

A Town Like Alice: Episode 10

A Diary by Deborah Berkely

Alice was born in July 2006. Deborah has kindly agreed to keep this diary to report on what has happened in their family life so far and to keep us up to date with developments. Deborah, Vince, Alex and Alice are pseudonyms, but all locations are real. To see the previous instalments please go to IQJ Issues No. 1 – 9.

July 2010

- Hospital Appointments in last 3 months: none!
- Child Development Centre (CDC) appointments: OT, family psychotherapist, dietitian, vision clinic, audiology, physio, orthotics clinic
- Specialist teacher and two learning support assistants (LSAs), SALT, OT and Ed psych
- New bits of kit: one pair of rather attractive white leather boots with custom insoles; night splints
- Health Professionals: 12

Clinics to come: developmental paediatrician, orthopaedics, developmental check

This month: These boots are made for walking

Well, we're still here...but not for much longer! A young lawyer wants to buy his first flat, and a family of four are moving to East Anglia. A real, three-bedroomed family home could be ours by the time I write Diary 11.

Unfortunately, the school opposite our intended home hasn't exactly welcomed the prospect of educating Alice with enthusiasm. My initial enquiries were greeted with 'we're full', and when told she had a statement of SEN, the head blurted, 'but we already have one of those coming in September!'

I thought I was seeking a school in an outer London suburb, not the 1970s...but the school down the road was almost as bad. 'The problem is she needs support all the time, bless her, including dinner and toileting and playground,' the SENCo told me, 'and I don't know whether we would find anyone who'd want to do

that as part of their job description...it's going to cost money...I don't know what the head teacher is going to say...' Was unsure whether to be more shocked by the discussions about cost (surely not my concern as a parent); the seeming ineptitude of a supposedly experienced SENCo; or – perhaps the most irritating of all – the frequent 'Aw, bless...' comments.

Thank goodness for school no. 3, with its frank admission that inclusion hadn't been the best solution for all their pupils with SEN, but a total willingness and 'up for it' attitude that I found really welcoming. They learned Alice's name and kept using it, too. If only they had had a bit more experience, I might feel confident about her going there.

I never thought I would say it, but I might check out the local special school simply to talk to someone knowledgeable. I always felt Alice could do well in the mainstream, because she is sociable and interested in what 'normal' children are doing – she just needs help to keep focussed and safe. And indeed, at her current (mainstream) nursery, she is thriving. Let's just hope there is a great school not too far away that sees her as an asset and not a drain on their resources.

I wonder what it will be like for me, with a new area to explore. All my fantasies about starting my new life in a new London borough – exploring the local (well-established) parent forum, restarting my training as a counsellor, finding the best coffee shops, don't really include putting everything on hold whilst engaging in wrangling with the local authority about schools – we'll just have to wait and see.

I think the best advice I have been given so far comes from Alice's head teacher at nursery, who said that the way she got through the whole experience of moving house was to keep repeating the mantra, 'in a year's time, with everything in place, you'll wonder what you were so stressed about'. Wonder if she would have felt the same way if she'd had to deal with this particular local authority!

In the meantime, Alice's wonky feet (which were worrying me last time around) have been fitted with custom insoles to stretch them into place whilst wearing her boots. This seems to be working well – I am sure she is falling over less frequently and the boots themselves are really quite cute, nothing like the clumpy 'special shoes' I remember from the 1970s. It would have been nice to see her in pretty summer sandals, but she is clearly not at all bothered – so why should I mind.

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Contact

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