



December '08 and Joe isn't yet the tallest!

As the rising tide of panic begins to edge its way up the shoreline of December 25th, we thought it was time to pack our picnic into the Christmas newsletter hamper, rather than sitting Canute-like staring at the horizon, hoping to hold off the inevitable. This time of year is so busy that we can forget the reason for the season, but one of the cards, which plopped onto our door mat this morning, summed it up: just a picture of a simple manger with the words "Adore Him". Don't want to miss out on the simple wonder of Christmas this year.

Our family continues to grow (not get more members, but get taller) and this can be illustrated by the following visual aid. Some years ago, some good friends brought us a present back from their travels in South-East Asia. It was a set of five silver elephants, each of which was slightly smaller than the one before. "How adorable!" we exclaimed, when we saw them. "They are just like our family ... a Daddy and Mummy elephant and three little elephants, going down in size." However this year, the biggest elephant is not called "Daddy", but Joseph, and Sarah has accepted the inevitable, that one, fast-approaching day, she will be the very tiny elephant. Actually, living with three boys is not unlike living with a herd of elephants, so it's not a bad analogy.

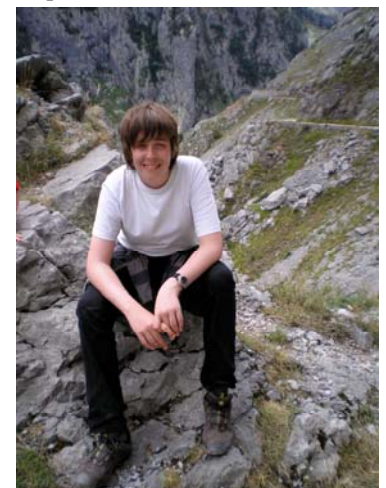
January saw **James** complete his first decade with a birthday sleepover (maybe that should be renamed "birthday over" because there was not a lot of sleeping going on!). James has become impassioned with skateboarding this year, both actual skateboarding and making model skate parks out of cardboard boxes and rolls and rolls and rolls of duct tape (quick buy some shares in the company!). A couple of weekends ago, on a very wet Saturday, he went to Camden skate park with his equally skate enamored friend, who later commented, "That was the best day of my life, ever!" Not so sure that Phil and Joe, who were there with them, felt quite so excited in the drizzle. Rather worryingly, he is going to be a skateboarding king in the church nativity and we await the performance with trepidation. Continuing the dramatic theme, James has a major role in his school play this Christmas and we were amused this week, when he came home telling us that a crowd of younger children had thronged around him at lunch time asking for his autograph. Apparently the crowd was such that James had to employ two of his classmates as bodyguards and a teacher had to come and break things up. It is hard to be a celebrity these days!



Daniel, now aged 14, has developed a love of film-making. This year he has written, directed and taken part in several films with some friends. Much to Sarah's consternation, the majority of these films have an SAS theme..."Why don't you make a rom-com next Dan?" The next major production however, is set to be a zombie thriller and only this morning Daniel was to be found in the kitchen concocting fake blood (if you want to make your own, and why wouldn't you, it is made of glycerine, red food colouring and a touch of blue food colouring). For Dan's birthday in August, he, Joe and a friend went airsofting in a set of underground tunnels, somewhere in Surrey. For the uninitiated, this is somewhat like paintballing, except the guns fire out little plastic balls. Dan has also been doing very well in his drumming, getting 96% in his exam and was teased endlessly about being a percentage point lower than Mma Makutsi of No. 1 Ladies Detective Agency fame. This year Daniel went on a school trip to Futuroscope in France during that very hot week in June and had a wonderful time.

Unbelievably **Joe** is now in the 6th form, studying hard for his International Baccalaureate (it doesn't seem that long ago that he started Nursery). Earlier in the year he went to the Hague, with a team from his school, to take part once more in the Model United Nations and he has become quite a good debater, as we have learned to our cost. We really enjoyed the end of term production for the drama exam of "Oh What a Lovely War" in which Joe played various parts and have been singing the songs ever since. Joseph also did a week's work experience this year with a company who sell technical equipment and he got on very well indeed.

After the rainy camping holiday in Wales last year we were fortunate to be able to go to Spain this year for our summer holiday and what an adventure it turned out to be. We set off from Portsmouth one evening, with our car and tent, on board the Pride of Bilbao ferry and stepped onto Spanish soil (...drove onto Spanish soil) some 34 hours later having crossed the Bay of Biscay. We then headed west to the principality of Asturias. Asturias is one of the most picturesque places in the world - think Cornish rocky coastline with huge surfing waves, eucalyptus forests and huge, imposing mountains. These mountains were the first sign of home the returning conquistadores saw, and they named them the Picos de Europa. Apparently they are also home to a small number of European brown bears, but we weren't lucky/unlucky enough to see them. We had such a good time, made even better as some friends were staying not far from us. One of the highlights was a kayaking trip down the River Sella. It was just so beautiful, the scenery, the salmon swimming in the river, the little riverside beaches where you could stop for a rest. The older two boys went off in a



