

A YEAR OF GOVERNMENT IMPACT

An odd choice of headline, but that's how 2010 has turned out for this branch of the Mell family.

Regular readers will recall that in the last edition we reported elder daughter Rachael had moved to America to train as a Field Engineer in the oil and gas exploration business. Oil was going well, as they say: Rachael had completed her initial training, then spent 10 weeks at "oil school" in Houston and during 2 weeks off in March, bought a car, sorted herself out a flat and made a flying visit back to the UK. She had just completed her first spell for real on a rig in the Mexican Gulf when the Deepwater Horizon platform was hit by disaster and Barack Obama shut down drilling operations. Initially moved to Arkansas, Rachael soon found herself loaned to Aberdeen and back in the UK. She was sent back to Louisiana for a couple of weeks in Summer to sell the car, get out of the lease on the flat and to arrange shipping her stuff back to the UK. She is now based in Aberdeen and reports that the weather in Scotland and the northern North Sea is somewhat cooler than Lafayette and the Gulf.



At the rodeo in Texas – and, yes, it is a real, live steer

David too has been impacted by government action. Following the general election, the new government announced that David's employer (one of the regional development agencies) is to be abolished. David is currently contemplating his options as a tortuous, prolonged and appallingly managed process of closure unfolds. Part-time retirement, some consulting work and a renewed focus on the property business are currently looking strong favourites.

Aces High

David and Alison shared a flying experience over the Summer at Sandtoft Airfield near Doncaster, where each had a half-hour flight in a Cessna. Like many light aircraft, the cockpit has side-by-side seating with full dual controls. After getting airborne, the instructor demonstrated each of the main controls (stick to left and right, stick forwards and backwards, rudder pedals) and then it was "you now have control of the aircraft" to allow the novice pilot to have a go. The panorama from 2000 feet-ish was fantastic, a clear view down the Humber Estuary with the bridge making a striking landmark.



Roger, Roger. What's the vector, Victor?

Alison said she enjoyed it though isn't keen on repeating the experience in too much of a hurry. As for David, learning to fly is definitely on the agenda at some stage over the next few years.

MANCHESTER LIFE

Younger daughter Alison is currently in the third and final year of her Social Anthropology degree at Manchester University. Over the Summer she moved out her city-centre flat to a shared house at the top-end of the Curry Mile in Rusholme. Little did she know that she'd end up as housemum to some young first years and a couple of Bulgarian students. Alison's hopes of a quiet life of study have been dashed by domestic duties which include sorting out the toilet-cleaning rota and dividing the household bills by five.



Alison enjoying the Manchester weather. No rain!

On the sporting front, Alison is still very much involved in waterpolo. At university she has finessed last year's role as Ladies captain with the club presidency this year. This has been good experience and has rapidly taught Alison about the art of delegation. The bill from Orange in October also taught the value of succinctness when phoning fellow club officials.



Alison, left, using eggbeater kick to block a shot

The highlight of the season to date was a recent match against Loughborough, a university almost founded on sport, with Manchester's Ladies handing out a 6-3 drubbing. Away from the university team. Alison is still playing for Sunderland in the women's national league and is vying for the position of top goal scorer in Division 4.

INTERNATIONAL LIFE

Despite the transatlantic to-ing and fro-ing, Rachael has settled into her new working life as an MWD Engineer for Schlumberger (MWD = measurement whilst drilling, look it up on Wikipedia). This is part of an extended induction programme, providing experience of the downhole conditions in which the measurement tools operate. Next year, Rachael will move to Schlumberger's base in Stroud, where she will be using her academic knowledge of production engineering for developing and manufacturing the tools she is currently using.



Rachael on the Louisiana bayou

SANDGROUNDER REPORT

Janice's Dad, John, is still living in his flat in Durham. February 2011 will mark John's 90th birthday, whilst the following month will see his fourth anniversary of living in Durham. The trend in frailty and dependence noted in last year's MELLO! has continued and John now has carers attending him

morning and evening, whilst Janice visits 5 times a week to provide a mid-day meal with David and a family friend taking on this duty on the remaining two days.

PROPERTY EMPIRE

In a moment of weakness in January, David agreed to view a one-bedroomed flat similar to one we already own. A ridiculously low offer was made and, surprisingly, was accepted, though getting to a completed sale took nearly six months.

Since then it has been ripped apart, with some help from Alison who enjoyed attacking the 80's brick built fireplace with an SDS drill, but the renovations to put it all back together have yet to be started.



The fireplace prior to Alison's ministrations

The empire now stands nine strong: mainly one and two bedroomed places plus Springwell Towers. The curious can see more at www.s555.co.uk.

DURHAM LIFE



Enjoying some November sunshine in Lanzarote

David and Janice are still rattling around Springwell Towers. David gave up his involvement in running the local swimming club in April having spent 11 years in various roles including Secretary and Chair.

The club moved to a new pool in 2008 which lead to a fairly hairy period, financially. But having got itself back onto an even financial keel, and with the girls' involvement long past, it was time to move on and leave the pushy parents and temperamental coaches for others to worry about.

Find MELLO! on the web

This edition of MELLO! along with an archive of previous Christmas newsletters can now be found on the web at www.s555.co.uk/mello.

AND FINALLY...

We hope that this edition of MELLO! finds you and yours in good health with food, drink, warmth and good company for the Christmas and New Year break. With love and best wishes from David, Janice, Rachael and Alison.

Right: Hanging basket Durham style

