

LONDON CALLING
Transplanted Americans
Allison Gray and Scott
Beyer with daughters
Rachel (top) and Sara.



STREET THEATER AT
COVENT GARDEN

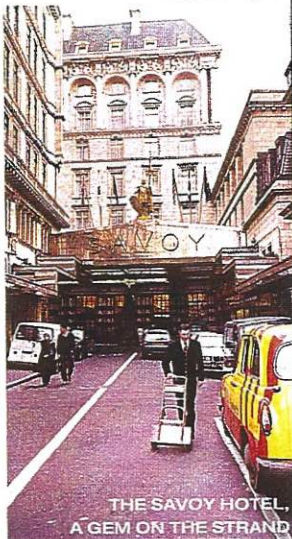


TOWER BRIDGE RISING
OVER THE THAMES



A HORSE GUARD ON PARADE

By Sheryl Berk
Photography by
Marc Royce



THE SAVOY HOTEL,
A GEM ON THE STRAND

mummy, may I have a biscuit?" Allison Gray laughs as her 4-year-old daughter, Sara, an adorable redhead with freckles sprinkled across her nose, asks for a snack in a refined British accent. "It's amazing how easily she picked up on the culture, and even the speech," Allison says, handing Sara a shortbread biscuit, otherwise known as a cookie. Sara's other favorite desserts are jelly (translation: Jell-O) and an ice lolly (Popsicle). For dinner, she's partial to beans on toast, a traditional English dish.

Sara was just 22 months old and her sister, Rachel, 10 months when Gray and her husband, Scott Beyer, moved from Darien, CT, to the London suburb of Wimbledon in May 1999. "Both Scott and I grew up in Texas," Allison explains. "I came to New York to pursue musical theater, and he took a job in the city with Factset Research, a small software firm." When Scott was asked to become managing director of the company's London office, the young family couldn't resist making what Allison calls "an exciting change—but also a scary one because we were really settled in the Northeast."

Gray, a full-time mom, wasn't giving up a job, but she was leaving behind something even more important: her family and friends. Luckily, the grandparents were willing to visit. Notes Allison, "The trip home is too long for us to make often with such little ones."

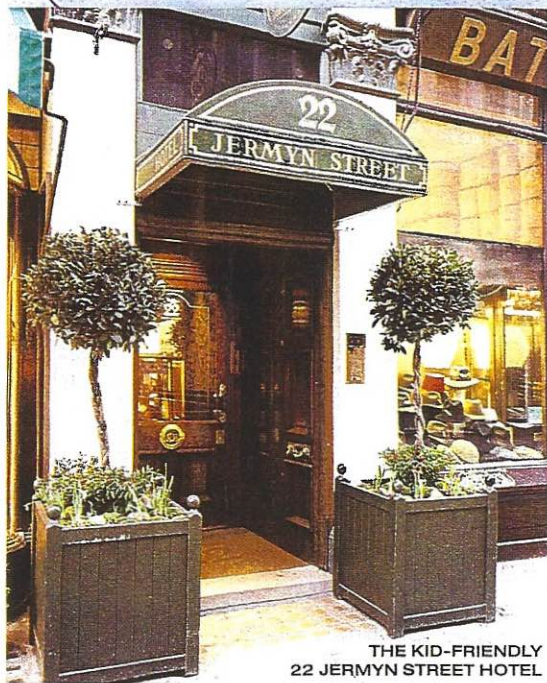
After moving into a three-story, five-bedroom house, Allison quickly made friends among her neighbors and at Sara's nursery school. "The international community here is very friendly," she says. "You talk to people in the park and the village coffee shop." She also joined the American Women of Surrey, a newcomers' club that helps families learn more about their adopted country. The 40 members in the Wimbledon area meet for coffee and a social outing once a month and share tips on everything from nanny agencies and family doctors to the best brands of "nappies" (aka diapers).

