

Letter from the Desert

News from Alan & Grace

September 2005

Home to England



John Paul Alan with his grandmother, Joan Cook, at her home in Sussex.

Welcome home Little John!



All Cooks together



Sally, Grace, Alan, Joan, John, Fiona, Paul



Fiona, John, Paul - brothers and sister.



For the first time, the Cook family are all together at the family home in Haywards Heath. From 3 months to 83 years, it was great to be together.

Kuwait friends reunion



A BIG welcome to Stephen and Martha Whelan who have recently arrived in Doha. We are delighted that you are here. We first met Stephen and Martha in Kuwait some years ago and have kept in touch ever since, so it was a great day when we heard that they were coming to Qatar and that Stephen would be working at CNA-Q, where Alan also has an office in his new job.

We've also had a visit from John (who we also met in Kuwait, where we both worked with Stephen), a regular visitor to see us, so it was great that we could all get together. We seem to have been partying ever since Stephen and Martha arrived just a couple of weeks ago. We had parties in our respective flats on Wednesday and Thursday, and as usual when John is here, we went to the Golf Club for lunch on Friday, this time joined by Stephen and Martha - we just wish that Joe McClusky could have joined us!



Martha and Stephen in our flat in Doha

Alan's farewell

At the end of July, Alan and a few other of his colleagues were given a fine send-off to pastures new by the English Curriculum Development Project Team. Thanks Gabi. Alan was presented with a wooden model of a Dhow and a set of matching fountain and ball pens. As you will see from the pictures, we all had a great time and will miss you all.



Marc, Peter, Gareth, John, Kevin, Gabi, Antony, Carla, Brian, Shane, Annette, Bren, Ian, Julian and Alan



Gabi with Grace

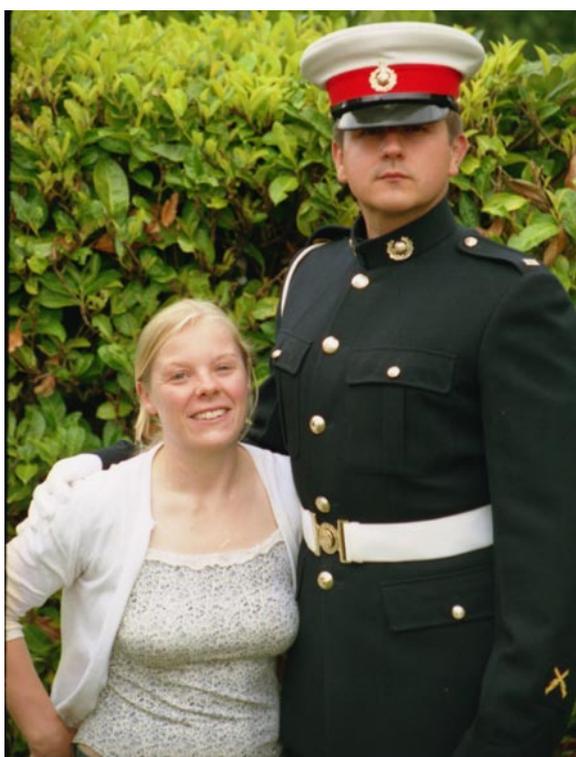


Annette with Alan.

Annette has since returned to Doha and is, once again, working closely with Alan in their new jobs. Welcome back, Annette.



Paul's visit home - August 2005.



Paul with some of his trophies awarded for his sporting and military achievements (above left), and with Julie, his girlfriend (below left) and with his grandmother (above), and brother John (below).



ALAN'S REFLECTIONS

My reflections this month is a bit of a mish-mash as some of it was written before we went to England, and some after we returned to Doha - and events moved on during this time. You may also find it written in a mixture of tenses; sorry, but that's the way it is this time. But at least you'll get the overall picture.

Something very strange happened just before we went to England. You will find this hard to believe. We do too!

Just to put you in the picture. On the end of our breakfast bar stands a small wooden unit with two shelves. Around the base of this are a number of pot plants in their holders. On the bottom shelf of the unit stand 5 bottles containing various drinks. Three of the bottles are full and the other two are about half full. The gap through which one walks between the kitchen and the lounge is quite narrow as one has to negotiate past the fridge/freezer as well as the end of the breakfast bar.

The telephone rang and I hurried to answer it. Squeezing through the narrow gap described above, my arm came into contact with the wooden unit. The whole unit and the surrounding pot plants went flying. Everything landed on the very solid, ceramic tiled floor. The only thing to be broken was one pot plant holder and a small jar containing herbs. NONE of the bottles broke! All the other pot plant holders also remained intact! The fall was exactly 1 metre. Try dropping a bottle of wine onto a tiled floor from that height and see if it stays intact. No? Now try dropping five at a time! No, we don't have an explanation either, but it's true.

