

Dear Friends

A number of our friends issue yearly “newsletters” updating us on their comings and goings. We think that this is a wonderful idea. We have, in fact, thought so for many years! So this year I finally put something together!! Yes, its late, I have an excuse!

1999 has been quite a year, a helluva year, in fact in many respects. Major events have taken place at a seemingly overwhelming pace. Topping the list must surely be the arrival of Robert James Clark on 23 October 1999. After 11 years of marriage, this has slightly altered the usual marital routine :-)

We celebrated our 11th anniversary (20th March) at a Home Group camp, where we announced to a truly stunned audience that we were pregnant. In common with many of our friends, the immediate question was: “Um, Er, Uh, what do you Um, mean?”, in the absolute certainty that the Clarks could not possibly be pregnant in the *physical* sense. After confirmation that procreation was definitely on the cards, this was followed by an enthusiasm that was truly remarkable, and which we do not yet fully understand. Let it just be said that we had finally taken the decision that we were ready and eager, and all of our friends related to the God-given timing. We had discovered that the general nausea that Les had been feeling was *IT* on the 16th March 1999 at about 6 weeks worth of Pregnancy..

Bittersweet memories of this period exist, however, as Mop (our *weeskind* Maltese) had been in and out of hospital as her epilepsy had deteriorated and her neck had seemingly become “loose” after her increasing seizures. This led to incredible pain on the side that the particular nerve was being pinched. We finally made the decision to put her to rest, after a bad weekend. We still miss her, and the way that she will always be Mop.

A couple of days after, Madam acquired a 4 year old Maltese/Yorkie Cross about the size of a teacup from the local SPCA, whom in Clark fashion, we named Floss, as she had a tad of ye olde Halitosis. (R300, a General Anaesthetic and dental cleaning later, she is better :-). Floss stole into our hearts very early on, and as usual is very much part of the Clark family.

A major thing for me was to see the scans of the developing child. At 12 weeks, we saw the full foetus in profile, and the feelings that went through me were something unreal. What killed me though was a short glimpse of a fully fingered hand waving about. I am not a particularly emotional person, but I bonded fully then. At the 20 week scan, the gender was guessed, but not fully established. We then had an opportunity to get a 3-D scan, via one of the only machines in the country at Park Lane, free and Gratis. Essentially it takes several usual 2-D cuts, and builds up a 3-D image of the last pixel to record an echo—ie it builds a 3-D image of the child's profile!

One thing is for sure, that when he came out, he looked exactly like the 3-D image!!! Another thing of course, is that we had a VERY good idea that the gonads were EXTERNAL :-)

During the period where the gender of Clark001 was uncertain, names were duly conceived: After the 3-D scan it was abundantly clear that it was to be Robert James and not Melissa Joy. Robert is from me (Alan Robert), who

is in turn from my uncle Bob, and James is my favourite book of the Bible (Madam is particularly pleased that it isn't Genesis, or Ecclesiastes :-). Originally, the she-clark was to be named Joy Clark, until we realised the wonderful mocking abilities of a JC. (Lesley's second name is Joy). Hence we settled on Mellissa Joy. Mellissa is a particularly wonderful name in the Penelope Wilcox's “Hawk and the Dove//Wounds of God” series, amongst other acquaintances (as is Robert). Isn't it funny how we judge a name by the people we know who carry it???????

In the lead-up to the birth, we had several “last-flings”—things that we knew we couldn't do with Charlie. We spent a wonderful weekend away at Critchley Hackle in Dullstroom, courtesy of Accolades points. We then had a “last-last” weekend at the Grace Country Lodge—wonderful. This time we were building up Accolades points :-) :-) We also had several “last” trips to restaurants etc, marvellous stuff.

The bittersweetness, however, continued in that 3 weeks before Robert was born, Les's Mom had a debilitating stroke, and was essentially unable to recognise that Robert was Les' son thereafter. Mercifully she died on the 8th December, leaving Dad (85years). The loss, and the irony of the timing, however, is painful. Pray for us in this regard.

Mom was such a generous and gentle person and is sorely missed. We have missed the daily phone calls, the “silly little” messages that she always left on the answering service. Les was obviously rushing back and forth to Benoni, organising frail care etc in the weeks leading up to the birth, and after two weeks was doing the same, this time with Robert in tow. So it has been a stressful time for us.

I am still happily doing the lecturing thing, it is such a blessing to *really enjoy* your job. I graduated my first MSc postgrad in December, with two more following in May 2000. (Hopefully). After exactly ten years in the post of Lecturer, I have finally been promoted to Senior Lecturer. Come another 20 years, I might get AsProf!!!!!!

Les finished her Systematic Theology course with Andrew George, and thoroughly enjoyed it, but was pleased when it was over, as the work load was quite high, and the travelling late at night all the way round the Ring Road was not good, especially being pregnant and all! As there was some debate as to whether she should continue to the second-year counselling course, she was pleased to have decided not to in the end!

Robert has been a tremendous blessing to us. The timing is clearly God's, he is such a mellow little Charlie, and generally lets us get some sleep at night. At this stage he smiling, very active with arms and legs, and beginning to chuckle. He certainly “talks” a lot, and can play with his Gym and toys for hours. We have been abundantly Blessed by the gifts that we have had for him, the only major items of expense being a pram and a baby monitor! (and nappies :-) :-)

I write this note with my son in a sling, with a dummy in his mouth, at 8 weeks old. It is unbelievable to me how much love one can feel to a such an input-output sytem!!!!!!!!!!!!