such a lot has happened since the spring edition, it's hard to know where to start! The Spring Fair on April 6<sup>th</sup> was an incredible success, with over €3000 raised for Association Dominique. For those of you who missed it, the fair was a great family day out, with lots of interesting stalls from local talents, and lots to do to keep the children entertained. I'd like to take this opportunity to once again thank everyone involved, we couldn't have done it without you, and we're looking forward to doing it all again next year!

Another important event was the "night away". You'll be reading more about this in the magazine, so I'll keep it brief. Those of us who participated had a wonderful time, we met a lovely talented woman

who made us feel thoroughly spoiled in her lovely home, and even managed to amaze some of us by bringing out a creative side we didn't know we had. My only regret is that so few of us were able to take advantage of the opportunity, and I would like to encourage you all to bear it in mind for next year – it's not just for committee members, it's for everyone, and it's a great chance to get to know people better, to take your mind off your daily routines, and to allow your partners to show how they can step up for a weekend and spend some quality time with the children.

Sports Day was a big event for the older children, and it was a great success. The kids club team with Marie and Helen did a fabulous job organising it, the sun came out and shone for us, and some wonderful memories were made. The day brought back some wonderful memories of my own childhood and I felt very lucky to be able to offer something like this to my daughter (sports days are now forbidden in the local park where I grew up, supposedly for insurance reasons). The children had a great time with an egg and spoon relay, a sack relay, a dressing up relay, a 3 legged race, and a 3 legged parent's race! Check out the website to see it for yourselves. Speaking of the website, if you have any photographs taken during tots events that you wouldn't mind sharing, please send them to Priscilla, our webmaster for publication.

On sadder news, there will be a few changes to the organisation

next year. As our children grow older, their needs change, and we must adapt. Sophie TSUI, who has been a member of the Tots & Co. committee for four years now, is stepping down, and will be greatly missed. Melanie Norwood, our musical bumps and birthday Friday coordinator will also be stepping down, as will Sarah Higgs and Abigail Rice of the craft team, and Carol Bliault and Jackie Alcock of the musical bumps team. Joanne Nixon will no longer be looking after the library. Some of our local leaders will be stepping down as well, although they'll continue to participate in local events. Helen Wiles, our kids club teacher will also be leaving us. Helen has done wonderful work with kids club, and she will be sorely missed. Thank you all very much for donating so much of your time and energy to Tots & Co. and for the joy you have brought to our children. On a more positive note, this means that new people will be stepping up to take their places, for which we are all very grateful. But more on this later. For the moment, I'd like to wish you all very happy holidays, and I hope to see you over the summer at some of our summer meets, the details of which you will find in the magazine.

Catherine x





# KIDS' CLUB LEADER WANTED

Kids' Club provides school-aged children from Tots & Co with the opportunity to meet up, have fun and learn in an English-speaking environment. Kids Club is currently organised into two groups: ages 3-5, and ages 5+.

Sessions last 90 minutes and are held once a month in a community centre near Lardenne.

We are currently looking for a trained and experienced leader to run the 3-5 age group. The successful candidate will need to plan, prepare and present a 90 minute session that creates a positive, fun and interactive learning environment for between 15 and 25 children. Volunteers will be on hand should help be required for certain activities. We are also very open to occasional day trips / outings to visit places of interest or take part in certain activities.

The successful candidate will have the following skills/capabilities:

### Essential

- Native English speaker
- Experience of teaching/working with children in a learning environment
- Positive, enthusiastic and able to motivate children
- Creative and resourceful
- Must have own transport

### Desirable

- Primary teaching qualification

Pay: negotiable

### The Kids' Club Vision:

To provide age-focused, Anglophone-cultural, educational activities for primary-school-age children in a fun, structured, English-speaking environment

Please send CV and a short covering letter as soon as possible to Catherine TARRAL at: [catherine.tots@gmail.com](mailto:catherine.tots@gmail.com)

## Who's who in Tots and Co?

### Committee members

Catherine Tarral: President

Tracy Moxey: Treasurer

Gemma Lloyd: Vice president and database administrator

Becky Coles: Secretary and Centre Sept coordinator

Mirjan van der Wielen: New members coordinator

Priscilla Deegan: Website coordinator

Sue Schneider and Emily Solans: Joint Kids' Club coordinators

Jackie Alcock: Pregnancy and new mums coordinator

Laura Fox, Naomi Rivière, Sohani Crockett and Shazia Bhatti: Magazine team

Adele Claux: Vice-secretary and Night out coordinator

## Lots & Co Summer Meets Calendar 2013

Thank you to those who have volunteered to host a summer meet. Full details about each of the meets will be circulated via email & facebook nearer the dates.

Please don't think that this calendar is the only opportunity to catch up in the next couple of months - if any individuals or local groups would like to host a meet up at any other time (day or evening) please contact me at [chodges.tots@gmail.com](mailto:chodges.tots@gmail.com) I will then arrange for details to be circulated.

Looking forward to a busy & fun summer.

Claire Hodges (& Jacob)



Date	Event	Address	Host
Tuesday 9 <sup>th</sup> July	Walk around the lake & a picnic	Sainte-Foy-d'Aigrefeuille	Sophie Tsui
Friday 12 <sup>th</sup> July	Park & ice cream	Minimes	Tracy Moxey
Tuesday 16 <sup>th</sup> July	Swimming & play in the garden	Beauzelle	Vikki Bordes-Carter
Friday 19 <sup>th</sup> July	AnimaParc	31330 Burgaud	Elaine Fell
Tuesday 23 <sup>rd</sup> July	Picnic in the garden	Minimes	Jennie Taylor
Friday 26 <sup>th</sup> July	Colomier pool or Plaisance park	Colomier/ Plaisance	Laura Fox
Tuesday 30 <sup>th</sup> July	Play in the garden	Tournefeuille	Celia Green
Friday 2 <sup>nd</sup> August	Trip to the park	Blagnac	Becky Camwell
Tuesday 6 <sup>th</sup> August	La Ramée	Tournefeuille	Becky Coles
Friday 9 <sup>th</sup> August	Park & a picnic	Sept Deniers	Mirjan Van der Wielen
Tuesday 13 <sup>th</sup> August	Plaisance Zoo	Plaisance Du Touch	Gemma Lloyd
Friday 16 <sup>th</sup> August	Tournefeuille outdoor pool	Tournefeuille	Charley Sheffield
Tuesday 20 <sup>th</sup> August	Swimming & play in the garden	Tournefeuille	Marcella Wood
Friday 23 <sup>rd</sup> August	Party Picnic (Cakes, Jelly, Ice Cream and party games in the garden)	Plaisance Du Touch	Gemma Lloyd
Tuesday 27 <sup>th</sup> August	Play in the garden	Tournefeuille	Celia Green
Friday 30 <sup>th</sup> August	Play & picnic in Foret Du Bouconne	Mondonville	Lara-Jane Dennis



# On your marks, get set, go!

Kids' Club sports Day by *Laura Fox*

**W**ednesday the 5<sup>th</sup> of June marked this year's annual Kids' Club Sports Day. Nearly fifty children, along with parents, came out for a fun day in the sun. Helen, Marie and the Kids' Club coordinators did an amazing job putting together a friendly day of competition. The event was held at Stade Arnaune

in Toulouse. Games and races included egg and spoon, dress up, bean bag, potato sack and everyone's favorite, the three-legged race. Teams red, green, blue and yellow all came out and gave it everything. The day was full of smiles, laughs and lots cheering. Even the parents gave it a go with the three-legged race. All participants received a trophy and the winning team members

each got a medal. A thank you and farewell was presented to Helen Wiles for her hard work and leadership with kids club as she is moving back to the UK later this year. The event ended with a picnic at the stadium. The feeling of summer was definitely in the air. Another successful Tots and Co event! Stay tuned to your email for upcoming summer activities. •

*The day was full of smiles, laughs and lots cheering. Even the parents gave it a go with the three-legged race.*

## What's on in and around Toulouse this summer?

By *Laura Fox*

28-30 June  
Mossiac Festival of the Voices-  
Mossiac  
<http://moissac-culture.fr/>

1-7 July  
Festival Tangopostale- Toulouse  
<http://www.tangopostale.com/fr/>

2-6 July  
Summer Festival of Dance- Tarbes  
<http://www.arts65.com/>

2-10 July  
Jazz in Montauban- Tarn et  
Garonne  
<http://www.jazzmontauban.com/en/concerts/jazz-montauban-cl.html>

6-7 July  
Festi fDrôle- Simorre  
<http://festidrole.wix.com/festidrole>  
05 62 65 37 29

12-15 July  
Jazz a Luz Luz-Saint-Sauveur  
<http://festivaljazzaluz.ouvaton.org/>

13 July- 2 September  
Toulouse Plages- Toulouse  
<http://www.citizenkid.com/sortie/toulouse-plages-2012-a1021764>

16 July- 9 August  
Toulouse d'ete- Toulouse  
<http://toulousedete.org/>

19-20 July  
Roots'Ergue Reggae Musical  
Festival- Aveyron  
<http://www.soft2rootsergue.com/>

30-31 August  
Nights of Fire, Pyrotechnic Display-  
Gers



## Lots and Co Night away

by Adele Claux

Ever since I became a member, the Tots & Co. Night Away has always seemed so tempting. And yet, for three years I always managed to find an excuse for not going. Well, this year being four months pregnant I realised I'll probably have the best excuse yet not to go in 2014. Nothing was going to stop me this time (not even my husband missing the last plane back from Paris the night before).

This year, six of us made it to Frances' 'Maison de Maitre' in the foothills of the Pyrenees. We were all so keen to get away from it all the we quickly changed the original plan of arriving after lunch to arrive in time for lunch – a lovely light lunch laid on by Frances. (The original plan of leaving after breakfast on the Sunday also got postponed for as long as the stay-at-home Dads could cope).

Catherine, Priscilla and Becky creatively opted for the pottery which they started after lunch. That seemed a little bit like hard work to me. As the weather was mild and dry, if not sunny, Sophie, Mirjan and I took off for a walk through the lush and muddy countryside with the ruined castle at Montespan our destination. After an hour and a half round trip, we'd managed to put the world to rights, as well as getting a sneak peak of the Pic du Midi through the clouds from



the hill on which the ruins stand. We also were lucky enough to stumble across a poster promoting a Medieval festival in the village the very next day.

Back in time for afternoon tea, whilst the potters kept pottering, the three of us settled down in the lounge to read. Well, do you honestly think three Mums can sit in the same room and read quietly? Nevermind, Frances has plenty of rooms so we soon all went our separate ways so that we could really make the most of the peace and quiet for reading, pampering and all the tranquil activities that

we usually just dream about doing these days. From time to time, we'd fill our free time in by going to inspect the work of our budding artists keen to try out all the new ideas the Frances had shown them. They finally came in just in time for pre-dinner drinks.

The entire evening was then spent around the dining table. What bliss to be served upon and not have to clear up afterwards (although one or two members were caught tidying - it would take a lot more than one night away to break some habits). After a peaceful afternoon, dinner was great fun and even

after the last course and the coffee and tea had been taken away we had plenty to chat about and learn about one another. Of course, I wouldn't dare to divulge names here – you would have needed to be present to know whose passion for New Kids on the Block just keeps growing after 20 years, who cries watching Walker Texas Ranger on the telly and who had an African adventure with a bison.

