

When James was in primary school, at the end of lessons, he used to take great delight in sneaking out of his classroom without Sarah noticing, creeping carefully away and suddenly jumping on her from behind. This, as you can imagine, used to make her very wary, rather like Inspector Clouseau anticipating an attack from Kato. This year, Christmas has played a similar trick on us and we have yet to develop a defence mechanism. One minute we were tutting at the early arrival of Christmas paraphernalia in the supermarket, the next we were panicking at our lack of preparedness for the festive season ... and yes, Christmas has counted to 20 and come to find us, ready or not.

What can we tell you? What have we done this year? It seems to have been a year of collecting boys from various events, encouraging boys to get on with homework and feeling somewhat tired. But that is just family life and we wouldn't want it to be any other way.

This year has been a year of change for us all. Sadly, one week before Christmas last year, Phil's Dad, Brian, died, leaving a great hole in our lives. He had been ill with diabetes, renal failure and the aftermath of a stroke for some years and died at home in his sleep. Despite there previously having been a few close shaves, the shock still left us reeling. The funeral took place in January, the day before the heavy snow arrived and the packed church (where Brian had been a lay reader), the warm memories from the many relatives and friends, the kindness and thoughtfulness of Phil's Mum's neighbours, together with the loving arms of our heavenly Father, provided comfort during this difficult time.

The same snow was not so kind when we tried to get to Street to celebrate Sarah's Dad's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday in January. The planned party had to be cancelled, but we made it down a couple of weeks later for a celebratory meal.

Last year, a couple of weeks before Christmas, Sarah re-entered the world of paid work, after a very long career break, by becoming a part-time EMA (Educational Maintenance Allowance - which the new government has just cut) and attendance officer at a local 6<sup>th</sup> form. This post provided the amusement of listening to students trying to pretend to be their parents reporting an absence. You wait 17 years for a job and then two come along at once, as she then embarked on a second part-time job, working in Golders Green library on Saturday. This has been the perfect job for a bookworm. It is all change now, as she is starting a new job this week as a Bookstart Liaison Officer, promoting reading to the under 5s and their families - this is instead of the school admin job.



In February, Joseph (our eldest, now 17) went on a school trip to Rome and came back all cultured up. In fact this has been a good year for school trips, as Dan (now 15) went to Salamanca in June and came back all Spanished up and James (soon to be 12) went on his Year 6 trip to Surrey and came back all hyped up.

April brought some unusually warm sunshine and with it Sebastian, the first of our German guests this year. You may remember that as a student, Sarah lived with a German family - Sebastian is one of their grandsons. Phil collected Sebastian from the airport on a day when Sarah was at work and endured an hour of questioning by immigration officers, who suspected him of being a child trafficker. This confusion arose due to immigration not having anyone at Heathrow who could speak German. He was eventually allowed to bring Sebastian home. We had a completely manic week during

the Easter holidays, doing all the tourist trails of London. Finally, it was all too much for Sebastian, who pleaded to be allowed to go back to play on the X-Box, with Sarah desperately encouraging him to finish looking round the Science and Natural History museums. "You don't want to miss the blue whale ...", "But, I want to play X-Box!".

In May we attended Chris and Catherine's wedding, which was slightly scary, as we used to babysit for Chris when he was a just a little fellow and now he is all grown up. It was, however, an amazing day, as the wedding ceremony took place in the Temple church in London. This is where all the barristers hang out and where the Knights Templar are buried. It was a beautiful occasion and quite the poshest wedding we have ever been to.



In July, Christoph, Sebastian's older brother, arrived. As he had come to improve his English, he joined Joe in his last week at school before the Summer holidays. Rather unkindly, Joe's school took Christoph's attendance too seriously, even giving him homework and he had to do a presentation in English in front of the 6<sup>th</sup> Form. Whereas Sebastian had had the official tour of London, Christoph got the student tour, as the boys showed him around the capital during his second week. He was able to finish by going on the London Duck Tours – a bright yellow amphibious vehicle which goes on roads and river – a fantastic way to end his stay.



July was a momentous time for James, as he finished primary school and had to say goodbye to his good friends. Year 6 had been a good year for him, he had started a skateboarding craze amongst the Juniors and been very happy. It was also the end of an era for Sarah, who had been involved at St. John's and the PTA for many years. A good send off for both though and no more school runs!

This Summer, Joseph was offered a wonderful, heavily subsidised, opportunity by his school, to go on a young leadership training camp for 3 weeks in Vancouver Island in Canada. It was such a good, outdoorsy kind of time, kayaking, walking, investigating the culture of first peoples and meeting other students from many different countries. Sarah was worried that he would be eaten by bears. However, to her great relief, he arrived home in one piece. Whilst he was away, the rest of the family had their first holiday without Joseph (very strange), camping in the wilds of Exmoor. It was so beautiful there, but the weather was somewhat disappointing.

In September, James started at North London International School, where his brothers go and settled in quickly. Very soon, we began to receive phone calls in the evenings, "Is James there please?", as the social scene swung into action. James was very keen to be part of his brothers' band at school and when the guitarist left, he had his big moment. He was allowed (rather graciously on Joe and Dan's part) to join them for a couple of numbers. Phil's dream had come true, with Joe on bass, Dan on drums and James on guitar. Sometimes it is like living with Jimmy Hendricks though, as playing guitar has replaced skateboarding as James' main passion.



October was another big birthday month with a party in Telford for Rosemary's (Phil's Mum) 70<sup>th</sup> and a trip to London for Sarah's parents, to celebrate Brenda's 80<sup>th</sup> by going to see Oliver at the West End.

For much of the year, Daniel has been working on his personal project for school. He decided to make a documentary on the history of film technology, which together with the 4000 word write up, was quite a large chunk of work. In November, all the students showcased their projects and we were very proud of the work he had done. Dan has also been able to pursue his passion for airsofting this year and has now got his licence.



Phil continues to run the Systems Integration department at Root6. After the rest of the world we felt the recession truly bite this year and have had a lean 2010. However, things do seem to be picking up again with jobs coming in from more unusual places – Arsenal football club for one, we're currently designing them a virtual TV studio amongst other things. Phil's also been running more training courses – something he really enjoys. Joe and Phil have also been working at the Camden Church's cold weather shelter and we're really proud that he's starting to take on more community-base activities.

So now, Christmas is getting ready to jump out and poke us in the ribs. More than ever this year, we are looking forward to spending time with family and having a rest. May God bless you this coming year – we are so grateful for all he has done for us and how he has helped us through new and difficult experiences.

Lots of love, **Phil, Sarah, Joseph, Daniel and James**