

HAPPY CHRISTMAS FROM CHARLY & LESLEY LOWNDES
BURR HOUSE, SHIPLAKE COLLEGE, HENLEY ON THAMES, RG9 4BW. 0118 940 5215
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The theme for the year has been babies, and weddings. Wil and Sal produced Nel on Feb 2, and she is, of course, the world's most wonderful baby. She's already reading for her Master's degree – or is that Sal? As well as coaching junior cricket – or is that Wil?

They live in Watchet, on the North Somerset coast; a small seaport. There's a view across the Bristol Channel to Wales; the longest steam railway line in Britain (handy for the Minehead Rail Ale festival) and a papermill. They have now set their wedding date for 6th August, at Combe Florey.

Jonny and Bri got married in New York in April – so good they did it twice, with a second ceremony by the shores of a lake near Terra Alta, West Virginia, in August. Lesley was there for take one, and the rest of us, including Nel, for take two with the full band. We were embraced by Bri's family, the O'Briens, with wonderful times in Baltimore and Washington, where we stayed on with Bri's Aunt Kay on Capitol Hill.

In Ellicott City, near Baltimore, we found an Iranian deli and supplies for a mezze – Greek vine leaves, Syrian tahini, Cypriot halloumi, Turkish hoummus, halva from somewhere. Jonny was born in Cyprus, which was the excuse; there were several vegetarians, so we never got as far as grilling small birds or roasting sheep.

Alpine Lake is a magical place of trees, water, and sunshine. The wedding party built up over a week, with visits to the Amish bakery for pies, jogging round the lake, and golf. A highlight for Charly was jamming on harmonica with Jonny playing guitar and electric kazoo. The Alpine Lake Back Nine Blues Band may never be reformed, but it was fun. Paul the philosopher from Paris was a great sound engineer.

Terra Alta is small but distinguished by hot-metal typesetting, and the longest railroad incline in the USA. The ceremony was dreamily wonderful, with the sun over the lake, and all present invited to make promises of love and support – including the meta-promise to find out next morning what we'd promised if the party went too well. It did rather.

Lesley started her full-time, six day week job as Burr Matron in September. She is brilliant and deals with every request from the urgent to the banal with the same helpful smile. Somehow she found time to drive Tim, who lived with us while flat-hunting for much of the term, to the station, walk the dogs and wash her hair before starting work. For the first few weeks this was impeded by a broken arm. Tim has now found a new place in London, near Clapham Common, and continues to work for the Home Office. He passed the Fleet Board with the RNR and enjoys evenings at HMS President.

Our house in Malvern is now ready to live in. It seems very light and spacious, with hardly anything in it. We'll spend some of next summer there, and move completely when ten years in Burr ends in July 2012. After that, a range of tempting plans suggest themselves. Charly hopes to carry on and perhaps expand his tutoring for the Open University, which brought exciting fringe benefits such as expenses-paid trips to Milton Keynes in January. Another idea is to create a small consultancy for families in the USA who are looking for boarding schools in the UK. Applewhite & Husband might bring in a few dollars, to fund travel.

Meanwhile life at Shiplake is full and rich. We were sitting quietly in the kitchen one evening after

Lesley has done toasted sandwiches and hot dogs for the Burr boys when the Head of Drama arrived enquiring urgently for carrots. The camel – no Nativity play should be without one – was hungry. Charly found himself helping out on the Under 14 Rugby tour to Bath. We survived an academic inspection, and await one on boarding standards. We think we have right ratio of urinals to pupils.

At the time of writing, we have pretty snow, a shed full of logs and a freezer full of Welsh lamb (thanks to a little side deal with a parent). Wil and Sal hope to get here in time to join Jon and Bri who come on the 28th, for a New Year Party here with UK friends. M40 permitting we'll visit Winthorpe and Lesley's family at some point.

You can find us both on Facebook; follow the [Burr House Blog](#) by googling it, and see Charly's photo journal at www.blipfoto.com/Enzo. If you haven't come across Enzo the Baker, you need to watch The Godfather.

Much love to all, and a Happy 2011 !