Even with the group's guidance, Allison experienced culture shock. "There were definitely some surprises," she recalls. When a birthday party invitation read "Fancy Dress," Allison assumed it meant formal party attire. "I put Sara in a beautiful white dress and patent leather shoes, and she chose a sparkly necklace to wear with them." They arrived at the party to discover that all the other children were in costume. "That's what 'fancy dress' means here," she says, "so we had to improvise. I told everyone Sara was in costume as Cinderella." >



Innocents Abroad

TWO AMERICAN FAMILIES DISCOVER THE JOY OF LIVING IN LONDON AND SHARE THEIR TOP SIGHTSEEING PICKS AND BRITISH ONLINE FINDS.



THE KID-FRIENDLY
22 JERMYN STREET HOTEL

Where to Stay

Great London hotels for families, according to Diala Sanbar, cofounder of the Web site www.planit4kids.com:

■ **County Hall Travel Inn Capital** Belvedere Road, SE1; 020 7902 1600. Reasonable rates (£69.95 a night) and close to the Aquarium and London Eye.

■ **Travelodge** Harrow Place, EC1; 087 0085 0950. In the heart of town, close to museums and shopping. A family room runs £69.95-£79.95 a night.

■ **Holiday Inn** 100 Cromwell Road. SW7 4ER; 020 7373 2222. Perfectly located for seeing the sights, with a private garden for play time. A family room is £140 a night, with breakfast.

■ **22 Jermyn Street** 22 Jermyn Street, SW1; 020 7734 2353. A small hotel that welcomes kids with games, newsletters, videos, and more. £495 for a two-bedroom suite.

■ **The Savoy** The Strand, WC2R OEU; 020 7836 4343; www.savoygroup.com. Families are treated royally at this posh hotel near Covent Garden. A two-bedroom family room is £495 a night.

■ **The Athenaeum Hotel and Apartments** 116 Piccadilly, W1V 0BJ; 800 335 3300; www.athenaeumhotel.com. Five-star luxury for families; kids get a teddy bear, a Hamley's gift card, and more. A one-bedroom apartment with kitchenette is £395 a night.

As at a typical party, "tea"—a term often used to refer to an early dinner for children—was served, consisting of sausages, chips (french fries), baked beans, and lots of sweets. "But both Sara and I were shocked when, after the guests sang 'Happy Birthday,' the cake was cut and then taken away. The kids were given Jell-O instead of the cake, which was wrapped up in napkins and given to the children to take home. It's like the British version of a goody bag."

Allison also finds some differences between American and British parenting styles. "The English are much more formal. At the park, you don't see many moms getting dirty—I'm the only one in the sandbox. And people probably think it's strange when they see me singing silly songs with my girls while walking down the street."

The British education system is very structured, and school starts at an earlier age than in the U.S. "If a child turns 4 by August 31, she's expected to go to reception class, the equivalent of our first grade," Allison explains, adding that she chose to keep Sara in preschool for another year. "She can already read beautifully, but I question if kids don't burn out."

Weekends center on family fun. "We love exploring all the beautiful gardens and playgrounds," says Allison. Favorite outings include visits to the duck pond at St. James's Park, the London Zoo, the Science and Natural History museums, and the Polka Theater for Children.

"But the girls' favorite activity right now is riding ponies," Allison says. "Most villages and towns have commons, large nature preserves with trails for horses, jogging, and cycling." Little Sara rides Biscuit, a palomino pony, once a week. "She's brilliant!" Sara pipes up. And she doesn't mean that Biscuit is smarter than your average horse: In British kidspeak, "brilliant" is the equivalent of "awesome" or "cool."

