

MERRY CHRISTMAS,
EVERYBODY



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Merry Christmas, everybody! I hope this note finds you well and looking forward to a happy and healthy festive season.

I'm laughing a little as I write that. I have to be honest and let you into a secret. It's not *quite* Christmas yet – I've barely packed away the tree from last year. But I've decided that I'm going to note down everything throughout this year to help keep track of our news. I always forget to tell you something! So I'll save my good wishes for the end of this note, once I know what this year brings for us.

January

Richie suggested that this year we take a big trip – something we've never done before. What a fantastic idea! Actually, I think he feels guilty about last year. As you know, we had always planned to go somewhere special to celebrate our silver wedding anniversary, but we didn't really have enough money once we'd fixed up the house after the partial wall collapse. On the bright side, however, after that Richie promised no more DIY, so that's something. In future we'll leave that sort of thing to the experts.

Anyway, now it sounds like Richie wants to take me away somewhere swanky to make up for it, bless him. I've started planning already; I've been to the travel agent to pick up some brochures. I know I could do it all online, but there's something nice about flicking through the pages and smelling the print while you're looking at the pictures, isn't there? Should we go on a cruise? On safari? Or what about a trip through the Rocky Mountains? I've always wanted to do that.

February

I've decided to go the whole hog. It has to be Australia. I haven't told Richie yet, but he'll be happy to leave all the arrangements to me. Well, men are, aren't they? Anyway, he's been spending all his time on his new hobby. He wants to get back to nature and is going to grow his own vegetables this year. I'm fully supportive. At least any mishaps will take place outside the house. He might take a little convincing about Australia, but I'm sure next door will water his plants while we're away. I know you're probably thinking that it's a bit far, considering Richie is not so keen on flying. But he was the one who suggested a special trip, so he must be prepared to fly, mustn't he? I'm sure he'll feel it's worth it when we get there. I think we should go in October, before it gets too hot. Such a funny thought, Spring in October!

March

Julie had a pre A-levels meltdown. Richie said something to her about us being away when the exams are on and she got a bit worked up. I thought it was nice she wanted us here to support her, but it turned out she was only bothered about her washing and food while she's studying. Kids, eh?

Richie pulled a muscle in his shoulder. He was digging out a border in the garden and just felt something go. He had to rest it for over a week. It was at a critical planting time apparently, so I had to take over the digging. That's not easy, is it? Thankfully, he was back to full fitness in time for sowing and watering which allowed me time to read some Australian guide books. Come to think of it, I'm not sure why Richie said we'd be away while the exams are on. They happen in June and we're not going until October. Unless... perhaps Richie has booked a surprise for June! All this trip planning has certainly given me the wanderlust.

April

Richie bought a greenhouse. Not a glass one, a green, plastic one. He's planted all sorts of things and spends quite a lot of time pottering about in it. I've not really got involved. It's not big enough to fit two people at once and, anyway, when I peeped in, there really was not much to see. Just a lot of green stalks. I'm not sure what he's growing, but he reckons we'll be eating home produce before the end of the summer. We'll just have to see.

I thought I'd run my plans for Australia past him before booking. I'd done quite a lot of work on an itinerary, but I wanted to make sure I'd thought of everything he would like to do too.

Turned out, when he said, "big trip, something we've never done before," Australia wasn't quite what he meant.

May

Richie has bought a tent for our, "big trip, something we've never done before." He says we can be at one with the land on our holiday and is hoping we can take all our own vegetables with us to cook over some contraption he has bought that runs off a gas bottle. He tried to put the tent up in the garden, but our patch of grass isn't big enough now that the greenhouse is in the way. I tried to help with the tent, but being so close to the grass really brought out my hay fever. I had to go inside for an antihistamine. When I got back out to the garden, Richie had started to pack away the tent – he said he'd be able to work out how to put it up when we get to the campsite. I went to look for Max, hoping he hadn't got through that wobbly fence post again and run to do his business in next door's garden. He hadn't though. We found him when Richie discovered, on his third attempt, that he couldn't fold the tent up small enough

to get it back in the bag and when a small hairy face poked through the zip. I swear Max was grinning. Richie was not.

