

## - Christmas 2015 greetings from the London Crawleys -

Well, the first Christmas card has dropped onto the doormat, which is the signal to get going with this year's Christmas newsletter. Don't panic (Sergeant Jones or Hitchhikers Guide – you decide), keep calm (a marketing ploy which has got well out of hand) and proceed in an unruffled manner towards Christmas day, keeping eyes firmly forward facing so as not to see those who have already posted cards, braved the shops/internet, erected Christmas trees, bought turkeys and are now sitting on their sofas just waiting for the Downton Christmas special to begin. That's the plan for this year. So far, so good. WE WILL GET THERE – we always do.



Compared to the fictional Crawley family of Downton Abbey, the London Crawleys have had a mercifully uneventful year. Joseph and Daniel are now in their final years at uni (where did the time go?) and we have stopped saying how quiet it is without them, instead noticing how noisy it is when they come home and just how much stuff they have (especially Dan and all his musical instruments). Somehow it seems as if the house has got smaller and the boys have got bigger. Still, looking forward to seeing them soon. James has left school and started at a local sixth form college, an experience which he is enjoying far more than he ever enjoyed school. He appreciates the freedom of it all and has made some new friends, whilst still keeping in touch with many of the old ones. James is doing A Levels in Music Technology, Graphics and Photography, subjects which really suit him.

Our kids seem to spend more time on holiday than we do. In June, Joseph went to the Nowhere Festival which was in a desert like place, somewhere near Zaragoza in NE Spain – a very hot and dusty location in the summer months. As far as we understand it, Nowhere is the kind of festival at which there is no commerce at all (no money changes hands) and the festival goers participate in setting things up, running the event and dismantling it at the end. Those attending group themselves into barrios (community groupings) and set up workshops, food stalls and art installations. Joe had a really good time. He then went hiking in Iceland with some friends in early September. They carried everything (tents, food, clothes, equipment etc.) with them and spent 6 days on a hiking trail across the volcanic landscape, staying in very basic campsites where possible, bathing in hot rivers and enjoying the distinctive scenery. Oh to be young!

James also went on a couple of holidays without us. First of all, he went snowboarding in the Black Forest with a group from church, which he really loved. Unfortunately he lost his mobile phone somewhere on the ski slopes and we were amazed when 6 weeks later we got an email from a lady at the admin office to say that it had been handed in. Incredibly, when it was posted back to us, it still worked. Wished we could have found out who found the phone, so that we could have thanked them. In June, he became the most blessed boy on the planet, when he was asked if he would like to go to Botswana with his girlfriend Ella and her Mum (as Ella's Dad had had to drop out due to work commitments). He got to stay in three different camps, saw amazing wildlife, took some brilliant photos and even saw elephants swimming underwater using their trunks as snorkels. At one of the campsites, there were a lot of naughty monkeys hanging about. James was having a bath in the bathroom at the back of the hut he was staying in and was quite alarmed when a monkey voyeur sat watching him through the window. He



pulled down the blind pretty quickly! The holiday finished with a trip to Victoria Falls, which apparently, was breathtaking.

This just leaves Daniel, who has been really busy playing in three bands in Hastings (where he is based as a student) and making a tv comedy with friends from one of the bands, which is called Metal Castle. <https://metalcastle.bandcamp.com/> Dan went back to Somerset for Momentum Festival in August and I do believe he is going on holiday shortly as he is off to spend Hogmanay in Edinburgh with some old school friends.

As usual James and Sarah braved the wet weather in July for Soul Survivor Stafford with a daring group of church mums and teenagers. What a blessing it is to go along to such a wonderful festival, to enjoy the camaraderie of friends and to see God working in the lives of the young people. Sarah will have to kidnap a teenager to take when James gets too old!



If you haven't heard enough about holidays already, our family holiday this year (family plus the lovely Ella) was a week in Berlin. It was an interesting place to go, both from an historical and cultural perspective. Couldn't get over how different it is from the rest of Germany – it's a really youthful, gritty, artistic place, not dissimilar from a giant Camden Town. There is graffiti absolutely everywhere. The week we spent there was unbelievably hot, with temperatures in the high 30's most of the time – good job it is surrounded by lakes so that Sarah could get her annual fix of wild swimming. We (just Phil and Sarah this time) also enjoyed three days walking in the beauty of Ullswater in the Lake District at the end of August and a weekend in Düsseldorf for the silver wedding

of our friends Joe and Damaris.

On the work front, not much has changed. Phil has been working at Root6 for thirteen years now and there still seems to be interesting technology in the film and TV industry; Ultra High Definition (AKA "4K") is what's getting the industry excited at the moment. Take my advice, don't buy a fancy new TV just yet; there are more things to be shaken out of that one! I had a very interesting trip to Riyadh in July (temperature hit 45° - which, as Sarah pointed out, is gas mark-1) as well as Amsterdam in September.

Sarah is still working at St. Paul's Church of England Primary in Mill Hill, North London. It is all a bit busy at the moment what with Christmas coming up and my work colleague off on long term sick. We also have the spectre of Ofsted looming ... Grateful to have work though, and a job I enjoy to boot.

Well we are eagerly anticipating Christmas now. Next Sunday is our carol service and Sarah is learning the ukulele so that she can join the band for one of the songs. We are looking forward to Phil's Mum and sister's visit just before Christmas, but most of all we are longing to have Joe and Dan home and getting excited about going to Street to visit Sarah's parents. How we love the lull between Christmas and New Year, time to potter, see friends, do jigsaws (Sarah) whilst having a sneaky glass of Baileys and some chocolates.



It just remains for us to wish you all a very merry Christmas and a wonderful 2016. Drop in if you are in the area.

Lots of love **Phil, Sarah, Joe, Dan & James!**

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