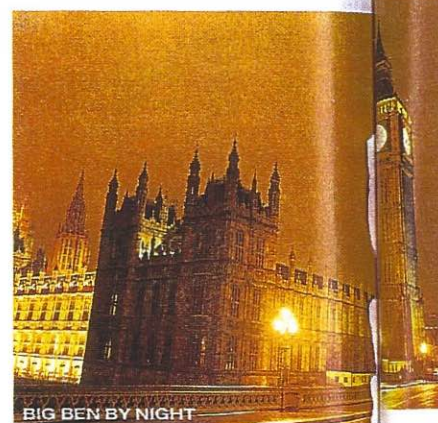
Both girls seem to think that life in London is also brilliant. Rachel doesn't even mind that it rains almost every day. "I splash now," the 2½-year-old announces, handing her mom a pair of galoshes. "Kids pick up on what their parents feel," says Allison. "If Mommy and Daddy are happy and comfortable with their community, then the children will be too. Even though our family wasn't born here, to us this is home now."

Triple the Fun

When Samantha Davenport and her husband, Tim, moved to London five years ago, they were engaged and eager to start a new life together. Samantha left her job as a lawyer for the National Basketball Association so Tim could accept a different position within Merrill Lynch. "I had been to London many times and knew I liked the city," she recalls.

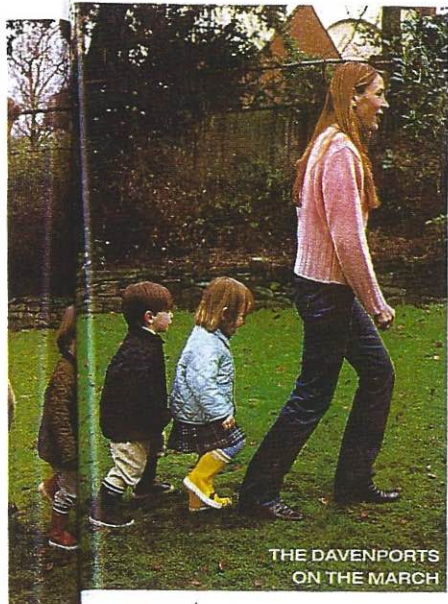
Samantha and Tim moved into an apartment in Kensington, then returned to New York City briefly to get married. A year and a half later, Samantha got pregnant with not one but three babies. "When they said 'triplets,' I was speechless," she says.

Eliza, Alexander, and Jackson, each weighing more than five pounds, were born on July 25, 1998, in the same hospital in which the late Princess Diana had her sons. "London offers a government-financed



BIG BEN BY NIGHT





THE DAVENPORTS
ON THE MARCH



THREE'S COMPANY Piling up on Mom and Dad's bed is part of the weekend routine for British-born triplets Eliza, Alex, and Jack Davenport.

National Health Service, so the children's care didn't cost us anything," says Samantha. "We have a general practitioner who is my children's doctor, and mine as well. When I was pregnant and had terrible morning sickness, my G.P. made house calls twice a day to check on me. Where would you find a doctor like that back in the States?" If a G.P. detects something more serious than an earache or a cold in a child, he might refer the family to a pediatrician, who is considered a specialist.

A year after Eliza, Alex, and Jack were born, the Davenports decided to move to Wimbledon. "With three kids, having a backyard—or a garden, as they call it here—is essential. My husband's commute time is only about 10 minutes more on British Rail and the Underground than it used to be, and we have all this extra room."

The Davenports' spacious house at the top of a winding hill is brimming with toys and Thomas the Tank Engine books. The triplets' nanny, Emma, assists Samantha and Tim in racing around after them. "Call me Mary Poppins," she jokes.

"Childcare in England is far superior to what's available in the States," Samantha believes. "This is the home of the nanny, and there are dozens of agencies around London as well as two-year nanny colleges, which is where I found Emma. You register, and when nannies graduate, they apply for jobs. Being a nanny is a career here."

Not all nannies, Samantha insists, are strict. "It's a British stereotype: Parents are strict. Nannies are strict. Children are brought up in a restrictive environment. That's just not so. Parenting styles differ and nanny styles differ—you find the style that works for your family."