One of my favourite parts of the weekend was going to bed knowing I'd be able to get up whenever I wanted. Out of habit, I was awake by seven but lay in bed for a luxurious hour reading until the thought of a cup of coffee finally got me on my feet. Breakfast was as leisurely as the meals before it, and also as chatty. Then it was "back to work" for some to finish work on their pottery whilst the others just pottered around enjoying the peace and quiet of the house. It was hard for us to drag away the girls from the pottery - I think they would have loved to stay on for a week long holiday course – but some of us had to get home and some of us had to get to the medieval festival in time for lunch. So, those of us that could drove up to Montespan and wandered around the festival before finding a bargain three-course meal with wine for 10 euros.

At the time, and looking back, I just remember how tranquil the whole weekend was. And yet, writing this I just realised that we also seemed to spend the weekend chatting and laughing non-stop. I guess it really is amazing the effect that not having to look after anyone but yourself can have on you. Maybe next year, I will manage to find a good excuse to go after all. •

Goodbye  
Tiddlers,  
from  
Naomi.....



"Having run Tiddlers for two years I have decided it is time to move on. Why? I rarely have a car and I seldom get to Leguevin so I hardly meet or see any of our members and my youngest son Oscar will start school in September so will not be a member of Tiddlers anymore. To be a coordinator you really need to know who you are talking to! It has been a real pleasure organizing meets and meeting the new members of Tots and Co but I am very happy to pass on my role to Claire Hodges. Claire surprisingly (considering how involved she is with Tots and Co) has only been here a few months! She already knows many of us, is a very familiar face therefore and with Jacob I know she will bring fresh ideas and motivation to the group. Welcome Claire and Jacob and thank you to all my loyal Tiddlers and Goodbye from me. I wish you all the best in the future and it has been a pleasure to chat to you as often as I have. You are more than welcome to pop round any time and continue to send me social mails of course but all responsibility for the group will now go to dear Claire...with many thanks to you all!"

Hello Claire, new  
Tiddler's coordinator

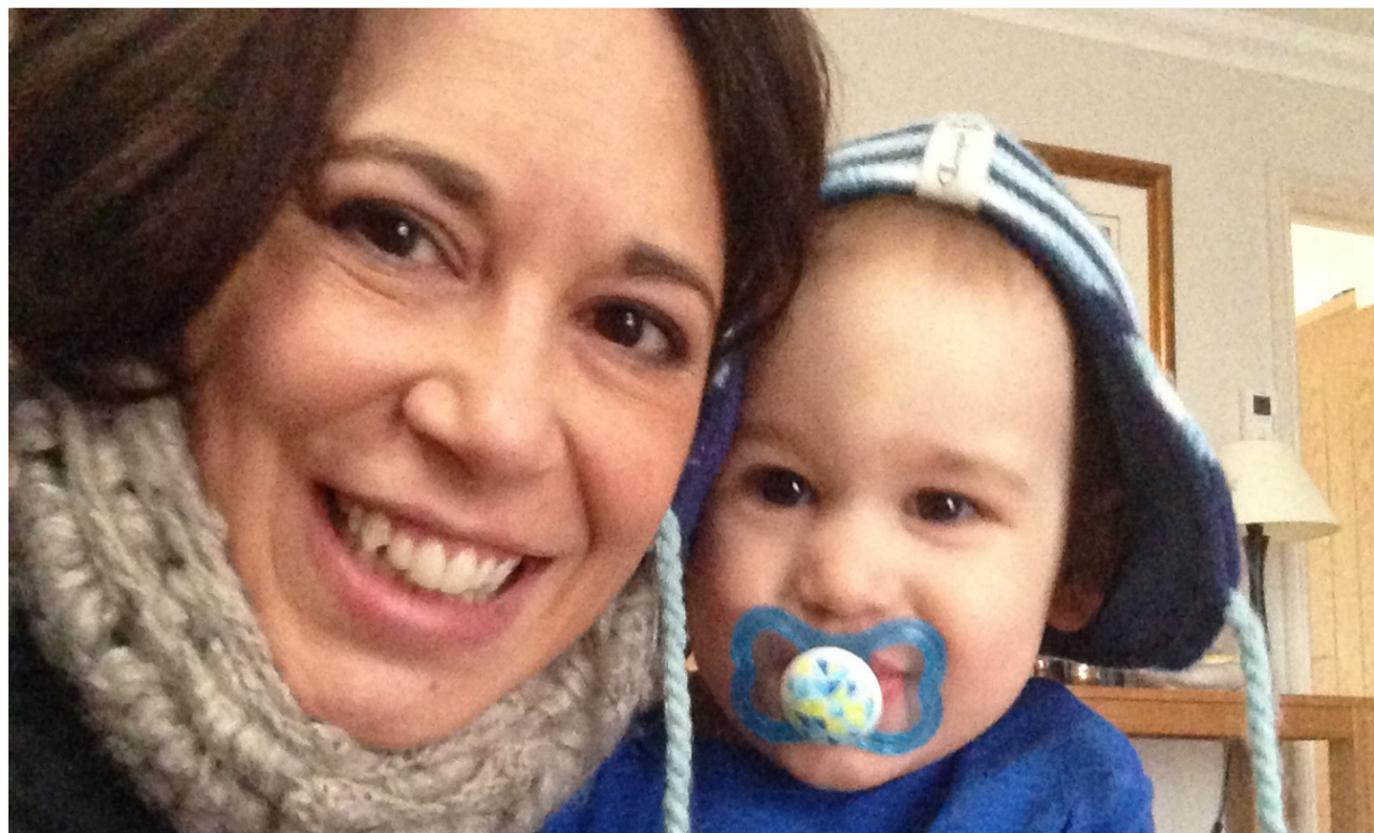


"Hello, I'm Claire and from September I will be the co-ordinator of Tiddlers & a new group called Toddlers. Having done a wonderful job of organising Tiddlers, Naomi is stepping down from the role as both her boys will be at school.

I joined Tots & Co in February 2013 & since then have attended as many day (& evening!) activities as possible. I'm very grateful to everyone who helps run the different groups as they have made moving to Toulouse a happy experience for both myself & Jacob. I plan on continuing to organise Tiddlers for those children that can't walk steadily yet (so approx. new born to 15months). However, having an excitable & boisterous two year old who loves being with other children I would also like to run a second group called Toddlers (I know, not a very inventive name!) for children that can walk up to about 3 years of age. Both groups will meet separately on Thursday mornings (usually between 9:30 & 11:30) at a volunteers house but once every couple of months we will all meet together either at someone's house or a park if the weather is good. If you would like to join either the Tiddlers or Toddlers email list then please contact me at [chodges.tots@gmail.com](mailto:chodges.tots@gmail.com).

# In the Spotlight

Each issue we catch up with our members -  
Here we speak to Charley, Katy and Ines



## Marcella Pizzo Wood

### What brings you to Toulouse?

It was long time in the making with both my husband Graham and I working for Airbus.

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

After 6 months of commuting, Daniel and I joined my husband Graham by end of April with the intention to stay for the long run. Only time will tell.

### Tell us about your family

Daniel is our only son and has just turned two, showing all the signs of the "terrible twos" and an addition to Cars and the Muppet show!

### What did you do before motherhood?

I have been working as an engineer in Airbus since leaving university, initially with the intention to go back to Italy, but then I met Graham and, as I usually say, "got

stuck in Bristol". With the move to Toulouse, I have taken some time off to spend with Daniel, learn the language and enjoy the French summer... I am hoping in some improvement soon in the weather as so far we are missing the U.K! I will go back to work and start a new role in September.

### What do you do in your free time?

Lately we have had not a lot of free time as we have been planning our move to France and working full

time. It is nice to have sometime to spend with Daniel in the week and with both the boys at the weekend. We like the outdoors and just enjoy time together. I like cooking and just socializing with people. I am the sort of person that needs to be doing something in the day, that is my way of relaxing.

### What are your favourite things about France?

Unfortunately, I love the bread and the cheese. I must have already tried in a month all the bread variety in the bakery, but I am only at the tip of the iceberg with cheeses. France makes me remember that I am back on the continent as it is very similar to Italy. However these days I feel probably more British than ever!

Definitely not on my good books is the amount of red tape and bureaucracy you have to go through. And nobody seems to know the right process!

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

I'm excited to be in Toulouse. I have been here for work many times and it feels very familiar. So it has not been such a shock. And we have been here probably too little to really miss the U.K. Of course we miss our friends and family. Having said that, we have had already our share of visits since here. We have friends coming out of the woodwork! If I were to pick something I miss it would have to be the coffee places and pubs in the vicinity. I do not drink coffee and I am not a big drinker, but it is just the possibility to sit somewhere with a cuppa, a book or magazine and let the world go by that I miss.

# Henry Alcock



### How old are you?

I was 7 last week, I had a Sonic party

### Tell us about one person in your family

I have a big sister called Bella, she's going to be 9 soon. I like playing swingball with her, and she's teaching me to play the keyboard.

### What makes you happy?

Playing Sonic the Hedgehog Wii games!

### What food do you love eating?

My mum's burgers

### What book do you like reading?

Where's Wally books

### Can you sing us a song?

'I'm your Man' by Wham!

### When you are not at school what do you do?

I love going to my tennis lessons, and to swimming club

### Where was your last holiday?

We went to England for my

Granny's 70th birthday at the beginning of May (but that's a trip not a holiday says mum!) Before that, we went skiing in the Alps in March (Les Arcs 1950, would highly recommend it, says mum!)

### Do you have a favourite place or friend?

When we were back in England we went to Bekonscot Model Village (in Beconsfield, Hertfordshire) I love running around the little houses following all the trains. But most of all I love being at home. •



## A real Gite Treat

**L**ovely gites, British owned... lovely friendly couple Mike and Kate: we stayed here during the May bank holiday, it was perfect.

Lovely big high ceilings, stair gates, highchairs, cot provided...plus English (UK) TV! Furnished to a high standard.

A large outdoor heated pool (unless its boiling hot!) lovely open gardens and communal tables and bbqs.. kids can run free! (if they can

run yet!) plus your own breakfast terrace and a five minute stroll to the village... and.. it's under an hour from Toulouse (need I say more)!

Joelle and Callum their children make excellent playmates too! (In fact why am I giving away this secret?!) :)

Here are some photos! Florence loved it! •

[www.leclossaintemarie.com](http://www.leclossaintemarie.com)

Lisa Allen

# Cycle heaven on L'ile de Ré

Jacqueline Reed peddles the advantages of a holiday on two wheels

**H**aving spent an afternoon on the Ile de Ré whilst en-route to the ferry terminal in Brittany last August, we decided to head back there this spring for a week-long holiday with our two young girls. The cycling culture on the island had grabbed our attention, as had the beautiful towns of white-washed buildings and the pavements covered in hollyhocks.

Our first day was spent exploring the chic and beautiful St Martin de Ré, our base for the week, then after that we were on our bikes exploring the island - and it didn't disappoint.

Cycling on the island was so easy: bike rental shops were in abundance, prices were very reasonable and everybody was catered for. The first day our girls rode around on seats on the back of our bikes and then after they rode around like queens in a trailer. You could get every size bike you could ever want: tandems, motorised bikes and for the more adventurous a unicycle! Free cycle route maps were readily available and all paths were well signposted and were usually off road.

Our first stop was a beach on the south coast near Bois Plage, an easy 20-minute cycle from St Martin. The beach is a vast stretch of sand backed by dunes and is very child friendly, with shallow, calm water (it was quite amusing watching the surfing lessons) and good amenities. When we finally managed to drag our daughters out of the sea we headed back to St



Martin taking a detour to the pretty La Flotte. From here we followed the meandering picturesque coastal path back to St Martin, looking down at the locals scouring the rock pools for shellfish. Cycling this path was my husbands highlight of the holiday, but for me the best was yet to come.

