

6386 Måndalen,
Norway
Tel: (0047) 7122 3881
Fax: (0047) 7122 3445

Our letter to you this Christmas is written rather on the last minute, for several reasons. Firstly, we have decided to spend Christmas in Britain this year (for the first time since we came to Norway), and secondly, we were waiting to be able to tell you whether we were going to move house or not (of which more anon).

So here we are, shortly before Christmas, taking a break from packing to go away, Christmas shopping, pre-Christmas services and all the rest of it, and looking out at the snow-covered mountains, clear blue sky and cold-looking fjord. It's relatively warm this December: about -3° each day, and very little snow. The Summer and Autumn were exceptionally hot, so we were able to swim in the fjord every day (except Tracy, who won't on principle!).

Looking back on it, we always seem to be able to say each December that the year behind us has been varied and unusual. This year certainly has. Of course, it's had a shadow hanging over it: although the immediate pain of Christopher's absence isn't always in the foreground of our minds, it often crops up unannounced and unexpected. We've been away on several holidays during the year: the Canary Isles in the Spring, Northern Norway in the Autumn, and a month in Europe in the Summer. This last was especially memorable: a trip on the coastal steamer down to Bergen, then the drive and ferry to Denmark, where the highlights included a day in Legoland and Tim getting his head stuck inside a modern sculpture in a park. After a longish stay in Britain, including many warm days on Welsh beaches, we drove back through France, Belgium, Holland, Germany and Eastern Denmark.

Tracy has been active as usual this year. She now has three horses: a heavy horse used for driving (horse and cart rides round Åndalsnes have been popular this Christmas), an Arab for riding and a large pony for riding and jumping. This last is also Bethan's regular horse. As well as all the horse-related work and the consultancy company, Tracy has been teaching in Måndalen school all Autumn, and is enjoying this very much.

Tim has also been busy: a concert tour in Denmark and various things elsewhere, and assorted articles and editions have dominated the year. An unexpected job was to produce a calendar with pictures of and technical information about organs in Scandinavia. This was fun, though much more work than expected. A Welsh publisher has accepted a book (in Welsh!) on church organ playing, which hopefully will also come out in English next year. Also some organ compositions published in Germany and Sweden.

Bethan (8½) started learning the flute this Autumn, and seems to be enjoying it. Hard work at first (for her and us!), but she's now come far enough to have the fun of being able to play the tunes she wants, and that helps a lot. She also enjoys riding and simply being around the stables, talking to the others.

Matthew (6½) is our in-house comic. Hardly a day goes by without some new gem. Today's picture on his Advent calendar was of "a man yawning by a lamp post" [carol singing]. At the school's end-of-term concert, at which Bethan played a little solo, some unfortunate youngster was struggling with a tenor horn which despite his best endeavours was grunting rather. Matthew's comment (heard and appreciated by most of the audience) was: "that one sounds like a sick cow"! Forays also into theology

(“Jesus can do things ordinary people can’t do — like being awake at night without yawning”) and many others. But he’s also extremely good at arithmetic and has a remarkable memory. His daily conversation encompasses varieties of eels, Greek history, carbon dioxide ... All in all, quite a challenge to have around the place.

Thomas (3) is still a bundle of fun. We’re still waiting for a proper diagnosis for his problem, but at last (after two years!) he’s due to go into the national hospital in Oslo for a couple of weeks in January, and we hope that they might be able to identify something there. Thanks to our own research and experimenting, we’ve got his diet more or less sorted out, so that he’s grown a lot and put on weight. He’s now got a great deal more energy, which he uses liberally!

We mentioned earlier that we may be moving. Tim has been asked to take a job further north, in Sandnessjøen. Sandnessjøen is a harbour town, some miles south of Lurøy, where we lived before. We know some people there from our Lurøy days, in particular the minister and his wife. They’ve been asking for many years whether we will come, but we’ve always refused. This Autumn we changed our minds and accepted the offer, for a variety of reasons. Firstly, a series of events both in Sandnessjøen and here led us to believe that we should seriously consider it. Then again, this is our 7th Christmas here in Måndalen and, while we’ve put down deep roots and made many friends, we feel that the time has come for a change. Tim’s job, with ten churches in a huge district, has become rather administrative and cumbersome and makes it difficult to work as much on concerts and recording as we might wish. In Sandnessjøen there is one church, a brand new organ currently being built for £1¼m, and a great many possibilities. It’s also a lot nearer the Church Music Centre, where Tim is still Director of Studies. It will be hard to leave Måndalen, and we’ve been quite unprepared for the reaction of people here. Everyone we meet stops us to say that they don’t want us to move. The day we announced our decision, it made three full pages in the area newspaper (including the whole of the front page), two full pages the next day (including the whole of page 1 again) and the whole of the editorial on the third day! It’s very touching and unexpected to feel *so* wanted. But there is still a question about the move: we have not yet found a house. If we can’t find something suitable, then we won’t go. If we do move, our new address from around the end of March will be: 8862 Alstahaug. We’ll let you know, however.

So it looks as though we’ve got an interesting and exciting year ahead. We hope that you also will have a lovely Christmas and a truly good year in 1998.