What works for the Davenports is a lot of love and laughter. "I believe that kids are kids, no matter what country you're in," Samantha says. "They all like to knock down blocks and read bedtime stories and get their tummies tickled. Mine are too little at this point to understand what's British and what's American. They're just living with Mommy and Daddy and having fun." ►

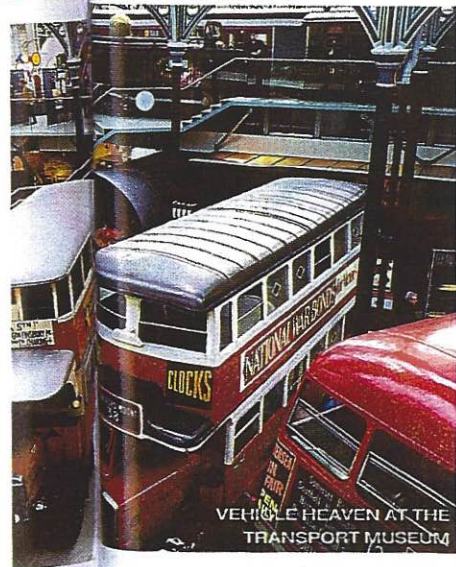
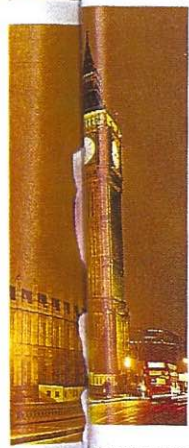
SHERYL BERK, a frequent traveler, is senior entertainment editor at *Biography* magazine. She and her husband live in New York.

To make the most of your British adventure, check out seasonal-events listings at www.londonforkids.com, the "Best Places for Kids" channel at www.londontown.com, and the virtual tour of London at www.travelbritain.com.

London Lingo

"You'd think because they speak English in England, you'd understand what people are saying," Allison Gray says with a laugh. "But there were so many times when I scratched my head, trying to figure out what the local moms and kids were talking about!" Here, a quick lesson:

AMERICAN	BRITISH
■ garbage	■ rubbish
■ trash can	■ dustbin
■ give a hug	■ have a cuddle
■ take a nap	■ have a rest
■ panties or underwear	■ knickers
■ pants	■ trousers
■ sneakers	■ trainers
■ diaper	■ nappy
■ pacifier	■ dummy
■ sweater	■ jumper
■ undershirt	■ vest
■ truck	■ lorry
■ french fries	■ chips
■ chips	■ crisps
■ soft-boiled egg with toast (cut in strips)	■ egg and soldiers
■ baby carriage	■ pram
■ stroller	■ push chair
■ cookie	■ biscuit
■ Jell-O	■ jelly
■ Popsicle	■ ice lolly
■ jelly	■ jam

