

NEW WRITING

A Town Like Alice

Episode 6

A Diary by Deborah Berkeley

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 - 5.

April 2009

Hospital Appointments in last 3 months: Podiatrist, gastro team.

Child Development Centre (CDC) appointments: SALT, Portage, family psychotherapist.

Clinics to come: Audiology, developmental paediatrician, OT, physio.

Big test to come: Bayley's assessment (see below).

Big changes to come: New nursery, which means new SALT, new LSA (Learning Support Assistant), new specialist teacher.

Last year, when she was just two, Alice underwent a Bayley's assessment, a kind of MOT for children with developmental delay. Her score (gross motor skills of 14 months, fine motor skills of 12 months) were helpful in ascertaining that she needed extra OT help, and since then she has mastered the art of isolating her index finger, a massive milestone that helps all areas of her development—she is able to operate more complicated toys, grasps things a whole lot more efficiently, and (eventually) will be able to tell me what she needs by pointing at it. She tries to now, I think, but doesn't quite have the language skills yet, so she tends to bring me to the item that she wants. I'm really looking forward to seeing what she scores this time around—when you don't have a diagnosis, it's so helpful to know what progress has been made year on year.

I'm not sure if the assessment covers speech and communication skills too. I don't really need a test to tell me her speech is still very delayed. I would guess it's probably still hovering around the 15-month mark, as she is still able to say little more than 'hello' with any degree of appropriateness (although the other day she did bring me a DVD cover with a vehicle on and say 'car', which was a bit of a champagne moment...).

So—Alice's time at the lovely, but expensive, day care nursery is coming to an end, and Big Nursery, with its expertise in working with language-delayed children, beckons. I can't believe our luck in securing a place there—it's the borough's flagship inclusion nursery, with mainstream children drawn from the surrounding area and SN kids from all over the borough who've graduated from the Portage home visiting service. It's a 15-minute bus ride from my place, but we can arrive late, after I've dropped Alex off at school, and I can pick her up early each day. Or I could ride my bike there, with Alice on the back, if I'm brave enough!

The building is a gorgeous light-filled child-centred space with a lovely outside area which will eventually feature a garden planted with flowers, a tree house, and some water play. The staff have been there for years (always a good sign) and the kids make stunning progress.

When I looked around, I could tell the children were really enjoying the place. OFSTED did too—they just won an ‘outstanding’ rating. Alice has visited for an hour, and she got stuck in right away—not exactly sitting down at tables and joining in, but exploring the outside space and finding a calm, quiet, little girl, also with SN, to sit alongside whilst exploring the train track. It’s clearly the best place for Alice. But, of course, a part of me wants her to attend the hideously overcrowded little nursery at Alex’s school, three minutes away.

It’s not just because I am lazy (although that’s got something to do with it!) or because I feel Big Nursery might be too good to be true (ditto). It’s more about wanting to move at the same pace and in the same places as Alice’s peers—the younger siblings of Alex’s mates. I want Alex to proudly visit his cute little sister in the nursery classroom, the way six of his friends will be doing with their siblings. There will also be an opportunity missed for me, too, to socialise with their mums. Instead, I’ll be in a perpetual rush, dashing off straight after morning drop-off to take Alice south to nursery, arriving later than everyone else, and leaving earlier, too, so I can be in Alex’s playground for 3.30 p.m....I hope it’s all going to be worth it.

So what on earth will I be doing with all that free time I’ll suddenly have by late September? Vincent thinks this is my chance to get work I’ll enjoy, and I suppose it is, in a magical world where there are plenty of fun jobs for fading overweight (as opposed to heavyweight) journalists with an inside track on complex needs in the early years. I don’t really share his optimism, but I have joined a writers’ group. I quite fancy being a novelist—so watch this space.

More soon...

© Deborah Berkeley 2009. All rights reserved.

If you would like to make contact with Deborah please contact Interconnections.