Other rather strange things have happened too (this was written before we went to England). Try this:

For a long time I've been looking for another job (needs must, as I can't retire yet). True, I've had several offers, but nothing seemed right somehow. As the end of my contract loomed ever closer (31 July) I thought I'd have to extend it until the end of the year. I'd got a couple of serious applications on the go, one in Borneo, the other in Syria, but they seemed to be delayed in coming about. You will see what I mean: Five weeks ago I had an interview for the job in Borneo and was told that I'd be advised of the outcome in two weeks - I'm still waiting - I've been advised there has been a delay for commercial reasons. Another job I'm in serious contention for (in Syria) has also been delayed - I was advised that the interview would be on 1 June and that it was just a formality as I'd been approved for the position. Again, I'm still waiting. Since those job applications were put into action, and quite by chance, other things have happened.

A friend in the office went to observe some technical training within the organisation I'm working with. On his return to the office he suggested I ought to get a position there - seeing as it paid a lot more money! Some days passed, then another friend in the office said that the project director was coming over from Australia - this is the person who hires technical training staff for the organisation I work with (not for). I thought it might be worth a try, so I obtained the director's e-mail address and sent her my CV, on spec. asking to be considered for any suitable position either in Qatar or in any other country where she needed people. I also suggested that we had a meeting when she visited Qatar. I received a very pleasant and positive e-mail from her and we had a meeting soon after her arrival in Doha where she said she'd pass on my CV to the right person and recommend me for a position in the technical training department. I must admit that I was very apprehensive about going back into technical training, especially in the classroom, as I'm rather rusty in my engineering knowledge and haven't had the specific oil/gas experience they'd normally demand. For this position. I was rather surprised to be told that I'd got the job! Imagine my surprise when, the next day, I was summoned to the office of the BIG boss in Corporate Training for an interview with him and the head of technical training. My bosses boss had received the call for action and I was told to get to the BIG bosses office immediately - I didn't know if I was going to end up sitting on the golden throne or on the next available airline seat! Thankfully, I'd got a spare, clean shirt in the office, so I grabbed it and leaped into the car for the drive across town to the BIG bosses office. Arriving at the building, I quickly changed my shirt (forgetting to put on my tie!), and was escorted at high speed to the BIG bosses office. On my arrival he summoned the head of technical training and I had my grilling! An even bigger surprise came when they offered me the job - but NOT the job I was expecting. As far as I can tell, the job I was offered hadn't existed before my CV landed on the BIG bosses desk. Obviously he hadn't created it especially for me, but no one else has done it and they were only just thinking about creating this job when they got my CV! This job will suit me much better than being in the classroom all day teaching engineering and trying to swot-up as I go along! It's largely an administrative job looking after all the technical trainees of the corporation who are going to be attending further training with the College of the North Atlantic here in Doha. I'll also be acting as a liaison between the corporation and the CNA. Could be fun! During the process of getting the Doha job, I've been waiting in eager anticipation regarding the outcome of one of the other two positions - jobs which I'd love to do and in the most fascinating countries. I've been hanging on hoping..... Then..... Our little son, John, was taken ill - in a lot of pain and discomfort. Grace has recently spent a lot of time at the hospital with him and he has been thoroughly scanned, x-rayed and examined using the latest hi-tech medical equipment. The result;

he is suffering from kidney dilation (quite common for premature babies) which could take quite a long time to clear-up (about a year). He is now on a course of antibiotics, but is still not a happy boy. With this condition, we now feel that it is important to stay in Qatar for the foreseeable future, as here, he can receive the very best medical attention that is available anywhere. The medical facilities here are fantastic, as unlimited amounts of money are poured into the health service - which is almost free, even for us foreigners.

So, bang goes the fantastic, high paying jobs in other places. Instead, we're staying here in Doha - but with a better job, more money and a much larger flat than we've been used to for the nearly two years we've been here. Just think of the timing. If either of the other two jobs had been on schedule, we'd have been off to another country where the medical facilities would have been nowhere near the standard they are in Doha. To get those facilities might even have cost us all our salary - and savings, and, poor little John would have been subjected to flying fairly long trips, particularly if we'd gone to Borneo, which might have caused him a great deal of distress.

I was scheduled to go to the UK on 31 July, but postponed this until 5 August to give us time to move into the new flat. The transfer from one home to another was likely to be tricky, as the moving-out date wasn't the same as the moving-in date! Wonderfully, our friends Chris and Lan came to the rescue and offered us their villa while they are on holiday, so we'd always have a roof over our head. Fantastic! The good Lord is certainly working overtime in looking after us and has got me the right job at the right time and in the right place to be of benefit to our little lad.

As things happened, we needn't have worried about being homeless. We were told we could stay in our 'old' flat for a few days until we moved, so we moved in in one stage instead of two and got into the 'new' flat two days before we left for England.

Another thing that worked out well was Grace's visa. We'd been told (in England), over two years ago, that she couldn't have any more visit visa's, so had never applied for one since, however, we felt it was the right time to try again. We made a very careful, thorough application and were so excited when she got a 5-year multiple entry visit visa. This meant that we could all go to England if the doctors gave the all clear for John. We booked our flights, and the day before we were to leave, got the final go-ahead from the doctors. The doctor also told us we could stop the antibiotics. Great. It was great for my mother to see her new grandson - she was SO pleased.

Alan

John with Sylvia and Gerry, in their garden, in Lindfield, Sussex.

