

Hi to all our wonderful family and friends,

Season's greetings from the Ashdown household...
Wow... what a year 2007 has been for us!

As some of you know, we found ourselves in an extremely horrible situation at the beginning of the year with a particularly nasty neighbour. In all the houses we've been in (and we've moved fairly frequently – 6 times in our 18yr marriage), we had never had a neighbour we didn't get on with. Shortened version, the neighbour had access over a section of our drive to his garage part way down the drive but he decided it was totally unfair we had a drive and he didn't. Consequently, he would constantly be using it – parking his cars on it, even putting skips on it – which usually totally blocked access/egress to our house! After many verbal attempts to come to an amicable solution failed, we wrote him a letter in January that, unfortunately, triggered a violent hate campaign against us. Slashed tyres, cut brake cables, constant verbal abuse every time we walked/drove up the drive and a physical attack that left me shaken for several days resulted in us deciding to move earlier than we had intended. God, however, was extraordinarily faithful to us throughout and we finally managed to move to Exeter at the end July.

A new chapter begins...

From the moment we got to Exeter, we felt at peace again. This was where we were meant to be and our bungalow (yes, another bungalow!) is perfectly situated for a current needs – 10mins walk to Tobias' school (as opposed to the hour-long school bus ride he would have done from Torquay), 10mins walk to our new church, 15/20mins walk to Exeter city centre! And, of course, half an hour 'drivetime' closer to the many friends we have scattered around the country!

With all the hassles of the move, we didn't have a major holiday this year. That said, we enjoyed a lovely weekend up on Dartmoor in an 'activity cottage' celebrating a friends' birthday – walking and enjoying the company of his many friends most of whom we knew from his/our previous church. We also managed to squeeze in our annual trip to London for a few days in the summer staying with our good friends Adam and Jo and family. Tobias had studied the Great Fire



of London and Florence Nightingale at school the previous term so a trip to Pudding Lane, the Monument and the Florence Nightingale museum was on his wish list of attractions. The Mary Poppins show was the surprise outing for him and I was able to persuade Tobias and Sam (A & J's son) to 'escort' me around the Star Wars exhibition.

We had plenty of visits from family and friends to our new home, although at the moment it is a bit squashed as we don't have the same spare rooms as the previous house (we have plans submitted for redevelopment). Nevertheless it is always a pleasure to have people stay.

Jo's brother, Scott, with his wife and their toddler came over from Australia. Although with the wonders of the internet and webcams we had stayed in touch, it was an absolute delight to see our niece in person for the first time and to catch up with them all. Jo managed to take the day off to spend with them whilst at their mum's house near Honiton not far from us.



Other activities...

I've joined a local bowls club having taken up the sport just over a year ago... yes I know... 40, bungalow, bowls! I've never been one for convention. Jo has joined a badminton club



literally 5mins walk from home and, of course, we are all very much involved with our new church. Tobias has settled in to his new school and taking advantage of the many excellent opportunities there. He has joined several lunchtime and after-school clubs – Italian club, chess club, junior strings group (he's progressing well with his violin playing), junior orchestra, drama club and the junior CU (Christian Union). He has also joined a local Beaver Sea Scout troop and has enjoyed the various '100yrs of Scouting' celebrations this year.

So from a very oppressive and depressing situation to a great new place, we are now very much settled in for the next 10 years while we watch and encourage Tobias through the rest of his schooling here in Exeter. We hope to develop the bungalow over the next few months so as to comfortably allow our friends and family to stay – but don't be put off... we'd love to see you if you're down this way or want to use us as a base in the 'West Country'.

We hope you all have a wonderful Christmas, a great 2008 and we'll be in touch soon.

Rudi, Jo and Tobias

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