

And INCIDENTALLY

LIZ HOGGARD spends a week disconnected from her mobile phone – and feels cut off from the world.



Apologies if you haven't heard from me but I've just spent a week in the No Phone Zone. It's my own fault, of course: I tried to upgrade my life. As everyone knows, that just makes things far worse. While I waited for my old mobile to die (tick tock, tick tock), and everything to transfer across to my new iPhone, I was left stranded.

Which, for a craven phone junkie, is desperate. My whole life is on there. I've been known to sit stroking the messages in my inbox. Sometimes when I can't sleep I run through the home numbers of celebrities. I'd never call, of course. But it's like a talisman.

The worst thing about the No Phone Zone is the absence of incoming calls and texts. I'd love to be one of those people who say airily: "How nice to be out of reach" or "Oh, heavens, I never bother to carry my mobile."

The trouble is I always want to be contacted. Even in my sleep.

As soon as I upgraded my account at Carphone Warehouse I began to get jittery. They promised the iPhone would activate in around eight hours (four days later I was still sweating).

Then, when I got home, I realised my new state-of-the-art laptop was incompatible. "Whoops, we sold you the wrong model. Jump in a cab," advised Apple. It was like a James Bond film except without the sex and foreign travel. My whole identity was crumbling – against the clock. Soon I wouldn't exist.

The weekend was a write-off. Life doesn't work without a phone. Dates, galleries, friends all fell away. Then my home internet went down. Cue lots of shouting at BT India. Liz Hurley really is my new heroine. Apparently she gets up at 6am every morning just to shout at her service providers.

By Tuesday I was a shell. Why bother going out? No one was expecting me.

Yesterday I finally crossed the Rubicon. My iPhone sprang to life; goodbye to the battered Nokia. But in theory only – now I can't let go of my old handset. We had such good times together.

I know it's the future, but my shiny new iPhone seems horrid and petulant. There's no instruction manual. I can barely text. Half my contacts have dropped off. And what the hell is visual voicemail?

Every time it squawks, I freeze. A week ago I was happy – now I'm lugging around the technological equivalent of an adult baby in my handbag.



After being made redundant from her job in banking, Zoe Darwin was unsure what to do next. But following a dramatic career change, she has swapped her desk for pre-school dance classes and tackling childhood obesity, as **RACHEL BULLER** discovered.

Tots with rhythm

HEAVILY PREGNANT AND SUDDENLY FINDING HERSELF WITHOUT A JOB, Zoë Darwin faced some difficult decisions about her future.

So after giving birth, the mum-of-two decided upon a dramatic career change to work with children.

Now, 18 months since being made redundant from her job as a product manager for the Royal Bank of Scotland, she is not only training to become a midwife, she has just launched her own business working with pre-school children.

Her high energy dance classes for babies and toddlers focus on getting them active while having lots of fun, playing instruments and making as much noise as possible.

And forget the traditional nursery rhymes, this also throws the likes of Oasis, S Club 7 and The Beach Boys and a touch of jazz and reggae into the mix and parents are also required to get up and burn off a bit of energy as well.

"I saw an advert for the Mad Academy classes and had always fancied taking on a franchise. I was immediately drawn to this as it sounded such a fantastic idea," explained Zoë.

"I had started working on my access course to do midwifery, but thought I could do this as well. Now I can't believe this is my job. I have done five classes today and it certainly keeps me active as well, but it is so much fun. But it is also good because I get to use my financial background to run the serious business side of it as well."

Latest figures show that one in four children aged four to five in England are overweight and a recent study claimed that the bulk of excess weight was gained before the age of five. The EarlyBird Diabetes study suggests that initiatives to prevent childhood obesity need to be started before children get to school.

This is an area Zoë is very interested in and believes pre-school groups, such as MAD Academy, or swimming and baby gym, can play a vital role in tackling obesity.

"The fitness side of it is so important, it is essential that children are active from a young age and it can set up habits that will hopefully take them into adulthood. I think most kids do want to be on the go, it can sometimes just be lack of opportunity.

She also said the classes were a nice way for parents to be able to spend some time focusing on their child.

"Some people don't automatically know how to interact with their child and I think this is a good way of learning different ways of spending time together and having fun."

In the past few weeks, she has started MAD Academy classes, the first in East Anglia, across Norwich, and in

DANCE FUN: Joshua Tough, aged 16 months, and, below, Zoe Darwin.



Picture: SONYA DUNCAN



Poringland there is already a waiting list. The MAD Academy holds sessions for three age groups – babies and crawlers, walkers to two-year-olds and two to four-year-olds. Zoë said: "If I hadn't been made redundant back then, then I'm pretty sure I would have been now in this current climate. There are a lot of people I know in my position who are having a big rethink about what to do with their lives. It can be frightening. "I've bought a franchise at the worst time in the world, but I'm determined to make it work and it seems already as though parents in Norfolk are willing to spend

their last few pounds on a good class for their children, especially one which keeps them active."

Angela Tough, whose sons, 16-month-old Joshua and three-year-old William, attend the class at Poringland Community Centre, said the boys loved the sessions.

"Joshua loves music and dancing and I thought it would help improve their confidence. It was so good seeing William singing aloud in front of everyone. He wouldn't normally do that. They both love to be active and it is good here because it is so energetic and we can all enjoy it as a family."

■ See www.madacademy.com, or call Zoë on 01603 482777. Classes cost from £4 a session.

QUOTES OF THE DAY

"They are a generation abandoning print and paper" – **Rosemary Duff, research director of ChildWise, on claims that children spend up to six hours a day staring at a screen.**

"Women in their 50s instigate divorce because they are bored and want to be free and single again, not because they want the emotional and sexual excitement of another man" – **Writer Fay Weldon.**

"No one knows what depression is until they've sat on the edge of their bed every morning and found themselves unable to think of one good reason to get up" – **TV presenter Anne Diamond.**

"One of the most desirable vantage points from which to enjoy the full panoply of human idiocy" – **Anna Sam, who has written a best-seller on her work as a supermarket check-out girl.**

"I have been exposed to all manner of beautiful musical instruments, and in my hands they might as well have been sledgehammers for all the music they produced" – **London mayor Boris Johnson.**

"There is widespread scepticism about whether the government is still on the right track – it now looks like someone giving the kiss of life to a corpse" – **Vince Cable, the Liberal Democrats'**

Treasury spokesman, on the government's latest bail-out plan.

"In cricket we have got the lunatics running the asylum. So I say change the lunatics" – **Former England batsman Geoffrey Boycott, pictured right, calling for changes at the top of the England and Wales Cricket Board.**