On day two we headed to the north west of the island in search of more beaches - my eldest daughter was armed with her new bucket and spade and was ready to build the biggest and best sandcastles you have ever seen! The first part of the coast was rock-pooling heaven, we came back here later in the week to go crab hunting. Then we found that wild stretch of beach that would rival those of Cornwall and Pembrokeshire. None of the amenities of the beaches of Bois

plage just golden sand stretching as far as you could see, backed by sand dunes and pine forest. A complete sand fortress was built and only a handful of other people and the odd kite were seen all afternoon.

Then came the rain and we discovered the down side of the island: there isn't much to do in the rain. The aquarium in La Rochelle made a good day trip, it was a popular destination for anyone who was near La Rochelle on a rainy day - the queues were big!

For me the highlight of the island was found a few days later after the rain had cleared. We headed to the salt marshes on the north coast of the island and The Lilleau des Niges nature reserve. This is where renting a bike came in to its element - kilometers of paths winding through tranquil coastal

marshes that were only accessible on foot or by bike. The nature reserve is a designated RAMSAR site over 300 species of birds being recorded there, an ideal place for fanatical twitchers or those with no birding knowledge at all. My three-year-old daughter loved being able to see wading birds up close as well as doing a spot of puddle splashing. A short distance from here was Ars-en-Ré, another beautiful harbour town filled with art galleries, narrow streets and bike rental shops, but without the extravagance of St Martin.

Our stay ended with some retail therapy in the designer shops of St Martin and, as every good beach holiday should, a donkey ride. We then headed home promising to pay the island a visit again very soon. •

# Normandy

## Laura Fox on a journey of remembrance

Sixty nine years ago my maternal grandfather was standing on French soil as the United States Army invaded Normandy under one of General Patton's top 6<sup>th</sup> Armored Division (aka Super Six). He survived the war and outlived most of his fellow militants, however, in 2004, at the age of 85 he passed away due to cancer.

My grandmother would tell us stories about waiting for him to return from the war and letters she received. Both she and my mother never asked questions about the war and I followed suit. While my grandfather, gentle but quiet, never spoke of the war except to other men who had experienced this devastating time, he did tell my father that he met General Patton. The details still remain a mystery.

Normandy is an important part of my family history and also in my family history. Living in

France, there was no question that Normandy would be at the top of our trip list. Two dilemmas arise when planning a trip from Toulouse or the US: it is multi-stop journey and not recommended for young children. So, with the in-laws (babysitters) coming for a visit, I insisted we stop waiting and go, without our daughter. We have limited time and need to leave a car for the in-laws. Do we fly or take the train? If we fly, do we fly to Caen or Paris? We made a flow chart and (for the sake of time traveled and cost) decided to fly to Paris, then take the train onwards to Bayeux.

Bayeux is a small French village known for its proximity to the Normandy beach tours and home of the Bayeux tapestry museum. It also is full of cafes and restaurants, many of which were closed for the off season. We stayed at Hotel Churchill, a small hotel with an

extremely friendly staff. To get the full American D-Day experience we took an all-day guided tour with Overlord Tour Group. The guides were extremely knowledgeable and they took us to all the important sites, drove us through back roads to not miss any key bits of history and even allowed time to explore on your own at each site. The group also offers other tours of the British beaches.

Normandy is full of history. Each site was haunting and beautiful. I often got chills and a feeling of peace, especially at the beaches where the stillness of the water and vastness of the sand make it all surreal.

Also, in Bayeux, we enjoyed touring the village, eating good food, and seeing another part of France. I highly recommend a visit if you enjoy history, beautiful scenery or even just oysters and cider. •



## Holiday in the slow lane



Two days to go until we were off on a five day holiday in Seville and the Andalucía region of Spain. A hire car and first night in a hotel were booked when what do we stumble across, a website on hiring a VW camper van in Seville! So the day before we were due to fly and I was busy cancelling the hire car and hotel and booking a camper van.

We arrived excited in to Seville airport and were met by Miguel, the owner of [www.weekendwagen.com](http://www.weekendwagen.com). Luckily Miguel had lived in London and spoke perfect English. He took us to meet our home for the next five days, a beautiful shiny red VW camper van named Micky. After a quick lesson in driving Micky (Micky had a choke and a 4 gear temperamental gearbox), a purchase of a map and we were off on our adventure. Would we

cope with a holiday driving no faster than 80km/h (Micky didn't like speed)? Would we cope with a holiday in a tin can older than us (Micky was made in 1970)? Well the answer to both was a definite yes, it was a truly wonderful holiday which I would thoroughly recommend.

The roof raised up making a double bed up top, perfect for our three year old son Luca. The seat downstairs rolled out to make another double bed, perfect for mum and dad. Micky was also equipped with a sink, a two ring gas cooker and a fridge. He also had a mains socket for those of us who need straighteners even when camping! We hired bedding and camping table and chairs from the company.

We explored Seville, Ronda, the Costa del Sol, Tarifa and Trafalgar, booking campsites as we went

and stopping for lunch when our tummies rumbled. Andalucía is a beautiful region, which I would recommend visiting by any means but especially in a slow old VW camper van. We were really sad when Miguel met us at the airport to take Micky away for the next lucky campers.

We hired Micky through [www.weekendwagen.com](http://www.weekendwagen.com). Also operating out of Malaga is [www.flamencocampers.com](http://www.flamencocampers.com) who have a fleet of newer VW camper vans.

Within the South of France there is an VW camper van hire company operating out of Aix-en-Provence, [www.flowerpowerexperience.com](http://www.flowerpowerexperience.com)

There is also a company in Toulouse who hire out modern VW camper vans, [www.ecocampers.fr](http://www.ecocampers.fr)

Bonnes vacances everyone, whatever you do this summer. •

**Ali Dowson**

# THE DEBATE

## French schooling: yes or no?

**Shazia Bhatti**

**NO**

When a friend posted this onto my wall on facebook <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-22279096> I thought, crikey, it's not often that the UK admits to France being ahead. What's going on? The problem in the UK is shockingly expensive childcare. I know from friends and family how much this can drain a family's income – my sister spends about £1000 a month on two children to go to nursery. Needless to say, pretty much everything she earns goes on childcare – she has her own business.

The debate we were wanting to have, however, intimately concerns many mums here in Toulouse – do you send your child to the local French school or to the international school in Colomiers? And what should your reasons be for one or the other? Before I ask for contributions from our readers to say which option they went along with and why, can I state that I fully wanted my daughter to go to our local French school but I was vetoed by my partner. I didn't fight this one because, sadly for me, my daughter had been less than enthusiastic about the Centre de Loisirs and I had experienced a bit of culture shock myself at their methods and so...I let my daughter go to the International School in Colomiers. And she loves it. She practically leaps out of bed to go to school in the morning. She couldn't love it

more if they tried.

French schools are great if you intend to remain in France and if you are happy for your children to eventually battle the bizarre French further education system, where either you go to a grande ecole or you end up with the dregs at a lesser university (this is putting it crudely) <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/expat/4190728/Frances-educational-elite.html>. However, if you want your child to be nurtured and gently eased into the great wider world, then perhaps the French schooling system is not for you, if the writings of woolly liberals are to be believed – see <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/sep/05/french-schools-pupils-feel-worthless> and <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/sep/07/sons-experience-in-french-school>.

On an international scale, France doesn't do well either. Read the links above to learn why. Rote-learning, the use of humiliation and stilted, old methods, over-zealous adherence to textbooks... yawn, yawn, yawn. France has one of the most inegalitarian outcomes when it comes to education – in other words, poor kids do badly, rich kids do well – and it doesn't even approach the top ten of western countries in the world. See <http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2010/dec/07/world-education-rankings-maths-science-reading> and <https://plus.lefigaro.fr/note/the-french-education-system-gets-bad-marks-20101208-344869>.

**Melanie Norwood**

**YES AND NO**

I am English and my husband is French and all three of my children are in the French school system. Nathan the oldest is in CP (first year of elementaire) and Luca and Dylan are in moyenne section in maternelle. I have experience of the English system through English 31 and with talking to friends back home.

Children can go to school from age 3, so if neither you or your partner are French speaking it enables children to learn the language more readily. Many schools are flexible, so your child can just do mornings to start with, if that's what you want. The first year of maternelle emphasises on play. From moyenne section they learn to write and from grand section they start learning to read and from mid-year start to learn joined up writing. From elementaire onwards, no time is spent on arts and crafts or music. During the CP year there is a real emphasis on being able to read, maths, dictation and handwriting. At the age of six and a half (he is one of the youngest) Nathan has already started using a fountain pen. At Christmas the only decoration he made was a simple orange decorated with cloves. Where I live, we are lucky to have good schools, however like in the UK, it is a postcode lottery, particularly in some parts of

Toulouse and even Colomiers. Many families chose to send their children to IST, just because they are here for a short time and Airbus is paying. However, I personally feel that these children never fully intergrate with their French counterparts, unless they have previously been to French school and/or spend time at their local centre de loisirs. In certain circumstances, if the child is much older, or having problems in the French system, it is clearly the right thing to do. However if you have a good local school, test it out, even if you just do a year or two in maternelle.

With almost four years experience of the French schooling system, I have learnt that neither the English or French system is better. The English system is more interactive with lots of role play and discussion. The French system is more academic with a huge emphasis on grammar (which some French people never get to grips with, so it is no wonder we never fully get it!) and learning by rote. Some people may think that young children should not have to learn a poem by heart or be forced to speak in front of the class. However, the former helps memory and the latter ensures quieter children participate and don't just disappear into the background. Many adults don't like speaking in front of adults, so if children do it from a young age they at least get used to the idea. Many Brits would have spoken in school assemblies or acted in school plays instead anyway... Speaking to English counterparts back home, the French children definitely get

more homework too. English school reports are definitely more positive than French ones. This year there were no comments made on both my twins "evaluation", however I have had regular conversations with their teacher about how they are doing. The evaluation of my older son was average, but upon looking at the test results could see he had got about 85% correct in the tests. Also in the French system, if you do not meet the required standard you may have to repeat the school year and this would never happen in England.

At the end of the day there are good and bad aspects in each system. The French system needs to modernise itself, become less rigid and allow for more self expression from the pupils. Meanwhile the English system needs to bring back more academic emphasis and teach people correct English. Many foreigners speak and write better English than some Brits in their early twenties. •

**YES (SO FAR!)**

**Catherine Tarral**

The education debate is very relevant in our house, my husband is French and has only ever known the French system, I studied in Ireland and did a post-grad in France. My daughter started in petite section of our local maternelle in September, and I was very concerned about what they were planning on teaching her.

I did a lot of research, and for some reason, everything I read was negative: French schools kill creativity, are obsessed with instilling respect for rules and

hierarchy, and have no respect or concern for the development of the individual. Their goal is to produce a clone who is perfectly adapted to French societal norms, considers everything logically before acting, does nothing without authorisation from their hierarchy, and behaves in a reasoned, non-impulsive fashion. The average age for loss of virginity is 17. I could find justification for all of these arguments in the behaviour of the French people I studied and worked with. The inability to directly confront authority or engage in a discussion with a lecturer/superior, the need to express an uncontroversial opinion in order to prove participation, the unwillingness to take any actions without having a fully developed plan, the bizarre ability to switch their personalities to "we're having fun" mode when given permission to do so...

Not to mention everything I read about French women who don't trust their friends (so can't really have any), obsess about appearances and how their actions appear to others (which to me means a lack of self confidence and ability to express themselves), consider criticism an act of friendship, and stay at home mothers lazy and irresponsible. Then I watched a series on French television about teachers in a suburban lycée who had to deal with extremely aggressive behaviour from their students regularly. I had visions of my daughter being trained to become everything I hate, and having to deal with life-threatening violence on a daily basis. I panicked. Obviously.

