

*'Another year over, and a new one just begun'.*

Dear Marna Masters,

It seems a lifetime has passed since the winter of 2016/2017, and I would like to update you on how we have been since.

December has been an extraordinary month for the last couple of years. In 2016, we had just moved to London, with Paul fighting for his life and our babyboy starting his in the very same room. I still cannot find the right words to describe what we went through back then.

The year after, it was no longer the three of us, but me and baby Frank. We had just moved house and were still getting used to the new reality, with Paul no longer with us, and practically every aspect of my life being different from the year before.

Last year, I reluctantly put up a Christmas tree. The decorations that we had bought together two years earlier a silent reminder of what had been or could have been. Still many tears were shed, but somehow, after almost two years, hearing ABBA on the radio no longer made me cry, but actually put a smile on my face.

Paul was no longer there to see it, but watching Frank dance to his favourite music reminded me of his fathers love of performing. And like his dad, Frank is physically and verbally strong, and very determined to do things his way.

There's differences too. Frank refuses to dress up, that must be his mothers influence :-)

As for Pauls remains, last spring, I buried them in the cemetery of Stroud, next to the hospital where he was born half a century earlier. I have chosen to bury him there, so his family and friends can go and visit anytime.

For us, visiting Pauls grave and seeing his family has been and will continue to be a regular part of our new life. I think it is important for Frank to know his English roots and to feel connected to his father and his second motherland. Peppa Pig and Thomas the Tank Engine have been helping us out with that a little bit too, recently.

Luckily Peppa goes to playgroup, so that made it easier for Frank to go there too. It was difficult for both of us at the start, as we have spent almost all our time together after returning home. Now that he got used to the other kids and the rhythm of playgroup, he quite enjoys it.

Frank is a very cheerful boy. He sings all the time, and loves dancing. He is physically strong, and right at the top of the growing chart for his age group. Very confident on his balance bike too, which is of course met with a lot of enthusiasm in this country.

Football and cooking are other things he loves doing, with curries being one of his favourites. One day he took all the different cans of dried herbs from my drawer, poured them all in his little pan in his kitchen and started to cook his own curry. The house had a wonderful smell of garam masala for days.

Every week we go to the pool, which is practically next door, and the weather allowing, we go to the beach, walking or biking through the dunes and stopping for little picnics. Frank is very gentle, and helps me in the garden with our plants and the rabbits. Trains and cars are of course another favourite, Paul would have been proud of him I'm sure!

All in all, I think it is fair to say we have come a long way.

This December will be different from the previous three years, with precious memories from the past but also with hope for the future.

Wishing you and your loved ones a merry Christmas and a wonderful, healthy and happy 2020.

Annemielu