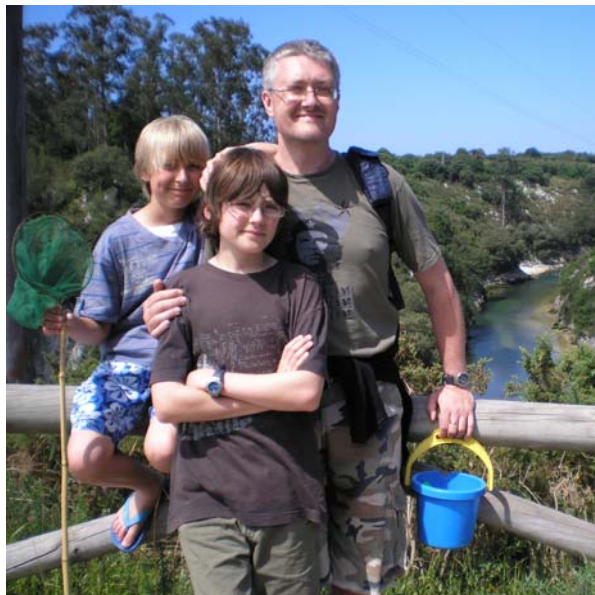


kayak each, leaving Phil, Sarah and James to travel in a 3 man boat. This turned out to be quite disastrous as we managed to capsize twice, the second time being dragged along the rocky bed of the river, earning some quite impressive cuts and bruises. The day also left its mark on Dan, as he managed to get quite badly sunburned legs (despite the factor 50). The next morning he was the first to sit at the picnic table laid with breakfast things and unfortunately the whole thing collapsed covering him in scalding hot coffee. His shouts of pain brought all the Spanish families in nearby tents, running to help. Poor Dan, still in his pyjamas, soon had a group of Spanish people throwing cold water over him, except they thought the sunburn was part of the scalding injury. It was a good way to meet people though. The most amazing day of the holiday, was the day we walked along the Cares Gorge in the aforementioned Picos. This breathtaking walk is along a narrow path, precariously perched midway up the gorge which is a mile deep in places. The scenery was stunning and when we stopped to eat our lunch we were surrounded by a mob of mountain goats which smelled strongly of goats cheese. This was probably our best ever holiday. Sarah was pleased to have brought a dictionary and grammar book, as it is not a typical English speaking tourist destination, though it was quite hard to persuade the teenage

contingent to have a go (one of the reasons for the trip). Churros and Chocolate were also not to be forgotten.

Sarah has had a good year, busy as ever with Hand in Hand for Asia and the school PTA. In July, one of her former house mates, Chris, was ordained as a Methodist minister, and as part of the ceremony was co-incidentally in Wolverhampton, the very place they had studied, it seemed appropriate that a house mate reunion should be organised around the event. It was so wonderful to be together again after so many years.

In August we celebrated our 20th wedding anniversary in style with a dinner & dance cruise on the River Thames. The whole thing was very stylish with a band and singer and incredibly romantic as they played "Have I told you lately that I love you" which was one of the songs we played a lot on our honeymoon. Hysterically, as the boat went under Tower Bridge, it rotated a few times in the river, whilst "The Hallelujah Chorus" played over the speakers. All in all it was quite an evening.



Well you wait sixteen years for a job and two come along at once.... Sarah has recently been offered two part time jobs, both in the same week, which was a huge boost to her confidence after so many years as a full time Mum. One is maternity cover for a secondary school admin post and the other is as a Saturday library assistant in Golders Green. "Sshhh!" as Phil keeps on saying. What a blessing, as both fit in around school hours.

Sarah also had an amusing day at October half term, when she went to the Royal Academy with a friend to see the Anish Kapoor exhibition. You can check it out on You Tube <http://tinyurl.com/ydwo3n2> Some of the sculptures were very beautiful, but the large "train" of red wax pushing its way through the arched doorways and the cannon, operated by a surly teenager, firing red wax at the beautiful walls of the Academy had to be seen to be believed. The word "pretentious" springs to mind. We can only hope that Mr Kapoor cleans up the mess afterwards. The day of modern art was made complete by a trip to see the large dark shipping container at Tate Modern which was filled with kids scaring other kids and not quite as "inky black" as hoped. Still, a fun day out all round.

Phil is still doing his thing, designing TV facilities. Although we've been feeling the effects of the economic downturn things haven't been as bad for us as many people in the industry. We are busy right up to Christmas and then working at Channel Five in the new year. Although the day when I can maybe think about a change of direction (I always thought of teaching) is drawing near, economic necessity means I've got to stay with broadcast engineering for a while yet! As ever I'll make a couple of musical recommendations - although I've only been to two gigs this year (I used to go to as many most weekends when I was a student!) but here goes; Martyn Joseph (who I've seen many times since the late eighties) was great when I caught him in Kilburn - his current record *Evolved* is worth a go. Springsteen's current album *Working on a dream* is also good.

So all that is left now is to wish you all a very merry Christmas and all the very best for the coming decade. With lots of love to you all. Catch up with us on the Facebook, Blog, Twitter, Flickr etc. etc. on the URL at the top of the previous page.

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