I was also extremely biased

towards the Montessori method of teaching for small children. My mother is a qualified Montessori teacher and has great respect for the methods used for helping young children blossom at their own pace, particularly for children who have difficulty conforming to a classroom situation.

For many practical reasons, mainly distance and cost, we decided to give the local school a try. It had been recommended to me by another mum whose opinion I trust, and my husband couldn't understand what I was making such a fuss about, so this reassured me somewhat. But not enough. I still worried whether we were making the wrong decision, and inflicting something awful on my daughter at a very impressionable age, my first meeting with the local headmistress didn't help. She talked about socialisation, respect for rules, ability to conform. No mention of character development or self expression, though I was warned that advance learning (her ability to count to 10) would damage my daughter as if she was bored in school, she would come to dislike it. I continued my research.

It turns out you can find justifications for any arguments. While all of the things I have mentioned above do seem to be true to a certain extent, the French system has many advantages that the system I went through doesn't. A broader range of subjects are studied through 2nd level, such as philosophy or nature studies, the history program is very extensive, and not confined to French concerns. My husband remembers studying classical architecture. Woodwork and design are also part of the curriculum and in many

schools classical languages such as latin or greek are obligatory – wonderful foundations for many modern languages. Children learn to eat well and be open to a greater variety of foods in the canteen, a great emphasis is placed on physical activity and team sports, and logic and mathematics are very useful life skills to acquire. I have met French girls who are generous, expressive and confident, have many good girlfriends and a couple of particularly good ones, seem to have lots of fun, and can be the life of the party while managing never to embarrass themselves. Violence in schools is mainly confined to certain underprivileged areas, but we cannot control what happens to our children, and I have to accept that this is something largely beyond my control. Forums for the French living abroad show their concerns with the school systems they encounter, they find that children are encouraged to compete instead of cooperate, the prevalence of entrance exams encourages elitism at an early age and puts unnecessary pressure on children, streaming means that the weaker children are left to stagnate instead of being encouraged and pulled up by the stronger, logical argument is insufficiently taught and valued...

For the here and now, what remains is for me to make the best of what is available, to be aware of what is not, and what might be lacking, and to do my best to compensate for it as much as I can out of school. To teach my children that under certain circumstances, it's good to draw outside the lines. For the time being, my daughter seems happy in school, she has a best friend, and her speech is improving, although the canteen is still an issue. •

**Laura Fox**



When we moved to France from the US, my daughter was only 18 months

old. Prior to moving, I worked full time and she went to a nearby day care. It was an amazing day care where they did painting, yoga and daily Spanish lessons starting as infants. But now I was facing the challenge of being a stay-at-home mom in a foreign country. I looked to other expatriate mothers for advice on mothering and child rearing in France, in particular with schools. Prior to arriving, I was completely unfamiliar with nounous, crèche, halte garderies,



maternelles, etc. What were these and what did it all mean? A little more time for myself, “Where do I sign up”!

My husband's company pays for schooling at the age of 4, meaning we had two years before we had to think about school. Not the case, since French schools start at age 3. At age 2, we started our daughter two mornings a week at halte garderie. She absolutely hated it and I had a difficult time adjusting too. This type of child care was nothing like the one with I was familiar. I often found my daughter crying alone in the corner. She did adjust a little by the end. At age 3, she began at the local maternelle in petite section. She was the only English-speaking child. The director was understanding and had no concern. She willingly put our two neighbors' children in the same class. Although, she still struggled with the language and adjustment for several months, she quickly adapted, found friends, looked forward to school and, after six months, started speaking French. While she was in maternelle, we still had to decide whether we wanted to put her on the list for IST for the following year. I thought about the pros and cons and keeping her in the French school definitely outweighed the reasons to change her to IST. The first benefit is the language. After all, we live in France; we should learn French. We only speak English at home, so immersion it will be and if we stay another two or more years, she will likely be bilingual. Additionally, it is great for my French as well because I am forced to do all my communication with teachers and

**The years in French infant and primary schools:**

School	Age*	School Year	English equivalent school year
ermMat elle	2 1/2	Touts Petits**	Pre-1st year infants
	3	Petite Section	1st year infants
	4	Moyenne Section	2nd year infants
	5	Grande Section	3rd year infants
maiPrintimeElé re /	6	CP	1st year juniors
	7	CE1	2nd year juniors
	8	CE2	3rd year juniors
	9	CM1	4th year juniors
	10	CM2	5th year juniors

\* children need to be this age before the end of December that they start the school year in September

\*\* not all schools offer this pre-1st year

parents in French. It has helped our entire family meet friends, practice the language and learn more about the culture. Second reason: the location. IST would be at least a thirty minute drive with traffic, while the maternelle is a five minute drive or bike ride. More time and exercise... no brainer. Third, curriculum and teaching style was a consideration. I am not very familiar with French or British in these categories, I have heard more praise for the British style, however I have come to appreciate the French style. Although, I feel that teaching style depends on the teacher more than anything, no matter what school it is. Lastly, Chloe is happy in the school, she has learned so much, is speaking quite a bit of French, has made great friends and is excited to go. For our family and situation, we are happy with our decision of sending our daughter to French school. Although, it was not the easiest adjustment, it has been a rewarding challenge and a truly French experience. •

**Jess Jean**

As with most things in France my thoughts on the education system are somewhat mixed. The French are quite proud of their education system and it's recognition throughout the world. There are many things they have got right and of course other things that we may not whole-heartedly agree with. The problem is that this is the place where our children will do most of their growing and learning and the decision on where to send them depends on us, the parents.

I've listed below some of the advantages and disadvantages that I have experienced with the French system so far (Alex has only just started in his third year so I don't profess to know all the ins and outs). I hope this may be of some help to those of you who are starting to embark on the school decision adventure!

*See next page for Jess' pros and cons of French schooling..*

Pros	Cons
<b>Money:</b> It's free!	<b>Money:</b> the school buildings, amenities and supplies can be somewhat on the scruffy side. There isn't a computer per child(!) but more likely one per class. However dilapidated a building can be if the teachers use the childrens' paintings to decorate the walls, the place looks just as good to the kids as a brand new building.
<b>French language immersion:</b> great for mono-lingual families with no French in the home. Small children will learn to adapt to a new language within a few months	French language immersion: the downside of this is for bilingual families where there is a risk of English spoken with only one parent being taken over by French from the other parent and school
<b>Pre school and after school child care:</b> this is usually provided at the school from approximately 7.30am to 6.30pm. There is a minimal fee which equates to about 1€/day!	<b>A long school day:</b> classes start between 8.30-9am and finish between 4.30-5pm. This doesn't leave a lot of time for other activities on school days. However, there is no school on Wednesday afternoons and some schools do not have class on Wednesday mornings either ("4 day week").
<b>High standards of autonomy &amp; discipline:</b> this is fabulous for the children who are ready for it but not as good for those who aren't (see opposite). Teachers encourage them to do things by themselves but start doing so very young, even in the first year of school. The question of discipline is difficult as parents have different ideas as to how much or how little discipline their children receive at home but in French school it's quite 'old school'.	<b>High standards of autonomy &amp; discipline:</b> Children are expected to be able go to the lavatory by themselves, decide which activity they want to do in the class room, find their name ticket by themselves in the morning, put their shoes and coats on for outside play etc. You will hear teachers and teachers' assistants 'shushing' the children left, right and centre. It's no surprise that they can seem a bit wild once they get home!
<b>Flexibility of head master/mistress:</b> some heads will allow you to choose when you want your child to attend school (for example, only 2 mornings per week for the first year) and also be flexible about them eating at the canteen on certain days and not others etc.	<b>Lack of flexibility of head master/mistress:</b> some heads will not accept children who do not go at least 4 mornings per week as soon as they start school in the first year. However, school is not compulsory until they are 6 years old. As of last year, you are entitled to choose which school your child attends but this must be authorised through your Mairie (town hall).
<b>Canteen:</b> the midday meal costs approximately 3 euros. The children eat a starter, main course, cheese and dessert! The meals are definitely a far cry from the turkey twizzlers of British schools with a focus on healthy eating with lots of vegetables and fruit. Most midday meals at the school canteen will guarantee at least 3 out of their 5 a day! Children are made to try everything on their plate but can leave things that they absolutely hate.	<b>Morning &amp; afternoon snacks (goûter):</b> In some schools the morning snack is optional, in others not. Most schools ask the parent to provide the snack for their child but others will ask you to provide a snack for the whole class about once a term. If your school goes by the latter, don't be surprised to hear your child has eaten slabs of chocolate stuck into a baguette...! However, schools are starting to act on this and most are now asking for the snacks to be either a dairy product (for the morning one) or fresh or dried fruit for the afternoon. However if you don't want your child to snack you can explain this to the teacher as well.

<b>Sport, music, gym:</b> the children usually partake in these activities between 2 and 3 times a week. The French system also takes the school children swimming starting from when they are 5 ("grande section").	<b>Lack of 'free play' during the day:</b> again this does depend on the school but for the majority of the time when the children are in the classroom they will be involved in a group activity with the teacher or teacher's assistant and not left to their own devices.
<b>Teachers' Assistants ("ATSEMs"):</b> There is at least one and usually two teacher's assistants in each class.	<b>Class numbers:</b> classes can vary between locations but do not be surprised to see up to 30 or even 32 children per class in some places. However, the average is still 27 or 28.
"Re-doubling": if a teacher considers that the child has not acquired the necessary skills determined in the curriculum at the end of the school year, it can be suggested that the child does not go up to the following year but stays in the same class to 'take the year again'. This means that no child should leave school without acquiring the fundamentals.	<b>Homework starts early:</b> as soon as children start in Junior School they will start to get homework (age 6). The amount of homework will again depend on the teacher/school.
<b>Teachers:</b> I've found the teachers' commitment to the children and their development outstanding. Teachers aren't paid very highly in France and therefore they are usually doing the job for the love of it which is great for the children! All the teachers I have been in contact with have also been very understanding and encouraging about Alex being bilingual.	<b>Report books:</b> most schools will fill in a report book for your child at the end of each trimester. This can seem a bit much when they're young and they have to draw a man with head, arms & legs etc. It's also quite amusing when you're told your child can't count up to 10 in French or sing a French song but you know they can do it all in English!
<b>Neighbourhood friends:</b> this was a big factor in my choice. Alex has friends from school that we meet at the park in the area, he has invitations to birthday parties in our town, I have visions of him cycling to friends houses to play later on... I wanted my children to feel part of our neighbourhood.	<b>Lack of individuality:</b> this is probably the thing I least like about the French system. Children are definitely treated as a 'group' most of the time. Later on they all learn to write in exactly the same style (you'll notice that 99% of French people write the same way!).

On the whole I think the decision is not only about whether you want to send your child through the French system or the international system or Montessori etc. but about the actual school. I would advise anyone thinking about putting their child into a French state school to visit the school before making any decisions and to discuss any questions you may have with the headmaster/mistress. From this visit, you'll get a feel for what the school is like, how flexible the head is likely to be regarding which hours you'd like your child to

frequent the school, how open they are to other ideas, cultures etc. I can't say enough good things about the French state school where I live but I think it really depends on the head and their staff.

