

## *A Town Like Alice: Episode 7*

*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, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6.

### **October 2009**

- Hospital appointments in last 3 months: ENT
- Child Development Centre (CDC) appointments: developmental paediatrician; physiotherapist, SALT, family psychotherapist, dietitian, occupational therapist, audiologist.
- Specialist teacher and two learning support assistants (LSAs)
- Health professionals: 10

**Clinics to come:** More audiology, geneticist, ENT

**This month Alice has acquired:** A schoolbag, two lovely LSAs and a boyfriend called Samuel

**And Deborah's thinking:** What am I going to do when I grow up?

Alice has taken to nursery so readily, I'm almost insulted. Shouldn't she appear to miss me a teensy bit more? She dislikes saying goodbye, and may shed a little tear...but by the time I've pressed the green exit button to leave her classroom, she's already distracted, led off gently by her LSA, Mary, and eager suitor, Samuel. Whilst Alice is still having coat removed and glasses wiped, he's impatiently seeking her attentions, 'AlicewecouldgocuttingoutandLego anddoyouwannadoapictureAlice, Alice's mum, can Alicecomeplaywithmenow?'

Alice hides in Mary's skirt at the relentless onslaught of options, but I know she likes Samuel. He's her new favourite word... we've had nothing but 'sam-well,

Sam-well...' all weekend. I leave her to Mary, Samuel and the rest of the beautifully inclusive, officially 'outstanding' nursery, and set off for my new life. Four hours of state-funded childcare every weekday! I can hardly believe it. Great for Alice and great for me – if only I didn't have to think about how to use my time to make money. Forget Learning Support Assistants. I need an Earning Support Assistant.

40-something mothers are supposed to be better set up for this kind of thing, I muse as I stroll (literally and figuratively) in no particular direction, vaguely home-wards. You're meant to be settled in your career, with people offering part-time, school-run-friendly projects to keep the cash flowing in and your brainwaves appropriately stimulated. Trouble is, I may be 48 in biological terms, but my 30-something fellow mothers far outstrip me in stamina, energy and maturity of the sort that creates a good part-time career.

I just don't seem to have worked out what on earth I want to do when I grow up. Over the years I've worked in journalism (I still write for a health magazine on a fairly regular basis but it pays too irregularly to be much of a career option); I've been paid to be a paralegal, a life model, a psychotherapy student and a cabaret artiste (not all at once, obviously). And in my voluntary life, I've been a parent activist, a helpline worker, an exhibition organiser and film-maker. I'm also, these days, a serial committee-meeting goer – the parents' forum means I attend over 8hrs of round-table discussions a month.

My walk takes me to the café, halfway between nursery and home. The coffee is terrible, but they make fantastic scrambled eggs. And the mere thought of the housework I can't avoid doing now that I have time on my hands, makes me delay my journey. Surely there must be something interesting and lucrative I could do to make use of my skills? Vincent's losing patience. Having given up drinking, swapped time spent in his studio for regular sessions of jogging, and

with increasing responsibility at work, he's by turns an excellent role model and a man on the verge of a mid-life crisis. 'You want to get some advice about what job to do' he advises, helpful in the way that only a man who *doesn't understand* can really be.

What he really means is, we're screwed financially and you aren't helping. And just when I'm splashing sauce on my eggs, and wondering why and how we created a financial black hole, without having the extravagant holidays, posh shopping or elegant wardrobes to show for it, my mother rings. 'Dear, I can't help noticing how much weight you've put on lately. Now that Alice is at nursery, do you think you might have time to do a bit more exercise...'

Sometimes, you've got to listen to your inner life coach. I swig my horrid coffee. I think about the exercise, I think about the career. I think about Vincent, in charge of his world. I think about Alice, coyly smiling up at Samuel. I think about Alex, comically overloaded this morning with book-bag, packed lunch and football kit. I leave the café, head to the charity bookshop, and emerge a happy hour later with a bagful of murder mysteries. Kick-ass heroines, using their wit, their principles and – if necessary – serious weaponry to solve their problems. I know there are things I need to work out. But right now, what I need is breathing space.

More soon...

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### **Contact**

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