



Did yours have Marmite on?

By Suzanna Nock

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What's it like to be an AIMS volunteer and a Mum? Suzanna Nock enlightens us.

I am very proud to be associated with AIMS, but sometimes I think that 'the rest of the world' forgets that we are a small, voluntary and (in my case) juggled-round-children kind of organisation. I took over posting out the journal as a stop-gap measure and ended up doing four editions. I am now on 'maternity leave' and, luckily, someone else has taken this job on.

When the call went out today for more articles for the journal - specifically, something lighthearted - I was immediately transported back to the summer I posted out my last edition.

Picture the scene...

I have the envelopes and the boxes of journals have arrived. My first task is to get them up two flights of stairs into the house; my luck is in and I ambush a neighbour, who carries them up for me. This time, I have been organised and have already bought hundreds of 34p stamps; Shane has posted me the labels with addresses and it looks like the team is ready to go!

I should explain that the crack team I had was me (seven months pregnant), a young French girl with a badly sprained knee, my next-door neighbour's six-year-old and my three-year-old (hence, the Marmite).

I make a cup of tea and demonstrate the process of sliding the journal into the envelope, sealing the side, sticking on the label and the stamp, and putting it in the 'finished' box.

So far, so good. Everyone starts and I make sure that the 'overseas' labels are separate as those journals have to go to the post office to be weighed.

This is not working. Six- and three-year-olds are just not able to slide the slippery journals into the tight-fitting envelopes. I have a rethink and apply the principles of Henry Ford. The children are given the important task of putting on the address labels while those over five feet tall put the journals into the envelopes.

Phew! All is going well...

But I should have known it wouldn't last. I explain the benefits of sharing nicely and then divide the remaining labels between the two boys. (Was your label one of the torn ones?) An element of

competitiveness creeps in. Now I have a moral dilemma-do I encourage the competition for the speed of the process, or do I explain that we all have different talents, skills and abilities according to our personalities and ages? I opt for the former.

We are making good progress; once we get the rhythm going, we two adults can just keep ahead of the kids, who are madly slapping labels onto the envelopes. (Was yours on crooked?) There is some disagreement as to what music we will listen to - my Radio 4 vote was quashed and we ended up with the happy action songs (Wheels on the Bus, etc). We stop for lunch (Did yours have Marmite on?), and then head out for a swim as it's been another scorching day!

We lose our six-year-old back to his mother, but crack on nevertheless and manage to get all the journals into envelopes-cautious celebrations with more tea.

Then comes the intellectually challenging bit of the 'overseas' division. The addresses have to be sorted by zone, and I then make my shopping list of stamps needed for the post office run.

Unfortunately, the post office doesn't do 34p stamps in self-adhesive, and the thought of licking all those stamps does not appeal, so we make a Blue Peter set-up with water, yoghurt-carton lids, sponges and water. At last, we have some finished products!

For the afternoon break, I chase everyone outside for fresh air and zoom up to the post office to get the overseas postage; we send all round the world, including Nepal, Belgium, Argentina, Japan and New Zealand. I also buy more 34p stamps as it looks like we'll be about 150 short.

Back to the grindstone...

We work out a way to tear up the sheets of stamps and stick them on without getting glue and water everywhere- well, mostly. (Did your address have splash marks?) The kids are back and want to help again-things slow down. (Was your stamp torn, upside-down, on the wrong side, or all of the above?)

My husband comes home and carries the completed boxes down to where the postman will collect them. We eat hastily cooked pasta and get into the bedtime routine. (No, you can't stay up to do more stamps!)

It's now 9pm, and we decide that we can stick stamps and watch a movie at the same time. So we settle down in front of the computer and watch Grease on DVD- Summer Nights! (Did yours have echoes of the lyrics?)

We finally get the last of the stamps on and the boxes carted away by 11pm, leaving a small pile of 15 waiting for stamps. (Was your copy two days later than everyone else's?) There is immense satisfaction at having got it all out so quickly, and I allow myself a small sip of wine to celebrate.

Not everyone would post out the journal in such a musical-comedy fashion, but it worked for me in my circumstances-and that is how we work at AIMS, doing what we can with our time for a cause we greatly believe in. If you have time and energy, and would like to be part of the work of AIMS, please contact

AIMS as we always have a wide variety of things that need doing.

PS: Don't feel left out if your summer issue arrived in an envelope that was properly sealed, with the label on straight on the white stripe, with the stamp head up in the top-right corner and not a bit of Marmite to be seen.