*Jess Jean*





**D**etox diets are everywhere. Celebrities swear by them and magazines, facebook, twitter and blog posts are full of them. First, let us start with defining detox diet: a dietary regimen involving a change in consumption in an attempt to detoxify the body by removing toxins and contaminants. Most detox diets start with a fast and sometimes contain herbal laxatives, colon cleansers that “clean” the intestine and liver. These diets are initially effective because of the very restricted calories. One or two days of this diet is likely harmless, but most regimens are recommended for seven to ten days. Additionally, many people think that extending

beyond ten days is beneficial, not harmful. The restriction of calories for this length of time will likely provide results, but comes with the risk of anemia, low blood sugar, irregular heartbeats, muscle loss and decreased metabolism. Colon cleansers and laxatives have additional risk of altering the body’s fluid and electrolyte balance and lead to nutritional deficiencies. Also, initial weight loss is from fluids, not fat, therefore causing a higher weight gain after the diet is complete. The weight gained back after any quick diet is usually fat not muscle (unless gaining the weight at the gym) and is often called the “yo-yo effect”. The idea behind the detox diet is to cleanse the body of toxins from processed food, smoking, caffeine, sugar, alcohol, etc. However, the

human body is an amazing thing and automatically removes toxins. It has three hard working organs called the kidney, liver and colon that were designed specifically for effective toxin removal. Additionally, the detox diet theory, a hypothesis that was developed over 40 years ago, still lacks scientific evidence. A better alternative is to limit the toxins, eat natural foods, watch calories and support the metabolism with exercise. If you do indulge, let the body do its job. If you feel like today it needs some help because you had one too many glasses of wine last night, try working up a sweat with some cardio exercise or sitting in a sauna. Remember to replace the lost fluid and waste with water.

**Laura Fox**

# Angelina Jolie's choice

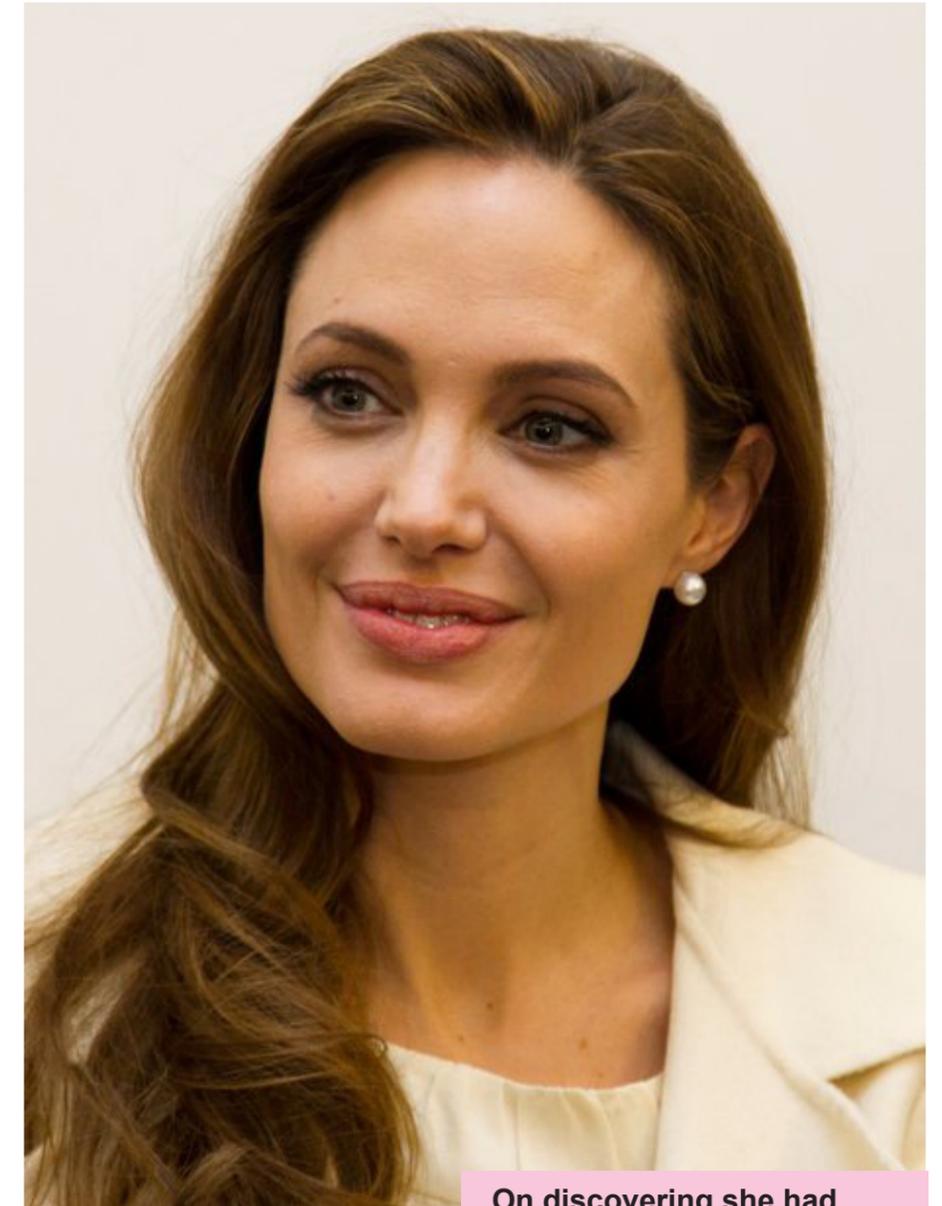
Shazia Bhatti

**T**he decision of Angelina Jolie to have a mastectomy and to go public with it won her praise in the press, with the usual accompanying bout of conspiracy theories. In her article, published in the New York Times, [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/14/opinion/my-medical-choice.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/14/opinion/my-medical-choice.html?_r=0), Jolie cites her reasons for having the mastectomy – her mother died at 56, having had a ten year battle with cancer.

I have to admit, when I heard this news story, I was fairly sceptical. I thought, here’s an actress whose fame derives more from being tabloid fodder than for her accomplishments on film and who is, quite frankly, no stranger to going under the knife <http://allplasticsurgerys.blogspot.fr/2013/05/angelina-jolie-plastic-surgery-before.html>. I thought she was mad. Why have a double mastectomy so young, when surely she could afford cancer screenings every month if she wanted? Surely she had time before a mastectomy became the serious option? She’s not even 40!

Then I started reading about cancer and the BRCA gene. This woman’s blog post in particular, moved me to wonder if there might not have been some sense in Angelina Jolie’s mastectomy after all <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/publiccatholic/2013/06/angelina-jolie-the-cancer-gene-and-my-friend/>.

According to research, cancer has



**On discovering she had the BRCA gene for an aggressive form of breast cancer, Angelina Jolie decided to have a double mastectomy and to speak out about it**

been with us for a long time. Even the Neanderthals had it <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-22780717>. So even though I have ambivalent feelings about medical science’s enthusiasm when it comes to hysterectomies (I mean, just think of the origin of the word – the removal of the womb was meant to reduce *hysteria*),

breast implants and other drastic surgical procedures that tamper with the female body, I think maybe it is sensible to have better screening (including for prostate cancer for men over fifty, maybe), more (free, must be free) gene testing and counselling, even, for those who live under the shadow of cancer and the fear of its return but do not want drastic surgery. •

Naomi Rivière

I do not think any woman who has lost a mother to Breast Cancer could have read about Angelina Jolie's recent choice to have gene testing (and as a result to undergo a double mastectomy) and remained unmoved. I read the story with surprise, surprise that a Hollywood actress would take such a radical step (surprise which in turn inspired horror and then admiration as the weeks passed). I also felt a sense of alarm as I remembered that I am inevitably approaching the age my mother was when she first got cancer: forty-six.

I did not think that mum was very young at the time of her first brush with breast cancer. I was eleven. Mum was “old(ish)” because she was mum. Now when I tell people her age at the onset of the disease they say how young she was and now I am thirty four and only twelve years off the age she was when cancer struck, I can see how young she was. The younger the woman is at the age she contracts breast cancer the more likely it is to be genetic. Having said that, according to Professor Gareth Evans, consultant medical geneticist at St Mary's Hospital in Manchester, “mutations in the



high-risk genes affect one in five hundred people or less” so it is less common than one thinks. And is forty-six young? It is after all approaching the fifty mark when screening is available to everyone.

I discussed gene testing a long time ago with mum when she was in remission. She was “anti” because she felt it burdened people and made them terribly anxious about something that may or may not happen. I am not sure when we spoke about the idea that she knew about preventative mastectomies. I wonder what she would have made of Angelina Jolie. I like to think it would have made her feel

more feminine as when she had a mastectomy due to a cancer already present I know she felt bereft and neither of us knew of many people that had had one. In that way, Jolie would probably have inspired her, proving that femininity is not removed with your breasts.

Mum is as yet the only female member of my family to have contracted breast cancer. Of course the “bad” gene may commence with her but unless you have more than one close relative with cancer you are not really advised to consider genetic testing. I do admittedly see my breasts as time bombs but that is typical of someone who has lost

per cent chance behind that. If I did decide to go down that route I would have to have a hysterectomy as well because I think once you start making decisions to that effect then you are surely somebody who is adamant about going the whole whack.

Once you start to want to control nature where do you stop however? Does there not come a time when you have to sit tight and just hope you are lucky in life? Angelina Jolie answers this very question in an article in the New York Times: “Life comes with many challenges. The ones that should not scare us are the ones we can take on and take control of”. Perhaps in life you must merely take stock of what is a reasonable response and what is one inspired by fear and make choices accordingly. One thing is sure: Angelina Jolie's decision will remind women that in their life time they have a one in eight chance of contracting breast cancer and to consider reasonable and simple lifestyle changes to reduce their risk. This fact that she is inspiring women to become 'breast aware' can only be applauded. Too many people do not want to think about cancer, I for one, but if we are sensible we need not let the fear of it rule our lives. Indeed, like most things one is frightened of, once one is aware of it, it slowly becomes less of an issue. •

Helen Saks

Hollywood movie stars, beautiful, sexy, rich and everything we aspire to, no? Female movie stars are pretty much without exception thin, glossy and beautiful, aren't they? Over many years we have seen stars

from the beautiful, buxom Marilyn Monroe to Scarlett Johansson fluttering their eyelashes and showing us how desirable they are. Men want them, women want to be them.

And then Angelina Jolie tells the world she has had a mastectomy. The most desired movie star of the current age is telling the world that she has had her breasts removed. The impact of this truly cannot be over stated. The smoke screen has gone and realism has set in. And that realism is raw and honest. Angelina took the incredibly bold decision to say ‘I am real, this is happening to me, and I have taken action to prevent myself getting cancer.’

For the thousands of women around the world facing a cancer diagnosis, this is emotional and empowering news. If Angelina can face this, surely we can too. Coming out the other side of her treatment, Angelina still looks like Angelina. She is still a beautiful, intelligent, working woman and she shows us that you too can go through this treatment and come out the other side. To have a role model in Angelina feels like proof that you can get through, what might seem unmanageable. Losing your breasts doesn't mean you lose your femininity or your beauty or your strength.

I currently have an old friend battling breast cancer. She was diagnosed when her second son was a day old and she was feeding him. In her case, doctors are talking about a possible mastectomy once her chemotherapy finishes. Her reaction was one word: “gulp.” For her to read Angelina Jolie's story, I hope will inspire and empower her to know that she really can do this, and she will be ok. •

# An app for that!

by **Laura Fox**

**W**hat's the weather? Oh, let me check my app. How do you say that in French? I have an app for that too. How do I get to the restaurant? Yup, app for that! Apple has taken the world by storm with their "i" products. It started with a little mp3 player and program to download music and has developed into iPhones and iPads that do almost everything. Apps are software applications designed for smart phones and tablets. It is like having a mini computer filled with buttons designed to perform specific useful tasks.



