

**FOR BETTER, FOR WORSE**



**MIKA SMILES**

I KNOW all of my husband's little foibles. He likes an extra hot bubble bath at 3.30pm daily, he chills his Stella in the freezer to help it reach optimum drinking temperature and reads Nuts and Zoo magazines "for the sport".

There is one habit that truly boggles me though. When we get a takeaway he likes to eat just half and put the rest away for the following day. Be it a Chinese chicken curry (extra spicy, no mushrooms) or a chicken jalfrezi (which he is soon, I'm told, set to substitute with a vindaloo for a "new challenge"), precisely half gets squirreled away for his lunch the next day. My half, on the other hand, is gone in nanoseconds. In my mind his restraint is remarkable.

It was Saturday night and I'd been out for my friend's birthday. After a delicious meal and a couple of drinks, my strict £50 budget prevented me from partying any further, and so I went home sober. Chris has had a night in with lager and, by the looks of the his dirty plates, an Indian takeaway for company. I reached into the fridge for a glass of juice before heading up to bed. But there was something missing. Chris' usual leftovers were nowhere to be seen.

The delivery of a pizza a few days later triggered the memory...

"Babe," I ventured. "What happened to your leftovers the other night?"

"Um..." he said stalling, while placing the slices onto our plates. "I ate it all," he replied eventually, purposefully avoiding my gaze.

At that moment the penny dropped. "Oh my God. You hid it from me didn't you?"

Chris's shoulders sunk. The game was up. "It's just I know you sometimes get hungry after a night out," explained my browbeaten husband.

There has to be something wrong when people actually make a point of hiding food from you. And truth be told, I didn't really blame him. One of my most shameful moments was fishing chow mein leftovers from the bin after a heavy night on the tiles. My only defence is that it was still in its container.

Regular readers of this column know that in our house it's a case of eat or get eaten - by me. Whole packets of biscuits and crisps disappear without poor Chris getting so much of a look in. "You'll save one for me, won't you babe?" is a phrase that features regularly in our relationship. When Chris has a plate of food it's to be shared. When I have a plate of food, I protect it in the only way I know, scooping it as quickly as I can.

Anyway, I'm afraid I must dash; I'm feeling a bit peckish.



**ISOBEL WEARS** Clockwise from top left, party dress, £8; Hello Kitty outfit, £6; tights, £1; shoes, £8. **ANNA WEARS** Party dress, £8; waistcoat and dress outfit; £5; tights, £1; shoes £8.

**P**HOTOSHOOTS with children are never easy, even when they're as good natured as Isobel and Anna. But tears and worried looks to the camera aside, the cousins are the perfect models for Cherish Baby, their mums' new high-end secondhand baby shop.

The two girls are firm friends, whose families holiday together, socialise together and now work together.

Maria Thrall and Alison Stanley are sisters-in-law, Alison is married to Maria's brother Mark, who are part of the region's growing trend for mumpreneurs.

The pair, a former HR manager for The Tanfield Group and a former primary school teacher, are part of a growing trend of women who want more flexibility over their family life and so have decided to set up business themselves.

Maria says: "We wanted to spend more time with the kids which is where this all started. In the run up to starting the shop it hasn't necessarily been the case, but now we're up and running we can work part-time."

"It has made managing the balance between work and family life much easier."

Both being pregnant, shortly before Anna's birth, they have spent a lot of time talking about theirs and their family's futures.

Both wanted to go back to work, but neither to the job they were in before.

Not because they disliked their previous jobs, but because, like many women, they wanted to have a good balance between working and

spending time with their young families.

Maria recalls: "It was probably about February this year which was decision time. We decided we were going to hand our notice in and thinking about what we could go and do."

After a number of brain storming sessions the answer became clear. Just looking in their own houses they had a wealth of barely-worn, and sometimes even unworn, baby clothes.

Both knew the expense of shopping for children and both were also not averse to seeking out good secondhand clothes.

"We knew from ourselves in how good a condition the stuff we had was in."

"Our houses were so full of things we could stock a shop - clothes with a lot of good wear in them, but which our children had outgrown."

"We also knew how expensive things were first time around. We would have wanted a shop like this



**MUMPRENEURS** Alison Stanley with her daughter Anna, both left, and Maria Thrall with her daughter Isobel in their shop Cherish Baby, below.

# Baby bargains

**Hannah Davies meets two mums who quit their jobs to become part of one of the region's growing trends.**



for ourselves." The deal was sealed when Maria noticed a shop up for lease in Low Fell.

She recalls: "I'd seen this shop and always thought how lovely it was; it was a gift shop before. So when I saw it was up for lease, I knew it would be the ideal place for the business."

The women did their research before opening the store and had help from Business Link North East with funding their website.

