

It was going to be so different this year. Imagine what could have been...

The Crawley family sit in the soft glow of the twinkling fairy lights. The exquisitely decorated Christmas tree releases a pine scented aroma, as the family sip their mulled wine, relaxing to the beautiful sound of Christmas carols gently playing in the background.

Sarah: "I'm so glad we bought all our Christmas presents early this year. It was so wonderful Phil, how we worked together to choose such appropriate gifts."

Phil: "Yes, now all the hard work is done, we can relax together and enjoy quality family time."

Joseph: "All the presents are wrapped, the food prepared, the house sparkling and clean."

Daniel: "Where did the ironing pile go? How efficient and organised our parents are."

Tiny Jim: "God bless us, every one!"

Instead what we have is the disorganised, chaotic, crazy, noisy, sometimes argumentative, last minute, panic ridden, time pressed, busy reality that is family life with three teenage boys in the house. Big questions remain ... Should we splash out on a real Christmas tree this year? Or persevere with the ageing, artificial one, which, despite its tacky glory, is dropping needles faster than Eliza Dolittle drops her aitches. How many more school concerts, work dos and trips to Brent Cross can we fit in after work? How can we negotiate between Joe and his Nanna's ideas of what constitutes the perfect Christmas dinner? Have we got time to bake our own stollen? Will we ever reach the fabled end of the ironing pile? But ... there is love here ... in all the madness and God has blessed us, every one!



So what have we been up to this year?

Philip: My year has been dominated by big work projects; and if I'm entirely honest I've done too many weekends, late nights and stays in hotels. I'm trying to re-align the work/life balance – watch this space! In January I moved the company's workshop to a new premises. Much nicer space, proper office and a hundred yards from our house! I've really enjoyed popping home for lunch and taking literally two minutes to walk to work. In February I spent a week in Nigeria installing systems for Lagos TV. What an eye opener; my brother engineers in Africa keeping a 24-7 station on air with equipment I was throwing in the skip twenty years ago. In the summer I spent a week at the MET's forensic laboratory in Sydeham training their engineers in video and audio and got to see some very interesting CSI-type technology. I'm currently commuting to Manchester to project-manage ITV's move to Media City – a new development in Salford where lots of broadcasters are setting up studios replete with government development grants – tax money well spent(!) As I keep saying to all our wiring contractors “..Christmas can't come soon enough”!

I seem to have been a lot more involved with football as well – continuing to work for Arsenal and Chelsea FC and I even got to take James and Joseph to the NFL game at Wembley as part of a work jolly; “...come on you Patriots”



Sarah: Still working as a school secretary at a small CE primary school in North London. A busy, sometimes stressful, often hilariously quirky job. I've not yet quite worked out how to balance the home/work/other stuff thing. Still enjoying reading, when I can keep my eyes open, and especially enjoy my once a month French conversation/book club, which has turned into a gourmet food evening as well. Current book – L'élégance du hériçon. I do hope you are all suitably impressed. In reality, it may take a whole year to finish the book.

Joseph: His school graduation meal was good. At the end, the students wrote down their hopes and dreams and tied them to

balloons. As we watched the balloons float away into the night sky, the symbolism of children making their own way in the world was not lost on Sarah, who is never one to miss an opportunity for over sentimentality. Joe has found his niche studying an HE access course in History, Politics and Economics and is hoping to carry on with History at uni next year. Joseph is also still working part time as a library assistant and a very fine library assistant he is too. He has a busy social life which includes photography, rockuoke (like karaoke, but with a live band), baking, pub quizzes, board game and book clubs and playing bass in the church band – hang on, we seem to have drifted off into writing a personal statement here.

Daniel: Dan has become an exceptionally talented drummer (please forgive the small amount of parental boasting here), playing in both the school and church bands. He is hoping to study film/tv production at uni next year, so we could potentially have two offspring fly the nest at the same time. This year, Dan braved a wet, airsoft weekend, camping on his own in the Dorset countryside. Well, not really on his own, as there were a few hundred other mad people, dressed in a variety of camouflage, also running around, firing small, plastic balls at one another. He also fitted in a school trip to Berlin, where the river was frozen in temperatures of -15°C, but he had a fantastic time.



James: James, almost 14 now, continues to live what Phil's Mum would call “a charmed existence”. He was whisked off to the Italian lakes for two weeks in the summer, by his girlfriend's family and he came home suitably tanned and gorgeous. James still enjoys playing guitar and ukelele in the school band and is hoping to be promoted to the church band soon. He seems to have gone through a growth spurt recently and it won't be long before Sarah becomes the shortest person in the family. James has also caught the airsofting bug. Still, on the plus side, it does involve running around in the fresh air.

Parents: Our parents are all keeping well and busy. Sarah's parents, Bob and Brenda have enjoyed their holidays both abroad and in the caravan this year and continue to help out at the old people's coffee morning in Street, where Brenda is the receptionist and Bob the chief waiter and cup washer. Bob is still kept on his toes as deputy church warden, bellringer and gardener extraordinaire, maintaining a fabulous vegetable garden. Phil's Mum Rosemary walks miles with Bonnie the dog and continues to help reluctant readers at a local primary school.

We enjoyed a wonderfully cultural summer holiday in Paris this year, renting a very stylish “Haussmann” style flat, not too far from the Gare du Nord. When we turned up at St. Pancras, the day before the Olympic Opening Ceremony, we found ourselves trapped, unable to get into the Eurostar terminal until the Olympic torch had made its way past. The Olympic Opening Ceremony on French TV, was amusing to say the least. It was a great holiday though. We were blown away by the art in the Louvre and the Musée d'Orsay and had fun in the Science and Music museums in the Parc de la Villette. Best thing – religieuses – choux buns filled with chocolate patisserie cream, which look like little, fat nuns.

Another highlight this year was the wedding of our friends Andy and Annette, where we were surprised to discover that the person taking the service was none other than the former Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey. Wonderful day and we danced the night away.

So all that is left, is for us to wish you all a very merry Christmas and a magnificent 2014. In the words of Tiny Jim (Tim), **God Bless You. Every One!**

