

**Addis Family, The Old Bakehouse, High St., Uffington, Nr. Faringdon, Oxon SN7 7RP, United Kingdom....**  
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Yes, it's true, the beasts are back. Well, I was using the expression for effect but the more I think of it, the more apposite it becomes. We Addis humans have indeed returned to these shores after a mere 20 year absence (that short? you mumble) but we do not return alone. How would Noah have coped in the age of air travel and animal health regulations? That's what I want to know.

First of all was the Daisy Question. Having been through 4 months quarantine on the Indonesia-HK leg of our travels we decided that this wasn't to be done again, unless we were to court major psychological damage. Fortunately, in this enlightened age, quarantine need not be conducted in a cage in Kent. Wandering free in rabies infested France for 6 months also qualifies, for obscure EU reasons. So Daisy currently rules the roost in a small vineyard near Montpellier. As "luck" would have it, Chateau Daisy is a mere 5 minute 2CV-ride from a splendid auberge which specialises in foie gras, confit de canard and highly drinkable reds. Corky and I have to visit regularly to ensure all is well.

Vivien Leigh, of course, had to come too. After all it is nearly impossible to buy a horse in England and the cost of flying her over was somewhat less than, say, casting her in gold and coating her in precious gems. She now lives in a field not a million miles away from a rather splendid pub, which specialises in overcooked beef with Bisto gravy, burned parsnips and highly drinkable bitter. Elvis, the possibly male guinea pig, was left behind to electrify another lucky family with his eating grass tricks. He was replaced in the family hierarchy by the allegedly female Sarah. Sarah is a Bearded Dragon, a rather magnificently Australian reptile (a la Pauline Hanson) modelled by Sam in the family photo. I was dead in favour to start with. She stands still for hours at a time, likes clinging to pullovers like some three-dimensional fashion statement and ate little. Unfortunately, this changed. She now ploughs through kilos of live crickets a day. These have to be caught, shaken in a box until they are coated in white vitamin powder and then pushed out, jumping and chirping, to a ghastly, antediluvian death. Black crickets ("crunchy or squishy, sir?") can be obtained in wholesale quantities suitable for the Reptile House at London Zoo from the aptly named [www.livefood.com](http://www.livefood.com) but to avoid bankruptcy we have now started breeding them in the Old Bakehouse laundry room. Will this be enough? I have nightmare visions of a series of sensible decisions resulting in our owning thousands of square miles of locust breeding grounds in northern Mali.

This pet collection was not considered sufficient, so last weekend saw the arrival of Jess, or Jester for short, an Airedollie of accidental parentage (Airedale mum: Collie dad.), loose bowels and sharp teeth. She does err on the cute side, I have to admit, but then, I thought the kids were charming at 8 weeks. She has already disgraced us with our Uffington neighbours by what can only be described as a loving savage of their 7 year-old daughter.

But what of the humans? I have alighted in the HSBC Training Department in St. Albans, where I am kept busy moving little models of trainers around the large map of the world I keep on my desk. I camp in a small flat mid-week and eat mostly at the Training College. Fortunately for my waistline I have almost been able to resist the stream of nursery puddings, unseen and untasted for years, that are paraded before my eyes. Apart from the occasional suet pudding, jam roly poly pudding or treacle tart at lunchtime, I hardly even think of them any more, such is the power of my resolve. Corky has taken to English rural life, much as anticipated. Apart from the small matter of 3 hours a day ferrying Sam back and forth to school, she is her own woman and has filled her time recently with unpacking boxes and arranging utility supplies. When pressed, she will admit to a snatched ride here and there. She is also studying refugee law and French in Oxford on a weekly basis. I think these are two separate courses rather than an anticipation by Oxford University of the forthcoming French presidential election creating a tide of human misery sweeping from Le Havre to Southampton.

The children are flourishing. Sam was a bit distressed at leaving the US, particularly Shirley and his friends. He has settled into school well though. He is in the junior wing of Daniel's school, Dragon in Oxford, and is rapidly becoming less and less American. Daniel achieved thespian immortality as the mayor of Hamelin in the school musical "Rats" last summer term which was exceptionally pride-making, not that I got to see it, unfortunately, but Corky flew over for the night. His studies are going well and he tackles hard at rugby. Kate has also knuckled down to studies at last, as the dreaded GCSE's start to peek over the distant horizon. Unfortunately, she won the battle of the flute that we fought for years and so no longer flauts. She does still ride and is training hard to be a professional puppy-cuddler in later life.