Pinterest- Are you crafty, love DIY, want to find a great recipe, new tattoo or book recommendation and save the links in one place? If so, then this is the app for you. Bit of inspiration on every subject. Facebook- If you are already into or addicted to facebook and tired of logging on your computer, the app is does most of the same functions. I have found that Toulouse area members are facebook lovers. I am always seeing recommendations on new restaurants, places to visit, buy/selling, staying up to date on all my friends here as well as friends/family in the States. My friends also use the message function instead of sending a text. If your friends are too, check out the facebook messenger app. Kindle- The Kindle app is great if you love to read and do not mind reading on an electronic device. The books are purchased and

downloaded from amazon and you do not even have to own a Kindle to use the app. I have a Kindle, but love that if I am waiting somewhere (i.e. doctor's office), I can read the book on my phone and even pick up where I left off. Nike+- There are numerous GPS walking/running/biking apps. Nike+ may not be the best; however it is free, simple and easy. It tracks your route, time and distance. It can be set to sync with your favorite iTunes playlist, provide audio feedback, log all runs and compare to Nike+ friends. The best thing about a GPS app and exercise, it is a great way to track progress. Yahoo Weather- This weather app is easy on the eyes. The five day forecast with high/low temperature, chance of precipitation, written 24-hour summary, radar map, sunrise/set times, wind and pressure set on

the backdrop of local Flickr photos of the city.

Google Translate- This app is very useful to translate anything to any language. It is more than a dictionary. It works for even long texts and will even speak translations out loud. Google Translate is perfect for those with limited French and/or traveling to other foreign speaking countries. Endless Alphabet- My 3 year old's favorite game because it is cute, funny and educational. Each word features an interactive puzzle game with talking letters and a short animation illustrating the definition. There are no high scores, failures or limits; every child can interact at his/her own pace.

Kayak- I love having all my travel options all in one place. Flights, hotels, rental cars, track flights or check deals. This app also saves my most recent search. It is so fast and easy, I am also checking for opportunities for a new place to visit or planning an upcoming trip. AlloCiné- Is a great app for checking movie times and locations in France. Choose a film you want to see or a cinema you want to visit, and AlloCiné will give you all the showtimes. Best of all, it even tells you if the film will be in French or the original language.

Google Maps- For many, Google sets the bar for mapping online. Its app (now available for Apple too!) does the same for mobile. Featuring map or satellite views, turn-by-turn directions, street view, and Google search to find points of interest, this app does it all. •



Behind every great Tot&Co member there's a long-suffering partner. But what are they really thinking? Let's hear it from their own mouths. In the spotlight this week... Monsieur Thomas Rivière (ze ozer alf of Mrs Naomi Rivière)...

**Name:** Thomas Rivière

**Age:** Nearly bald

**Occupation:** Sitting in front of a computer pretending to be busy

**Children:** I will not fall for the third

**Household:** Happily bilingual with a few fish

**Favourite things about France:** Food in general, charcuterie above all

**Least favourite things about France:** I am not slagging off my country in an English mag!

**Ambition in life:** To be bald at last

**Favourite thing to say to partner:** No, England is not THAT bad (and nor is your family)

**Favourite things to hear from partner:** Go on, I'll deal with the children

**Hopes for retirement:** Far away from town

**Biggest regret:** Sitting in front of a computer pretending to be busy

**Glass half full or half empty:** Empty if you listen to my wife talking about me, half empty otherwise...

**Favourite position:** Inside out

**Dream activity:** Being off work

**Secret Crush:** My books



*Lisa Allen*  
photographer

**Tell us about your job:**

I'm a photographer, specializing in creative family and wedding photography. I photograph anyone, from newborns upwards! And all those special moments in life worth remembering.

**How did you set up your business / get your position? Did you start**

**your profession here?**

I set up my business through the AutoEntrepreneur scheme, which was tricky to get your head round (in French) but once set up it's really simple. I had been self-employed doing design consultancy in the UK for three years and closed that business when I moved out here (mainly due to too much

travel and time spent indoors locked to a computer!). I wanted to work creatively, yet still leave the house and meet new people, and improve my French! I bought a camera and started experimenting, soon enough I was photographing friends babies and building up a small portfolio that I put online on a website I designed myself

using a simple template site. It was surprisingly easy! After a few months my friends asked me to photograph their weddings.... Eek! .... But they were so relaxed, it made me relax et voila! Here I am! Business is really busy right now with three weddings in May, and two booked for later in the year, plus my weekly family and baby

shoots. Have to say i'm loving it!

**Do you have a specific training?**

I was a fashion designer (specialising in menswear and graphics) for eight years prior to moving out to France, so I had already purchased all the software packages I use in my editing. I think if you are creative and have a creative eye you can apply it to any medium. Photography is just another creative source to me and that along with the technical training (one-to-one masterclass courses in the UK and networking) I've become much more confident and knowledgeable in my field.

**What do you most enjoy about what you do?**

The creativity... picking places to compose a photo and choosing backgrounds, getting out and about and having fun with the families i'm photographing, editing the images (I'm lost in a world of tinkering with the images for many hours in the evenings!) and love downloading my images to see what I captured! I'm like a kid at Christmas.

**What is challenging about your job?**

The conditions, as they're ever changing - rain, sun, wind - all different, all tricky to photograph! Keeping my camera set at the optimal settings is hard work. At a wedding i'm often analyzing the frames, the lighting, the creative aspects, the moments i'm documenting, the movement of my subjects - to name a few! Everything at once, often for 12 hours with only a small ½ hour break. Its exhausting! Then I often have to drive an hour or so home

(not to mention the time I broke down after a wedding. That was painful!).

**What is the best / most amusing experience you have had?**

The most amusing was a little two-week-old baby who I was photographing last week totally nude at my place. The scene was set with fluffy blankets and clean sheets ready for the little princess to lie and pose.... two seconds later the biggest squelch of your life and the most embarrassed parents!... I just carried on. The best experience is when my brides see their wedding photos and cry! It's then that I know i've hit the mark!

**Flexi time?**

Weddings are great because they're often at a weekend when my husband can look after Florence. In the week I try to schedule shoots when she is in garderie, or occasionally at the weekend.

**Equipment?**

I have two DSLR cameras, and three different lens, I'm always upgrading and looking at new equipment.

**Job perks?**

Flexible working hours on my terms, often out in the sunshine. Oh and I love being in on all the action at a wedding - the photographer sees it all!

**Where can we find you?**

I'm based in Blagnac, but the way to contact me is via my website [lisaallenphotographytoulouse.com](http://lisaallenphotographytoulouse.com) or [lisaallenphotography@gmail.com](mailto:lisaallenphotography@gmail.com) 06 49 62 80 08 Or at Tots on a Tuesday!

# Learning to swim

This issue we are drawing on the knowledge of two Tots and Co swimming teachers, **Abigail Rice** and **Helen Saks** to give us some tips on how to keep safe yet have fun in the water this summer

The summer has finally arrived & we can all enjoy cooling off in the many swimming pools, lakes & beaches we are so fortunate to be near.

Swimming is a fun & great way of spending time together as a family. And learning to swim from a young age is a fun and potentially life-saving gift. We all know water doesn't come without its hazards, so here are a few tips on keeping safe & having fun.

- Always be able to see where your child is & never leave them unattended near water (any water).
- Set some ground rules before you go swimming with your little ones (if they are older enough to understand), reminding them not to run around the edge and stay near you.
- Do not rely on buoyancy aids to look after your children.

### Games to play

Almost every nursery rhyme & many songs can be adapted to water. Ring-o-roses is always a favourite with my learners from young to adult. Everyone stands in a circle holding hands, as you sing the nursery rhyme everyone starts skipping sideways round and when

### Bouyancy aid advice.

Bouyancy aids can be a great aid to children & parents (especially when there is more than one child per adult. But some come with caution. Here are a few pros & Cons for your aid of choice.

Aid	Positives	Negatives
 <p>Noodles (Frites in French)</p>	<p>These are a fantastic invention and can be used in many ways. They were first invented to aid Pre-natal mothers when swimming &amp; have now been approved by the ASA &amp; other countries swimming associations as swimming aid. They can be used for Learning to swim, playing games and aiding training.</p>	<p>Large &amp; clumsy to carry around. Your child can get off it easily, but if they don't like going under water, they will only do it a few times.</p>
 <p>Arm Bands</p>	<p>Can be deflated to save space in your bags. Difficult for children to take off.</p>	<p>Arm bands are in my opinion invented by the devil. They do not give the child a true reflection on how their body should be positioned and restricts them from arm movement.</p>
 <p>Rubber rings</p>	<p>Good idea for very young babies with the seat attachment (supervised with parent holding on). Fun for lounging on.</p>	<p>If used wrongly rubber rings can be a hazard. Again restricts body positioning in the water and if the child tips it over they are at risk of getting stuck upside down head first in the water.</p>
 <p>Swimming belts</p>	<p>Good for helping with the buoyancy on body positioning and foam can be removed over time to help the child find their own buoyancy</p>	<p>If not used correctly can tip the child, so they find it hard to keep their head and shoulders up. Also bulky to carry around.</p>

you get to the last line everyone "we all fall down" everyone tries to sit on the bottom of the pool (or little ones and timid swimmers can blow bubbles)

Most land games can be adapted

to the water too. Netball, Football, volleyball, stuck in the mud etc.

### MIRROR GAME

In pairs, stand opposite (facing) each other. One of you does an action and your partner has to copy



it, just like you are looking in the mirror. You can start with pulling faces, jumping or swimming side to side, dipping underwater and lots more. The swap round and the other person has a go.

### HUMMING UNDER WATER

Get in pairs or more, get close. Duck under water and one person starts humming their favourite tune. The others have to guess what it is.

### OVER UNDER GAME

(you will need a small ball or object such as a pair of goggles)

Everyone stands behind each other in a long line. Then you start by passing the ball (or whatever you have) from the front of the line all the way to the back, going over and under all the players. The first person passes it over their shoulder the second person passes it between their legs and so on. Careful not to drop it!

### HOT POTATO

(you will need a ball) Everyone stands in a circle. One person starts with the ball and throws it to someone else. The ball is a hot potato, so you have to

throw it again quickly, so not to burn your hands. • **Abigail Rice**

Swimming - I've always done it and have never thought much of the ability to swim or stay safe in the water. Since falling into a pool at 18months old, it has been as natural for me as walking and talking.

It was only when qualifying as a swimming teacher in 2006, and having the priviledge to teach non swimmers, both children and

grown ups, that I realised for so many, swimming isn't a given. If you haven't swum as a child, and found your confidence from a young age, learning to swim can be a huge challenge.

Living here in the South of France, with all our lovely weather (!) and an abundance of pools, often in people's own homes, pools represent two things: fun and also danger. What fun you can have splashing in the pool on a summers day, but what a nightmare that pool can be if the risk of drowning is ever present.

So, having been asked to put pen to paper for this article on the subject of water safety, what is the answer? Well, it's all fairly straightforward. Get your children swimming! It's not like another sport or hobby. Learning to swim is a life skill that could actually save a life. That simple fact should be enough to prioritise swimming over other activities. Ensure your child is safe in the water, they don't have to be a champion butterfly swimmer, but just make sure they can stay afloat and get to safety, then everyone can relax over the summer months.

Pop into your local Decathlon, and there a multitude of water safety products. My favourites are the arm bands for the very small swimmers, and the noodles. There are so many different activities you can do with the noodles, to support the swimmer on their front, on their back, they can straddle it and ride it like a horse. All in the name of fun, the swimmer is learning vital skills to stay afloat. Purchase hoops for diving, to encourage the children to submerge. Batons can make for a fun relay game. Make it a family priority to go to the



pool on the weekend, and make it a regular event. We are so lucky in Toulouse, there are numerous pools, both indoor and outdoor to benefit from. Type in 'piscine Toulouse' for a full list of local pools and their opening hours.

