

A bit on the kids Having been on the anxious side before Joel & Hannah started, pre-school has been excellent. There are no serious complaints about going each day, and they're clearly liked by their classmates and teachers.

Hannah, true to form, is quite shy and reticent outside of the house. Joel, as some of you know, suffers from an irrepressible urge to speak his mind all the time! His teacher spoke to us about it: first listen, then speak. I think he's making progress! (It's also an issue at home.) Remarkably he has taught himself to read Greek! He and Hannah are beginning to speak and we have no concerns about that. Sunday school is also a good thing. They've plenty of contact with Greeks and are content and peaceful. Esther has much less contact with peers, but we're thankful that she is very happy and healthy and very lovely.



Outlook Between now and Christmas we have little planned on top of the basics, with the exceptions of the student conference in north Athens (16-18 Nov) to pop in on, and some meetings with small group leaders, at least those of the one that meets locally. Sofia (who Kate got to know a bit before the summer) and Manolis are keen for our input, being short of ideas as to what a student Bible study group could and should do. We'll keep you posted.

Term finishes 21 December. We're planning a quiet Christmas with (hopefully) a few days away with hire car and borrowed/rented cottage somewhere in the hills. An opportunity to get away and spend quality time together with games and snow and DVDs and a log fire is what I'm after (though this could be dreaming...)

We may be often tired and sometimes down, but we are still confident that we should be here, that Jesus is Lord and that he has his people in Athens who will respond to the gospel eventually! Pray with us to that end please.

Lots of love, all the Clarks

We love and need the contact we have from friends and family, so please do drop us a line. Snail mail is especially great!

Greece is the Word!

November
2007

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As I write this, Dawn is blogging. Have a look! The blog complements this: more pics, more text. If our camera still worked we'd be more inclined to update it more frequently. Sorry... Please do feedback on it.

Dear friends,

We're really sorry that it's been such a long time since we wrote (and sorry for beginning with an apology: I was taught not to, but what did my English teachers know?).

First, a brief catch-you-up since the last letter. Our time before Greek classes started was dominated by Dawn's dad's heart attack, (Dawn and Esther popped back to Sussex and London for a week) and Joel & Hannah beginning school. We are still really grateful for all that happened around those events: George made a great recovery from his heart bypass, though it is ongoing, and Joel & Hannah made a great start at pre-school.

It's been good to be back at church, which becomes more like home each week—including the kids settling well in Sunday school (for an hour before main meeting). In mid-October we had 60ish folks round from church for Sunday lunch! They brought all the food, we just opened the door.

We also had two great visits: firstly all my immediate family as a surprise for mum's 60th, secondly from the Callows (named in case you know them...), and we celebrated Joel's 5th birthday! The rest of the time things have settled into routine. The next two pages are written from our own perspectives on that. Read on!



A day in a Jonathan

Up at 7 for breakfast with J&H, E if awake, older two dressed/bags packed, leg it to J's pre-school by 815 (exactly 400 paces door to door!). If strong enough, take bike. After J, ride H to her's (towards uni). Bike problem: 2.5km of pure uphill to uni. Been physically empty recent weeks, have had to walk bike. Worth it for ride back home! Aim to arrive early enough to read bible on roof. Great Athens' views (will put photos up soon).

Greek class 9-12. Self-dropped a level after week with fluent speakers. Big relief, still challenging. Most of ~20 others married to Greeks/working here years, speak much more than me. Piling on grammar, struggling to pick up vocab. Enjoy class. One teacher same as spring course. Whoosh downhill to collect H then to J's and home. (If no bike, leave J for Dawn to collect.)

Family lunch, then time for D to finish h/w, muck around with kids, power nap every week or so, put girls to bed, read or do h/w myself. D to class 3ish, leaving me with two sleepers and one quiet player (J). Plan: I work up to 1 hour while J plays downstairs with me. H woken by 4, E by 5. Spend 4-6 juggling kids/dinner prep. Kids eating before 6. D joins soon after. J&H such slow eaters: takes us to bath/bedtime. Once kids settle (beautifully) we have 'til 11ish for h/w, correspondence, and relaxation.

This is the thing friends: the routine we have is good but tiring. Most evenings I've felt too tired for the prospect of home work, let alone extra vocab learning. Lack of sleep and distance from friends takes its toll and evenings can be quite low. This isn't a symptom of being in *Greece per se*. I like it here, the people and the crazy systems. It is simply the strain of distance from safety, comfort and trusted people who know me (apart from Dawn and kids) and the magnitude of what lies ahead: i.e. more of the same with no prospect of learning faster or having good local friends! None of this takes me by surprise, it's just an observation.

What I'd ask of you is that you pray that I'd be joyful, careful with my time (when I have the choice), persevering in the mundane of language study and loving towards my family. I am conscious of the earthy reality of the spiritual battle: that it is in relationships and unspectacular godliness that the battle is fought. These very unsurprising strains easily undo the effort. I've tried to tell it like it is, though space constrains. Please feedback anyway you like. I appreciate it, especially as the all-consuming nature of life can distort my perspective.

Dawn's Diary

On average, I get an extra 25 mins in bed and get downstairs for the back end of breakfast and helping Clarkie and the kids get out of the house. I then have around 4 hours until we're all together for lunch. Most mornings I tidy up, hang out washing on the roof, spend a bit of intentional quality time with E (singing or reading stories), do some homework, get bread from the bakery, pick up Joel (if needed) and prepare for lunch. Some mornings I do a bit of food shopping locally—at the farmers' market Mondays, in the local small supermarket or down the hill to Lidl or the great trek to Carrefour (bus-ride once a week with E and the pushchair). I also try to cook a batch of something at least once a week so that Jonathan has a selection of home-cooked meals to just heat up from the freezer as a good option for dinner.

The lunchtime period is as Jonathan's described. I leave the house just before 3 and catch the bus up the hill. It's a stiff walk even from the bus-stop to the class and I'm usually in a hurry! Most of my class have lived here for more than 4 years and speak quickly and understand a lot. I'm in the minority of those who have better written and reading ability than speech. Consequently I'm uncharacteristically reticent and shy (and a little too proud to make mistakes). There's definitely been progress in all of this in the last few weeks, but it's still a struggle. I'm encouraged by our progress though and see it at least every Sunday as I recognise and understand more both in terms of words and grammar. Sundays are such an encouragement in so many ways!

Being of less melancholy disposition than Jonathan, I've not **FELT** the effect of missing friends and Beeston quite so much. It *has* affected me—every meaningful contact and conversation is an encouragement to intentionally seek friendship and I'm feeling much more settled now that supermarket shopping and trips to

Pray...that the pressure of what we do and how we feel will drive us to prayer and that our character will be formed well, and that we will consistently be good parents and partners.

the bakery are less daunting! We're grateful for the encouragement of the good friends we do have: Paul & Emma, Tom & Anna, and the potential for others amongst Greeks and ex-pats.

It's all pretty tiring though. Changing cultures for us has been less of a shock, more of a creeping and steady adjustment that has tired us imperceptibly.