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Our first complete year in Kelbrook has been full of experiences for us all. The amazement of seeing flowers in the garden in January (as opposed to frozen wastes, but we won't dwell on that), the village duck race at Easter (yellow plastic ones, helped down the beck by the fire brigade), lots of walking on the hills and alongside the canal, and several visits from friends coming to stay. Apart from the Norwegians, our most enterprising visitors sailed a converted lifeboat along the canal system from Wales to reach us!

For many years we've spent our summer holidays in England, visiting family and friends. We've had wonderful times and many memorable trips, but it has been a constant ambition to go somewhere else! This year we all piled into the car and set off for Brittany, where we had rented a large and comfortable farmhouse. We had a wonderful and much-needed holiday, enjoying warm French weather, good food and swimming in the sea (unintentionally on one memorable occasion) . We are all enthusiastic about going back.

It's been an exciting but exhausting year for Tracy. "Half-time" in the parish has constantly tried to make itself "full time", while full-time study at Nottingham was supplemented by a huge project for Ministry Division. Everyone was astonished at the volume of work she has managed, but no-one was very surprised to see her work graded as "outstanding". Now into her second year, things have quietened down a little, but we were all very pleased to get her home last week after a 5-week residential spell at Nottingham.

Tim has also been active, with the usual trips to Norway as well as a couple of concert tours in Italy and various concerts and courses in Britain. This week there's a *Messiah*, a BBC1 broadcast and a *9 Lessons and Carols* all within a couple of days. To take his mind off it all, he's taken delivery of his 40<sup>th</sup> birthday present — a bearded collie puppy. This is designed to keep him young (though it seems to be too late for that) and give him exercise (which at the moment consists mostly of mopping up puddles). Pup's official kennel name is "Minanda Melody" so (being a nutty musician) he's called her "Tune".

Beth (14 in the Spring, and as such a Fully-Accredited Teenager) is stretching her wings. She quite forgot to mention at home that she'd been elected to the local Youth Council, and she happily jumped on a plane in the Summer and took off alone to Norway for a couple of weeks (changing flights with a 6-hour wait in Oslo) to visit friends. We got reports of sightings from time to time, and gather she had a wonderful time swimming in the fjords and revisiting old friends. The flute playing is going well, too. But our main impression of Beth is simply that she's such a nice person to have around!

Matt (12 in the Spring) has made the big leap to secondary school, where he has joined Beth and a selection of cousins. He seems to be enjoying it (as much as anyone admits enjoying school). The noise level in Kelbrook has increased significantly this year, as Matthew has started learning the trumpet. He's taken to it like the Kelbrook plastic ducks to water. Hearing

protectors were issued to all members of the family, but have been very little needed. He's also doing gymnastics — and seems to be very good at it. Matt and Tim also went for a week's holiday in Norway this Autumn - for both of them their first trip back to Måndalen. It was a lovely holiday and reunion with old friends, although it's never easy to go back as a visitor to a place where you've lived for so long.

Tom (8) describes himself as a chatterbox - and his teacher agrees wholeheartedly. He talks approvingly of school (where he engages unwary teachers in detailed conversations about unlikely subjects such as the day's kroner exchange rate) and of "fun" subjects such as technology. He was mildly in trouble today for sliding on the (icy) playground whenever he thought the teacher wasn't looking. His swimming lessons proved their worth during the French holiday (when he had an unplanned swim in the sea), and he's still enjoying piano lessons — though his feet seem to be itching to play the organ. Wonder where he gets that from. Tom went with Tim on a concert trip to Venice this Autumn and had many memorable experiences, including an hour-long walk through the city well after midnight, looking for their hotel with the aid of a steadily-increasing band of local helpers.

Katie (3 in the Spring) is our big personality in a small package. She likes parties, singing, meeting people and general rowdiness. She orders the dogs around and stomps about in large wellies. She looks completely angelic, and everyone falls for her.

The coming year looks like being every bit as interesting as the one gone by. Tracy has a great deal to do, including another 5-week stint in Nottingham, Tim has a number of new challenges including concert tours in Germany, France, Italy and Scandinavia and a good deal of university work, the children will no doubt find ever more things to do, and we've a funny feeling that Tune the dog will make her presence felt this year, too ...

But in the meantime, we've just treated ourselves to a satellite dish to receive Norwegian television. Funny the things you miss, but this makes us feel at home and we justify it by reckoning that it will keep the children's Norwegian up to date.

All in all we've been counting our blessings, and found a lot of them. We do hope that it's the same for you, that you'll all have a wonderful Christmas and that all will go well in the year to come.