June

Teenagers and exams. Give me strength. I told Richie we couldn't go camping this month so he agreed, reluctantly, to wait. I wanted to stay with Julie as it's such an important time for her. I'm regretting that now, of course. Tears, tantrums, late nights, early mornings and I haven't been in the spare room for weeks because she's using it to study. I hope she moves away from home to go to university.

I heard on the TV that it's been the windiest June since records began. It hasn't really bothered me, but the poles holding up the greenhouse have snapped so Richie isn't happy. He's ordered a new set of poles, but meantime all his plants are in the dining room. I think we may also have some sort of infestation.

July

I'm still holding out hope for Australia. I've left a few brochures around the kitchen. I think I've managed to knock the camping idea on the head. I said it wouldn't be the same without our own produce to eat and Richie's veg. didn't really take off in the dining room, not when we had to have the place fumigated. He's not very happy. Never mind, we can always sell the tent online.

August

Turns out I have not managed to knock the camping idea on the head. Richie is not keen to sell the tent despite not yet having managed to put it up. He has given up on growing veg. for this year though – he feels it's too late in the season to start again. I have washed my hands of

the whole thing and I'll tell you something for nothing - I am not going through all this again next year.

Some great news though. Julie passed all her exams. She hasn't decided yet which University she is going to, but at least we know all the weeping and wailing in June was worth it.

September

My ploy of leaving brochures lying around the kitchen has had some effect, but not in the way I planned. Julie has decided to take a "gap year" – apparently all her friends are doing it – and is going to tour Australia and New Zealand. She is leaving in October. Richie is not sure about her putting university on hold, but I think it's a brilliant idea! A whole year to yourself to plan what you want to do with the rest of your life. And in Australia too. It'll be fantastic. She'll have the time of her life.

Our own "big trip" is looming. Richie believes he has compromised. I wanted to go to touring in Australia, as you know, and he wanted to go to Scotland, camping. He has now suggested we go to Cumbria, camping.

October

This has not been the best month of the year. We waved Julie off. It's silly really, but I cried for a week. I'll miss her so much – I don't think I want to not see her for a whole year.

We went to Cumbria. I was tempted to cry for another week, but I decided to put my best foot forward, as they say. Richie found someone at the campsite to help him put up the tent and, as hay fever season was over, I thought it wouldn't be as bad as I'd feared. And I thought Max would enjoy it. At least we didn't have to put him in kennels as we would have done if we had been going to the other side of the world.

Camping in Cumbria in October. Unsurprisingly it was cold and a bit damp.

Richie, however, did not have to put up with this. On his way to the toilet on the first night he fell in the dark and ended up in hospital. In a nice, warm, clean bed. Fortunately his leg really hurt.

November

Richie got an infection in his leg. To cut a long story short, he spent some time in hospital this month so I had the house to myself for the first time in 25 years. I didn't realise I would like it so much.

Julie is having a great time in Australia. She has seen some wonderful sights and made some lovely new friends. What a tonic!

Richie is fine now. He has decided to give the "back to nature" thing a miss and is searching around for a new hobby. I saw him looking at a bagpipes catalogue and started to make some plans of my own.

December

I'm finishing this early December, dear friends, so that it gets to you in time for Christmas. Cards are written, presents are wrapped and I've left Richie all the instructions he'll need if he wants to cook himself Christmas dinner. By the time you read this I'll be on a plane. I'll catch up with Julie as I'm touring Australia. Gaps years are not just for teenagers, you know! I've managed to get Richie on board this time – he really can be a sweetie sometimes. He is going to join me in the New Year once he has arranged time off work and has psyched himself up to fly. He has suggested taking scuba lessons so we can look at the Great Barrier Reef together.

Let's face it; he's had worse ideas, hasn't he?

With love and best wishes for the festive season and here's to a great New Year!

Marianne xx

The End
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Thank you so much to all my online buddies for your support in 2013! Merry Christmas, everybody. ☺xx

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