Learning to be comfortable in the water can begin at home. From baby stage, get your child used to water on their face, water over the head in a shower or bath. The more 'immersed' they can be, the more natural they will be in the water. Splashing about in a few centimetres of water in a garden paddling pool, will help to teach the child that water equals fun.

Guidelines around pool safety must be drilled in to our children. We DON'T run on poolside, or in the changing rooms. Before jumping or diving into water always check two things, is the water deep enough? Is there anybody in your way? These simple checks can literally save lives. Hence, I drone on and on about them! Do not lean on your fellow swimmer or push them under. But DO have fun, learn, play, find your confidence

and enjoy the amazing sensation of being free in the water.

Start lessons young and keep them frequent. Your child will always respond to a teacher in a different way than to a parent. They won't cling, and they will try to learn, especially if Mummy or Daddy might come to watch for the last five minutes and they can show off their new found skills!

The Dauphins du Toec at Nakache pool, hailed as the best swimming club in France, recommend that children swim twice a week from aged 3. Lessons take place twice a week after school, and entering the club on a Monday evening is like entering a parrallel universe of little swimmers. As much as it is a commitment to get there twice a week, it's so impressive to see the children's ability in the water. Six and seven year olds are swimming 25metre laps showing impressive skills.

So, now that we finally have a little sunshine, and the outdoor pools will be opening, get to the pool. And keep going often! •

*Helen Saks*

*Summer 2013 TOTS*

## What do you think of your newsletter?

## Do you have an article to contribute or a topic you would like to see covered?

Have a problem for our agony aunt?

**We'd love to hear from you.**

Your name will only be printed if you agree to it being printed. By default you shall remain anonymous

## We welcome all submissions, thoughts, comments, criticisms... :)

## Please get in touch!

[timeoutinthesouth@gmail.com](mailto:timeoutinthesouth@gmail.com)

## The answer to your problems...

**A**bout a month ago, I returned from the UK alone with our kids. My husband was away. The neighbours opposite, an English family like ourselves, were having a birthday sleepover for their daughter's ninth birthday. I hadn't mentioned this to my four-year-old as I really did not want her getting in the way. However, as soon as we got back, one of the kids opposite told my daughter, who went in the house to swiftly emerge in her wings and beads and a new skirt, all ready for a party.

Sensing trouble coming, my friend who had kindly picked me up from the airport offered to take my daughter back to her house for a bit to play with her kids. I went up to my neighbour's window, where we often talked, to ask her if this might be an idea or if my daughter could play outside for a few minutes with her daughter and the five friends who were staying, when my neighbour's rather frosty mother appeared. Her mother was on a visit over from England. My neighbour had left the kitchen so wasn't to be seen. I said hello, asked where my neighbour was, only to be told rather curtly that 'we're quite up against it, actually.' I got that they were busy with making pizza for their daughter's five friends and went in to unpack as my friend had very kindly taken my kids to the supermarket. When she got back,

I still hadn't managed to chat with my neighbour, so my friend went home.

After dinner, around 7pm, my daughter again let herself out of the house and went into the neighbour's garden. I went across the road, with my smaller child, and attempted to persuade her to leave them be. Meanwhile, my neighbour's daughter's nine-year-old friends were chasing my four-year-old off. I wasn't happy but kept quiet. I was also dismayed to see that my neighbours had shut their kitchen window and in fact, were watching me trying to persuade my four-year-old to come home while I clung on to my two-year-old.

Since then we have not spoken, although my neighbours will wave at my husband, which has only made me more angry. I must admit, when trying to persuade my daughter to come home, I might have said the girls were boring anyway. My neighbour's nine-year-old is a lovely girl, but I was extremely annoyed by the behaviour of her friends, who were laughing at my daughter, basically.

I have been furious since this incident. Mainly because I have always made such efforts with this family - lending them sugar, eggs and butter even when inconvenient to me, babysitting for them last minute because one of them needed picking up from the theatre late at night, and so on. So I must admit, I may have

slammed my front door a couple of times when they're at their window since then. I have been pretty angry. It wouldn't have killed them to tell their daughter's friends that they would still get their film, pizza and sleepover and to be nice to a little four-year-old girl for five minutes, would it?

Kind Regards,  
Angry

Dear Angry,  
Neighbours, everybody needs good neighbours - right? We certainly all bemoan the lack of community these days but the stories I hear make me wonder if most people wouldn't rather be living on a desert island than negotiate the tricky business of living side-by-side.

There definitely seems to have been some bad behaviour here but I urge you to take a step back and ask from who? Excuse me to be blunt, but this isn't Ramsay Street. Popping up at people's windows unexpected, introducing yourselves into their garden and calling their daughter boring because she wouldn't play with yours! It's certainly never nice when we feel our children are being excluded or laughed at (and wouldn't it be amazing if all ages could play peacefully and happily together all the time) but if you felt offended that a nine-year-old had been mean to your daughter, how must your neighbours feel now that an adult has been mean to theirs?

Sad as it must have been to see your excited little girl dressed up to the nines (no pun intended!), if the party was anything like the sleepovers I remember when I was that age, the whole thing had probably been planned out by the girls to the very last detail, weeks in advance, and that detail probably didn't include playing with a four-year-old. A simple but firm explanation from you that the big

girls were having a big girl party and doing big girl things may have been enough understanding your daughter needed to leave the situation alone.

In your anger, you now slam the door at these people when they appear at their window. But what are you really angry about? I sense that you arrived frazzled from your journey and needed a hand keeping your daughter occupied while you were sorting stuff out. You felt like this family owed you a favour as you've lent them pretty much everything but the kitchen sink but, from your letter, you never clearly asked them for this as you were never able to speak with your neighbour directly. They themselves were already busy looking after five children that didn't belong to them and may not have picked up on your signals or even seen what happened between the older group and your little girl. I'm sure your little girl has moved on unaffected by this incident and perhaps you should too? By your own admission, you've worked hard at being a good neighbour until now, why let this little misunderstanding ruin your relationship? I suggest you pop over with an olive branch in the form of an invite to lunch. Welcome them with gusto into your home: after all, that's how good neighbours become good friends.

Good luck  
x

# Easy peasy summer food

## Spiced Pork Tenderloin

(Serves 4)  
 2 tablespoon olive oil  
 2 pork tenderloins  
 1 teaspoon fennel seed, crushed  
 1 teaspoon paprika  
 Salt and black pepper

Heat oven to 205 degrees C.  
 Heat 1 tablespoon of oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Season the pork with the fennel, paprika, ½ teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper and cook, turning occasionally, until browned, 6 to 8 minutes. Place the pork on rimmed baking sheet. Transfer the pork to oven and cook 12- 15 minutes. Let rest 5 minutes before slicing.

## Spinach and Orzo Salad

(Serves 8)  
 3 tablespoon olive oil  
 2 cloves garlic, thinly sliced  
 Juice and zest of 1 lemon  
 ¼ teaspoon salt  
 ¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper  
 4 oz spinach leaves  
 450g cooked orzo  
 1 cup pitted olives  
 4 oz feta cheese  
 ¼ cup thinly sliced red onion  
 ¼ cup finely chopped fresh mint leaves

In a small pan, warm oil over medium-low heat. Saute garlic until lightly golden. Transfer garlic and remaining oil in pan to a bowl. Add 3 tablespoons juice,

2 teaspoons zest, salt and pepper; whisk to combine. Add spinach and toss lightly. Add orzo, olives, cheese, onion and mint. Toss to combine; serve.

## Sweet and Sour Sloppy Joe

(Serves 4)  
 2 tablespoons canola oil  
 1 bunch scallions, chopped  
 1 tablespoon grated fresh ginger  
 0.5kg ground/minced beef  
 ¼ cup soy sauce  
 ¼ cup tomato paste  
 3 tablespoons brown sugar  
 Bread or buns

Heat 1 tablespoon of canola oil in large skillet over medium-high heat. Add the scallions and ginger and cook until browned. Add the soy sauce, tomato paste, sugar, and ½ cup water and cook, stirring, until slightly thickened. Serve on your favorite bread with sesame slaw.

## Sesame Slaw

Serves 4  
 ½ small head cabbage, thinly sliced  
 2 carrots, grated  
 ½ cup fresh cilantro leaves  
 ¼ cup lime juice  
 1½ tablespoon vegetable oil  
 Salt and pepper  
*Laura Fox*

## Tarte aux Mirabelles

This is my mother-in-laws recipe for a really easy, fast and tasty

summer fruit tart that the children love helping to make.

1 pastry roll  
 Cornflour (fecule de mais)  
 Castor Sugar  
 Lots of Mirabelles (cherry plums), although other fruits can be used too.

Preheat the oven to 200°.  
 Put the pasty in a tart tray. Prick it many times with a fork. Sprinkle with cornflour and sugar until you can barely see the pastry (about a handful). The cornflour is to absorb the fruit juice and keep the pastry from going soggy. Cut the mirabelles in half and remove the stones. Place them cut side down on the pastry until all the pastry is covered. Place the tart in the oven and cook until the pasty looks done (between 20 and 25 minutes).

*Catherine Tarral*

## Easy bakewell cake

150g butter  
 150g golden caster sugar  
 150g self-raising flour  
 150g almonds  
 2 large free range eggs  
 1 tsp vanilla extract  
 6tsp raspberry jam  
 150g of fresh raspberries  
 50g flaked almonds

Preheat oven to 160 (fan), 180 C or Gas Mark 4. Line a 22-24cm springform cake tin with baking



parchment.

Use a food processor or electric whisk and whizz the butter, sugar, flour, ground almonds, eggs and vanilla extract. Put half of the mixture in the tin and smooth.

Dot the jam, 1/2 teaspoon at a time all over and scatter the raspberries. Drop the remainder mixture over the fruit and smooth over with your fingers.

Scatter the flaked almonds on top and bake for 45-50mins until golden. Cool and then serve with ice-cream, custard or just have it on its own!

*Vikki Carter*

## Avocado Starter

It is an avocado starter and it takes few minutes to prepare. Excellent when you have guest as an entree, for a BBQ or as part of a light lunch next to a salad or smoked salmon. Kids might like it as well as, but could get messy.

A medium/ big avocado for 2 people.

Take a nice ripe avocado ( or slightly less ripe if you prefer), cut in half along the length of it. Remove the stone gently, trying

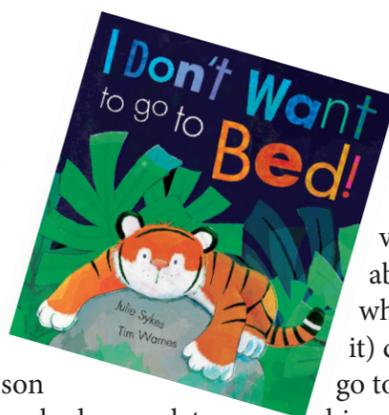
not to squash too much the flesh. A trick is to hit the stone with the sharp blade of a knife and then pull the stone off. So you are left with 2 oblong parts and 2 hollows. Fill up the hollows with your favourite olive oil, salt and pepper. A variant is to include as well some balsamic vinegar. It is really up to you and your taste. Serve on a plate or platter with a teaspoon. To eat just scoop out the flesh.

Best is to prepare just before eating, to avoid the avocado getting browner. Easy and very healthy.  
*Marcella Pizzo wood*

# Top tips for books, films, toys and music

## I don't want to go to bed!

Julie Sykes, Tim Warnes  
Little Tiger Press



My almost three year old son Oscar has always had difficulties sleeping and getting to sleep. He slept through the night at fifteen months and until then woke on average every two hours, fretting. Now he is older he still does not want to go to sleep though we have the usual parental rituals and he shares a bedroom with his older brother which is a source of comfort. Every night I would hear the dreaded words: "I don't want to go to bed" (this from a child who could stay awake in a car at night until we reached our destination at 11pm...singing!)