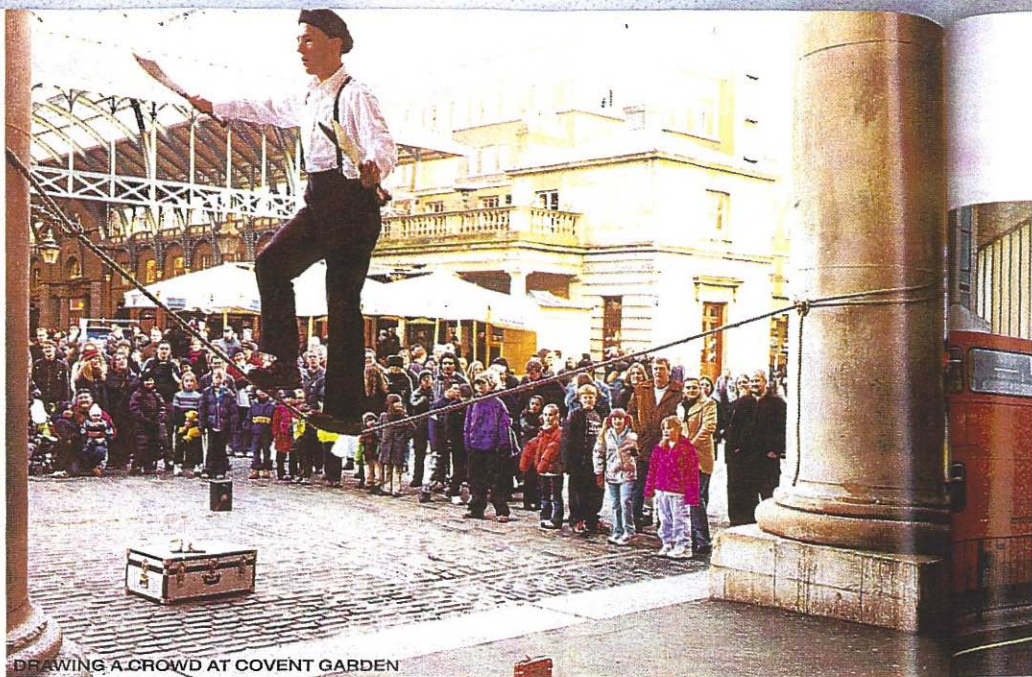


VEHICLE HEAVEN AT THE
TRANSPORT MUSEUM

A website devoted to parenthood. No wonder they call it a homepage.

parentstages.com

The best of the web for every parenting stage.



DRAWING A CROWD AT COVENT GARDEN

10 Terrific Things to Do With Kids in London

- 1. Trafalgar Square to Buckingham Palace** Put on your walking shoes and take in the classic London sights, beginning at Trafalgar Square, home of thousands of hungry (and friendly) pigeons who'll eat birdseed out of your hand. Head down the mall to see the toy-soldier-like guards outside Buckingham Palace. The changing-of-the-guard ceremony takes place every morning at 11:30 sharp, April through July, and on alternate days from August to March. (The Queen's royal residence is open to visitors in the summer.)
- 2. Covent Garden** Street performers outside the restored market building entertain with music, juggling, acting, and magic tricks, while peddlers hawk every wonder and ware you can think of. Kids gobble up "jackets" for lunch (baked potatoes topped with cheese, chili, sour cream, or the works).
- 3. The London Eye, Jubilee Gardens, South Bank** Billed as the world's biggest Ferris wheel, the Eye offers spectacular aerial views of London and an unforgettable 30-minute ride reaching 450 feet above the Thames.
- 4. The Science Museum, Exhibition Road, www.sciencemuseum.org.uk** This museum's ever-expanding exhibits are specifically designed for different age groups. "The Garden" lets 3- to 6-year-olds experiment with water, sound, and light.
- 5. Hamley's, 188 Regent Street, www.hamleys.co.uk** One of the most famous toy stores in the world is home to thousands of furry and flocked friends, toy soldiers, and baby dolls—not to mention West End Barbie (a store exclusive).
- 6. The London Transport Museum, Covent Garden, www.ltmuseum.co.uk** London's public transport system is the oldest in the world, and 15 KidZone exhibits make learning its history fun (and noisy!).
- 7. Daisy & Tom, 181 King's Road** At this irresistible children's store, kids can take a ride on D&T's famous merry-go-round, sip root beer floats at the soda bar, watch puppet shows, listen to stories being read—even get a haircut.
- 8. Tower of London/Tower Bridge, Tower Hill, www.hrp.org.uk** Climb 200 steps to the walkway atop London's most famous bridge. At the nearby Tower of London, kids can meet Beefeater guards and see the fabulous Crown Jewels.
- 9. London Zoo, Regent's Park, www.londonzoo.co.uk** London's 36-acre zoo includes many endangered species, a biodiversity exhibition, and a children's zoo.
- 10. Afternoon Tea** Whether it's at the Dorchester, the Savoy, Brown's Hotel, or even the Orangery at Kensington Palace, high tea (taken between 3:00 and 6:00 p.m.) is an unforgettable experience in ambience and proper dress and decorum for children.

