

Last Christmas we wrote from Haworth, at the end of a deeply-snowy walk home from school. This year we're living in a warm country. The thermometer outside is showing 10 degrees and there's hardly been a flake of snow to be seen at ground level. There's plenty of other things, though – mountains, the river, waterfalls. Things we don't have include neighbours (three houses are visible in the distance; at night time there are three points of light in otherwise complete blackness), traffic (it's a 20-minute drive to the nearest road with more than a couple of cars and a few sheep passing each day).

One way and another it's been quite a year. We moved house in June, and quite a performance that was. The only way into our valley is over a winding mountain pass and through a mile of very small, unlit, unsurfaced tunnel which scared the removal men. They took an hour to get their lorry through it, terrified of it ending up for ever stuck inside a mountain. Getting the dogs here was even more of a saga. There's no time to go into all that just now: suffice it to say that it ended up with a local flying club saving the day. But it was all worth it, and we now feel entirely at home in our tiny village and our warm and cosy Norwegian house.

Andrew (15) (who for Norwegian purposes is Thomas again) and Katie (9, nearly 10) are both at the local school – just half an hour's journey away. Both are enjoying it on the whole – though of course having to do everything in Norwegian has been a challenge, especially for Katie who doesn't remember living in Norway before. Tracy is priest in charge of a large evangelical church in the nearest town (just over an hour's drive away). She seems to have a history of taking over churches that have had “issues” and this one is no exception: much of the work at the moment is concerned with straightening out old problems and guiding the congregation towards better times. But there are some wonderful people there as well as fantastic buildings and resources – and a real sense that the church wants to be dynamic and active. Tim is half concert musician – bookings pouring in – and consultant for various universities and half-time director of music for the local churches, including a fabulous organ, and loves it all. Matt (18 going on 19) is still in Durham but he gets across to Norway for holidays and some long weekends and is intending to come here in a couple of years when he's finished his course. And Beth (20 going on 21), of course, is still in Norway. She's changed her job this year and moved house – but within the same village – and seems very happy. She's just bought a horse, but - sadly - lost her dog. Hallie died a few weeks ago. Ironically it takes much longer to get from her part of Norway to ours (14-15 hours' drive) than from Durham to here (3 hours or so)! Our dogs love living here too – their favourite activity being coming with us up into the forest to cut firewood.

It's all coming back to us – the good things (and, of course, the occasional disadvantages) with living here. It's five months since Tim last locked his car. Soon after we arrived we went into the local bank and found that the staff had popped out on some errand or another, leaving dozens of bundles of thousand-kroner (£100) notes stacked neatly across the (open) counter (no security glass here!). It was five minutes before the bank clerk returned, by which time there were a couple of customers waiting, jokingly discussing whether the bank had gone over to self-service. Back home we have deer visiting the garden, eagles circling overhead and beavers down by the river (full of trout) that flows past the bottom of the garden.

As for things that we've done, even in the half year since we moved, I really don't know where to begin. We have put up a web page on <http://family.rishton.info/> which includes pictures of where we live and what we've been doing, a daily webcam of the view from our house, and – for the last couple of months – a rather intermittent “news” page that gives some idea, at least, of the pattern of life here. Doing that means that we can tell you so much more, and much more “up-to-the-minute throughout the year, but it doesn't leave us a lot to write about in this letter. So one way and another I hope you'll forgive us for being a bit brief this year.