As usual, 2001 seems to have been a more or less endless series of trips. I did have to cut up rough early in the year when signing a series of travel expenses that revealed that my staff had pulled Las Vegas and Miami in February while I had achieved Syracuse and Minneapolis. Having thrown a major tantrum I mollified myself by shuttling off to Mexico and Panama "on business". Corky came too. While I worked she cruised unharmed and only visually molested around Mexico City. It can make you feel like you are in Barcelona, with the rich bits plazaed and

haciendaed to high Mediterranean standard. Not dangerous at all, we crowed. What was everyone worrying about? Until I turned up, when I managed to be robbed at knifepoint by a wall-eyed midget with an uncharitable attitude. Panama City was less exciting. Protected by the Suttons we managed to make the cash dispersal a voluntary activity, not that we were allowed to do much dispersal, come to think of it. While I visited Colon and chatted idly with Syrian entrepreneurs who sell Chinese rubbish to Jamaican department stores, Corky watched Panamax container ships squeeze into the canal locks. It was a cool trip all in all. The Tetacahuantchicanhican (you know what I mean) Pyramids of the Sun and the Moon, just outside Mexico City, are simply magnificent. The fact they are more or less unused, having been abandoned once the absence of a nearby water supply was noticed by the constructor, just adds a certain Millenium-project-type piquancy to the whole site.

Non business trips were also excellent. We have had two skiing trips since my last missive. The first, last Christmas, in Vermont, was surprisingly good. We anticipated a sort of ice-carving expedition but actually the snow was great and the weather was so clement that masks were not compulsory on the lifts, though Corky could only manage 2 runs before rushing for the fire to thaw her toes. A high point was Sam, courtesy of a liberal education, wowing our Jewish hosts by singing a Hanukah song as they lit the first candle. Easter saw a return to Whistler which was just brilliant and we'll go again. Not unconnected with our enthusiasm, Corks and I both won medals in a slalom race. I will never wash that ski-suit again.....indeed, has it ever been washed?

The summer saw us touring the Grand Canyon. I can report that the region is, indeed, both Grand and Canyonesque. We camped on the North Rim, chatting around the campfire over a bottle of wine, barbecued sausages and a couple of packets of Oreo cookies. As Corks and I observed cheerily to each other, while we mopped regurgitated Oreo from the children's pitch-black and freezing tent at 3am, it truly is an earthly paradise. The following morning we took the children to Lake Powell for a boating expedition. It is a manmade lake, formed by flooding the canyon, so deep that 3 small bodies would never be found. Fortunately (I suppose), time had applied its healing balm by the time we reached there, so we restricted our clandestine activities to illegal smuggling of alcohol onto the boat and into Mormon country ("Daddy, is beer alcohommhmhmhmmmmh?" "You'll suffocate that child, sir, unless you remove your hand").

Arrival in Blighty has hardly slowed us down. For the kids' first half term in October, Corky and the boys went back to the US to do the final move out of Mistletoe Lane. Things got a bit nasty with the landlord's agent which marred the trip but probably helped the emotional tie-cutting. I think the trip also helped Corky come to terms with the reality of September 11, seeing that magnificent Manhattan skyline without the Twin Towers. Having left on September 4, I still have an unreal feeling about the whole thing. Half outrage that anyone could do such a thing to wonderful, strangely innocent New York and half guilt, that we weren't there standing "shoulder to shoulder" with our friends and neighbours. Anyway, while they were in NY, Kate and I were in Hong Kong. While I worked, Kate did a good impression of a teenager lounging beside the pool at the Country Club. Brilliant, in fact. She remains convinced that living in England is the 6<sup>th</sup> level of Dante's hell. Unfortunately, a week of high living with the Macalisters only convinced her of that. On the way back to the UK, I popped in on India, as one does, and visited Mumbai and Hyderabad for the first time. Hyderabad is a rather pleasant place. Mumbai isn't, achieving the remarkable feat of making Jakarta look like Los Angeles.

What other highlights can I recall? A farewell trip to Nantucket, Mass. to stay with our Rye friends, the van Asbecks, saw us bumping over the sand in a 4x4 to barbecue on the beach as the Atlantic waves pounded in with the sole intention of removing layers of swimmers' skin. A weekend at Niagara saw us viewing the Falls from a myriad of angles, some of them wetter than others. Perhaps the least satisfactory is the view from behind the Falls - queue, pay, queue, file into damp tunnel, shuffle through tunnel, stare through small opening at sheet of water, edge out, queue, emerge. The view reminded me of looking through a car windscreen after a frosty night and before the demister has started working. I don't queue for that.

Splendid weddings in England for Corky's cousins Lulu, Ted and Tiffy (not to each other, you understand, we're not that liberal). I love English weddings. These managed to combine the best of English-weddingness with interesting touches of respectively Judaism, Brazil and the Maghreb. Dancing in a Dulwich cricket pavilion for Cath and Adam's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday party (When did my baby sister suddenly become older than me?). Trips to the US heartlands of Indiana and Georgia for, respectively, Bandung (Jeffries) and Hong Kong (Shaws) reunions. Remember, you can run but you can't hide.

Anyway, it's good to be back. One forgets the good things about Britain - blackberry and apple crumble and Radio 4, for example. Driving home last Friday I heard the moderate wing of the Taliban described as Mullah Lite, which tickled me. Sort of makes up for the eternal darkness and driving rain. Have a great Christmas and a wonderful 02.

