

Some Suburb Open Gardens



Gardens open to the public as part of the National Garden Scheme (top left clockwise): Christopher Matthews of 43 Addison Way, David Weinberg of 74 Willifield Way, Mike and Heather Collins of 121 Erskine Hill and Gerald Weinbrenn of 102 Willifield Way.



New Year's Eve firework party



PHOTOS: CESAR RODRIGUEZ-DURAN



Free Church Advent Candlelight choir service held on December 2nd



MICHAEL ELEFHERADIS

Pets Corner: Sausage – a special pet

Sausage, a blue-grey miniature lop-eared rabbit with dark brown eyes is the first rabbit to have been interviewed for this series and she certainly won't be the last.

She belongs to Clare and Steven, but it is Clare who, from a very early age, wanted to have a pet rabbit, but her parents were not so keen. So the first pet

she was allowed to have was a goldfish, a creature which cannot really show much affection to humans. After this, Clare was given a hamster, and then a slightly larger animal – a guinea pig! When she was about 15, her parents finally acquiesced and let her have a rabbit, called Rocky. Maybe by this age, they felt that

she could take on the duties of cleaning out the hutch.

Clare then had a succession of rabbits. She spent a year in Heidelberg, where she had a grey mini lop-eared rabbit called Winston, who was not very affectionate and her flatmate conveniently continued to look after it once she left. Then to

Oxford University, where she kept two rabbits called Sookie and Alioli, who made friends with the college cats. When leaving Oxford, Clare gave the bunnies to the vicar and his family, ironically with their family name as 'The Butchers'.

After university, Clare's parents finally bought her a pet from a rabbit breeder. This was Sausage, so named as, when she lies down, she looks like a sausage! Clare was then living in a flat in West Hampstead with wooden floors, which Sausage did not much like as she kept slipping.

When Clare married and moved to a house on the Suburb, Sausage was about five years old and she now lives in a downstairs room with a bay window,

furnished with all mod cons. This D-shaped arrangement makes an ideal 'hutch' as a gate forms the straight side of the letter D and the curved area under the window is lined with vertical sticks, which enable Sausage to easily sharpen her permanently growing teeth. Within this area is a small wooden house where she hides, a table hung with toys, a small bed on which she sleeps, and at the other end is her food bowl, a trough where grass is growing and a litter-tray.

Carrots are her favourite food but she is only allowed a small amount as they have a high sugar content. She also eats special pellets, dried and fresh hay and loves basil and

parsley. Rabbit owners have to be quite careful what they put in the enclosure as rabbits will often chew through wire or bite off paint.

In the summer, Sausage is taken into the garden on a lead and loves walking on the grass. But she is kept well away from the two vegetable patches. As soon as she's outside, she starts cleaning herself. In fact, she spends a lot of time licking herself. In winter, rabbits grow an extra layer of fur, which they shed in late spring, with some help from their owners who have to de-fluff them. They don't actually moult. In winter, if she's cold, she sensibly sits by a radiator.

Rabbits are most active in the mornings and evenings and sleep the rest of the time – about 16 hours. They are not noisy animals and don't mew or bark to attract attention. Instead, when hungry, they buzz like a bumble bee and when afraid, thump their feet.

Visits to the vet are quite frequent as her nails have to be clipped regularly and she has to be vaccinated against myxomatosis. Rabbits have a scent gland under their chins, so they rub their chins against anything they want to claim as their territory.

I very much enjoyed meeting Sausage, who makes an ideal family pet.

JUDITH SAMSON



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