When I was looking for a book to help him understand the virtues of sleep, I came across this one: "I don't want to go to bed"! When I showed it to Oscar for the first time he beamed. I could see he already loved it just by its title. I am sure he thought it was going to work in his

favour and not mine!  
The story is very simple. It is about a little tiger who (you guessed it) does not want to go to bed. His mother lets him stay up all night so he goes to visit all his friends. He soon finds out that being awake late is not to his advantage for the simple reason that there is very little to do! The illustrations are very simple, there are not too many words per page and there is even a subtle joke at the end of the book for adult readers.

By chance Oscar has a little tiger toy. Every night we talk about Tiger having nothing to do at night and we decide that it is better to go to sleep than stay up. I have to say it has definitely helped. Oscar fusses less and bed time tensions are not as high as they were before I bought the book.

This story can only have been written by parents who understand the need to convey an important message in a way that is clear and

accessible to toddlers and young children.

"I don't want to go to bed" are words I now hear on only very rare occasions. Oscar wants to read this book every night and then as he slides down the bed under his duvet he says simply as I close the door: "I am happy in my bed"!

Naomi Rivière

## Mud (2012)

Directed by Jeff Nichols  
Starring Matthew McConaughey, Reese Witherspoon, Tye Sheridan and Jacob Lofland



I find there is something slightly annoying about Matthew McConaughey and I can't quite put my finger on it. I seem to have an irrational dislike of him – rather like how I dislike Keira Knightley

for her chin. A quick survey of acquaintances reveals he is the sort of actor you either love or hate. The former are attracted to the blond mane and southern drawl, the latter accuse him of coming across as smug and arrogant. However, I have to say that in *Mud* he is surprisingly likeable.

The film is set on the murky Mississippi river, where 14-year-old Ellis (Tye Sheridan) lives on a ramshackle houseboat with his mother and father, who eke out a living selling fish. To Ellis and his best friend/partner-in-crime Neckbone (Jacob Lofland) the river is their adventure playground and one day while exploring an island they find a boat stuck high up in a tree ever since a flood swept it away. When they climb into the boat they realise they are not the first people to find it, and spot footprints in the mud. They run back to the shore only to see the footprints again in the sand and a scruffy-looking man appears. Mud (McConaughey) is a mysterious character with a weather-beaten face and a cracked-tooth who strikes a bargain with the two boys that he will let them have the treehouse boat in exchange for food. The boys agree and as they become friends it emerges that Mud is on the run from the police for killing a man who beat up his girlfriend Juniper (Reese Witherspoon). He is hiding out until she can join him and they can run away together. Before long, the boys become messengers for Mud, passing letters to Juniper and stealing equipment for Mud so that he can escape down the river. For Ellis, the task takes on greater significance as he faces the prospect of his own parents' marriage breaking down while at the same time starting to have feelings for a

girl from school himself. Helping reunite Mud and Juniper becomes his way of trying to understand the grown-up world of love and relationships.

*Mud* is a coming-of-age film in the same vein as *Stand By Me* and with beautiful shots of the Mississippi river. For me, the real achievement of the film is that McConaughey is actually fairly enjoyable to watch as Mud. But while he and Witherspoon might be the big names on the posters, the two boys who play Ellis and Neckbone are the real talent and their performances defy their age. It is a touching film, but does not fall into the trap of becoming too sentimental or indeed to provide the happy ending you might expect. At Gaumont Wilson Toulouse, Utopia Toulouse until 25th June and Utopia Tournefeuille until 23rd July.

Charley Sheffield

## Balloons

I'd like to review the common balloon. It's a wonderfully versatile toy, inexpensive and easy to transport, fits in the smallest of handbags or even pockets, takes up very little storage spaces in a car, or in a buggy bag. It can bring smiles to children's faces instantly and its uses are innumerable. It can be used as a beach ball, a volleyball, a trampoline toy, a football, attach a large elastic band and it's a bouncing wrist toy! It can be drawn on, painted on (or with), rolled on, jumped on.... It's great for those tricky moments like when we visit someone who has no children (so



no toys to keep them entertained), or have a picnic somewhere with no playground. I always have a bag of balloons in my car.

A very brief MYGYM birthday party review.

I was recently at a birthday party in MyGym in Beauzelle and was very impressed. The entire gym is reserved for the party which can be up to 20 children. The 2 gym employees were wonderful at organising the children, and the equipment was very impressive, from climbing frames to tunnels to ballpools to ziplines to bubbles, with something new coming out every half hour. Everyone had a wonderful time and came home exhausted.

Catherine Tarral

## James Morrison: The Awakening

(2011) Island Records

I can not stop listening to this album, James Morrison's third. It uplifts me although its lyrics and subject matter are at times rather melancholy. I love its "vibe". I usually judge music by what makes me feel good when I am walking through town, MP3 on in my pocket. This passed the test. I feel alive and inspired when it is playing.

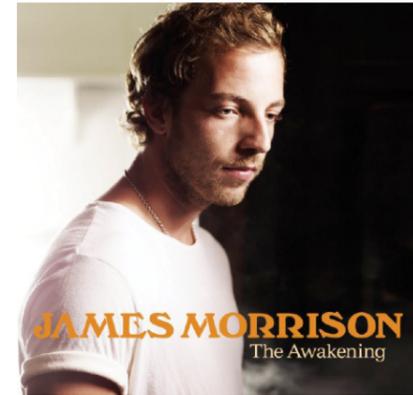
James Morrison is often confused with James Blunt. I guess the first names may have something to do with that because the two singers are in no way similar. They are both roughly the same age it is true and both British but James Blunt has an unmistakably posh voice and James Morrison could almost pass as an American (in fact I thought he was)! Morrison for me has more of a lilt, he is more in the realms of soul. Blunt in my mind is more

“pop”. Morrison is best known for his album “Undiscovered” and more specifically the song “You give me something” but I prefer “The Awakening” to “Undiscovered” because it really draws on a unique style which is derived as a result of his musical influences, two of which came from his parents: soul from his mother and folk and country from his father.

This album was inspired by the singer's new role as father and by the death of his own father after the latter's long battle with alcoholism and depression. I think it is that which provides the constant feeling of bitter-sweet in the music. There

is always an element of hope in the melody. I almost feel that despite everything Morrison has been through, he is looking forward, to the life of his child, to his new life as a father, acknowledging yet

refusing to turn the loss of his own father into a tragedy. In fact, this album has been cited on depression websites as one to listen to as a “pick-me-up”. He reminds me of the feeling I had when my own mother died: it was both the saddest time of my life and perversely the most precious, dare I say it happiest at points. Mum and I savoured every second spent together laughing harder than ever, crying harder than ever. Everything was revealed in its extreme. As I watched her die I watched her live and through that insight I acquired a 'joie de vivre' that I feel I want to enjoy rather than regret for what it has erased in order to come to fruition. I feel Morrison is thinking along these



lines.

Titles include: “I won't let you go”, “Up” “Beautiful life”, “The awakening”, “One life”. His first track is “In my dreams” a song so painful that he was not sure he would be able to perform it in public. It is exquisite. Anybody who has ever lost anybody will be able to relate to his desire to fall asleep to see once again in dreams the person he has lost.

My favourite song is the final track: a bonus track: “All around the world”. It is an adult lullaby. You want to sway to it. It is reggae, soul, pop, that mix which is unique to James Morrison. I can

simultaneously feel the warm breeze of a tropical climate and see the singer on an album cover photograph, guitar on his shoulder walking on a sidewalk, eyes down as he muses on life...

His husky voice (apparently a result of whooping cough that he contracted as a child) shines through with backing singers singing in harmony in a distinctive soul style: you can even hear the singer smiling at moments. This song always makes me dance.

When Morrison ends his anthem-style song “One life” with the words “I'll tell my baby girl, you only got one life so make sure you live it right”, you want to live it right too. James Morrison's “The Awakening” really does awaken something positive within. It is very inspiring and quite simply a great, feel-good album by a modern motown style artist. I can not wait for album number four!

Naomi Rivière

## Fuzzy fun for little ones

I have found this craft on the Internet few months ago and it has become a hit in our household. Hope your little ones will enjoy it too.

Materials:

Medicine dropper

Transparent tray or plate (i used an ovenproof dish- lid)

Small containers for the paint

Liquid food colouring

A bit of vinegar

Baking soda (sodium bicarbonate)

Fill the tray with baking soda, place the liquid food colouring in little containers and add few drops of vinegar in each colour. Ask the child to take the medicine dropper and fill it with the colour. It will take few fillings to get the grip.

Then place the dropper above the tray and squeeze the colour out.

You will get sheer minutes of colour fuzziness!



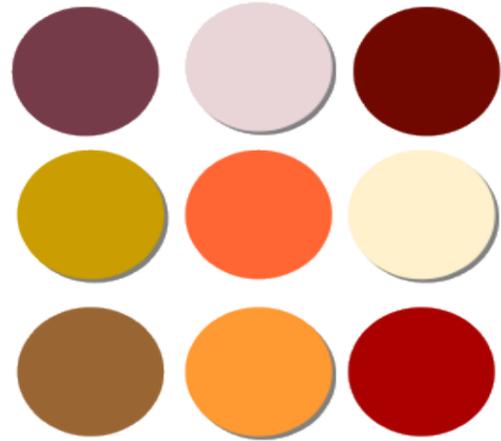
## New designer for TOTS magazine



We say goodbye to Sohani Crockett who has been with the team for the past five issues, thanks to Sohani and best wishes to her in her personal projects ahead. It is with great delight that we welcome onboard graphic designer Charlotte Gibson. Here's a word from her:

Hi, I'm Charlotte, and I came to live in Toulouse with my French half-husband 16 years ago. I originally wanted to go into journalism after my degree, but realised when I got here that since I could barely even ask for a loaf of bread, I wasn't going to get far in a writing career! So I converted to graphic design as I had done an art foundation course in England and have always loved all things creative. After four soul-destroying years of designing housing brochures in a titchy dark office with 3 chain-smoking, prozac-popping psychos, and a secretary like a human-rottweiler

that used to come and breathe sweatily down my neck in attempts to intimidate me, I finally managed to get a job in one of the big Toulouse advertising agencies as an Art Director. Still a lot of smoking involved, even over my 7-month pregnant bump, but it was much more fun! Anyway, four children later, I have left the world of restaurant vouchers, sneaky long lunches and far-too-long-wasted-on-commuting to freelance from home. At least, that is the plan, once the youngest two go to school. I still manage to work a bit, and do bespoke wedding stationery, logos, brochures, magazine layouts (!) anything really, although I love doing wedding stationery the best, as it is so personal to the client. I have a blog, hardly anything on it yet, but I still have one! <http://carlstonatious.blogspot.fr> and soon I will be opening an Etsy shop where I will be selling children's pictures and more. •



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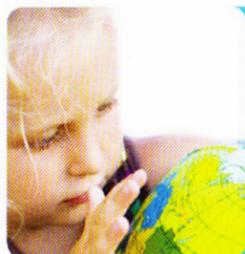
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## kid-speaking

ateliers dès la maternelle  
ateliers linguistiques par le jeu, seul ou en groupe



## teen-speaking

cours dès le collège  
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cours dès le collège

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Kinesiologie	Arnaud	06.45.41.56.41
Reiki	Dominique	06.17.20.06.04
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