ON THE GO London's famed double-decker buses let passengers see the sights like a native.



BIRD-FEEDING AT TRAFALGAR SQUARE

The Best of British Shopping

According to London parents, these stores and mail-order firms offer high-quality goods for kids. All will send catalogs and ship abroad, and many have online ordering.

■ **Brora** 344 Kings Road, London; mail order: PO Box 16594, London SW6 2WP; www.brora.co.uk. You'll see all the little London girls in dance class wearing Brora's adorable ballerina wrap cardigan. The shop—which sells great clothes for grown-ups too—specializes in exquisite hand-knit cashmere pieces, pure Shetland wool Fair Isle sweaters, and Scottish woolen jumpers.

■ **Buckle My Shoe** 19 St. Christopher's Place, London; www.bucklemyshoe.co.uk. Fashionable footwear in chic colors, patterns, and designs. From leopard-print loafers and lilac snakeskin cowboy boots to the shiniest patent leather Mary Janes, the shop's collection, say moms, is not only cool but comfy to wear.

■ **The Great Little Trading Company** 1 Broad Plain, St. Phillips; www.gltc.co.uk. Its motto is "practical products for parents and kids," but GLTC also insists on fun. You'll find everything from sturdy umbrellas that look like frogs to multi-compartment "munch boxes" that keep sandwiches, snacks, drinks, and fruit fresh.

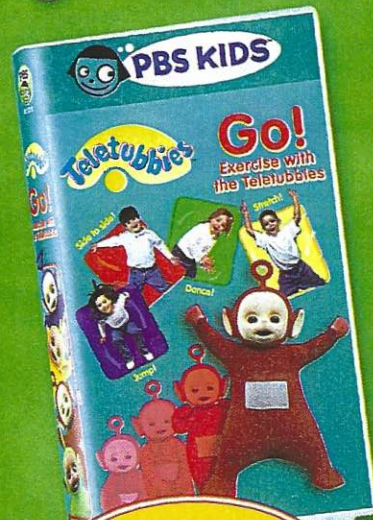
■ **Harrods** 87-135 Brompton Road, London; www.harrods.com. This legendary Knightsbridge department store has some of the most exquisite (and exclusive) toys for children, including hand-carved Stevenson rocking horses and Dijon dollhouses (custom interior-decorated to your personal taste). The signature Rodney Teddy Bear—wearing a green velvet vest and ascot and embroidered with the Harrods logo—is a fixture in London nurseries.

■ **Silver Cross Prams** Available in the U.S. at Juniorplace.com, 444 Saratoga Avenue, Suite 29K, Santa Clara, CA 95050; www.juniorplace.com. The Rolls-Royce of baby carriages, Silver Cross prams are sturdy, strong, and spacious—the twin carriage was big enough, says Samantha, to stroll all three of her babies until age 5 months.

■ **The White Company** Available via mail order: www.thewhitecompany.co.uk. The finest cotton bed linens for babies and children, embroidered with delicate hearts, flowers, or trains. The exclusive London Zoo pattern features giraffes, elephants, and crocodiles. The catalog also sells precious pajamas, nightgowns, and slippers for infants through age 6, plus nursery accessories.

■ **Young England** 47 Elizabeth Street, London; www.youngengland.com. Lacy frocks with smocking and Peter Pan collars and smart short trousers and blazers are the specialties of this traditional English children's clothing store.

Move and Groove with...



Get \$5 Back! (By mail) when you purchase Go! Exercise with the Teletubbies video AND read along! Restrictions apply. Offer expires 1/31/02.



in this fun and funny

interactive video!



TELETUBBIES characters and logo: TM & © 2001 Ragdoll Limited. All rights reserved. Licensed by The Itzy Bity Entertainment Company. Warning: All children's exercise should be supervised by a competent adult.