Alison says: "We didn't really have any retail experience previously. I worked in Littlewoods as a Saturday girl before university and Maria worked at Monument Mall selling jacket potatoes, but that's it!"

"We'd both gained skills from our previous jobs but, to be honest, the best transferable skill was from being a parent."

"When you have children you have to be organised. That's probably been one of the most important lessons we've brought into retail."

Opening a shop has been a sharp learning curve though. Both say they were unprepared for how long things can take - from ordering lines in (Cherish Baby stock the women's favourite new lines as well as new mattresses and car seats) to designing a website.

And despite opening the shop so they could spend more time with the children, initially, that wasn't the case.

"We were working a lot of hours up until the opening. We couldn't have done it without the support of our husbands."

"Luckily it has all calmed down." Now the women are relishing working part-time. Alison says: "A lot of our friends say they wish they'd done something similar."

"We're just so glad we've done it. Your children are only small for a very short period and it's great making the most of it."

Equally however, Maria adds, neither of them would have wanted to be full-time, stay-at-home mums.

She says: "Being at home is hard. When you're at work there are always people around to say whether or not you're doing a good

**PROFILE**

Name: Maria Thrall  
Age: 29  
Lives: Low Fell, Gateshead  
Family: Married to business and economics teacher Nick, 29, daughter Isobel, 15 months  
Previous occupation: HR manager for The Tanfield Group  
Best thing about being a mum: "I just think you feel totally fulfilled."  
Worst thing: "The tiredness!"

job. "As a mum you don't get: 'You are doing a great job'. When you are bringing up a baby there's no appraisal system." Luckily the shop has already been a hit with its mixture of high-street to high-end clothes and buggies from the likes of Mamas and Papas and Bugaboo. Maria says: "It has been fantastic, it really has. People saw we were

opening and we've had to replace virtually everything - the stock has flown out.

"We've had a lot of people buying toys and clothes."

"Mums are obviously big customers but also grandparents."

"Our pushchairs and buggies have been doing really well. The other day a woman came in and saw the exact same travel system she was going to buy for around £700, in immaculate condition for half the price."

The women also rely on people coming in with their stock of good-quality baby items.

"People like the fact we give them cash, and, although they get less than perhaps they would make on ebay, it takes all of the hassle out of it for them," Alison says.

"At the moment we've been relying on word of mouth. We have done well so far through that."

"People have been brilliant, coming in and saying how good they think it is and how the area has needed something like this."

Already the women have plans for expansion - eventually they'd like to open more shops.

**PROFILE**

Name: Alison Stanley  
Age: 34  
Lives: Chapel House, Newcastle  
Family: Married to paramedic Mark, son James, four, and Anna, two  
Previous occupation: Nursery school teacher at Prudhoe West First School  
Best thing about being a mum: "It's seeing them develop and feeling like you've contributed to the person they're becoming."  
Worst thing: "Sleepless nights and the fact you work 24/7."

Maria says: "Ideally we'd like to have branches all over the region, that's the eventual goal. And we want to do clothes for mothers-to-be and children as well." For more information email [info@cherishbabyonline.co.uk](mailto:info@cherishbabyonline.co.uk), visit [www.cherishbabyonline.co.uk](http://www.cherishbabyonline.co.uk) or call (0191) 487-5433.

**YOUR SPACE**



**KAREN WILSON**

A new clock is one of those relatively affordable accessories that can add interest to any room.

And with so many unusual and quirky designs available, you can really make a statement. From reclaimed, rusty, vintage clocks to funky, modern timepieces in all kinds of shapes and sizes, there's something for every taste. They also make great Christmas gifts.

Here's my pick of the current crop.



Ideal for a contemporary home, this happy hot dog clock is new at [www.hunkydoryhome.co.uk](http://www.hunkydoryhome.co.uk), tel (0191) 645-4004. Made from orange acrylic in the shape of a dachshund, it measures 16in wide by 9in and costs £49.99.

Created by well-known British textile designer Celia Birtwell, the Pretty Woman clock adds a funky floral twist to this classic design. It costs £20 from [www.breeze.uk.com](http://www.breeze.uk.com), tel (01223) 354403.



My favourite is this square, retro-style clock with a French cafe theme, which is perfect for the kitchen.



Beautifully painted and finished, it measures 22cm by 22cm and costs £11.95 from [www.milk-and-honey.co.uk](http://www.milk-and-honey.co.uk), tel 08454 597 649.

If you're after a funky modern clock for the study, this globe design from



Karlsson could fit the bill. It's made from pale blue glass and it features the world atlas map in a darker blue, while the hands

are silver metal and shaped with aeroplanes on the ends. It measures 40cm in diameter and costs £28.99. Visit [www.giftedpenguin.co.uk](http://www.giftedpenguin.co.uk) or call (01642) 763000.