

Christmas Letter 2002



With less than a month to go to Christmas, I decided to start the "Holmes Family - Annual Christmas Letter"... I know that it's a bit impersonal, but its the only way that I can think of to keep in touch with family and friends at least once a year... and as most of you will get this as a "hard copy" with your Christmas card, at least you can read it without the need for a computer! We have two desktop Computers in our house, apart from the transient collection that are partially built, in for repair, upgrade or demonstration at my Computer Class. However, getting to use one at a reasonable hour of the day is becoming increasingly difficult. The one in Richard's room is in theory 50% Edward's, but in practice used solely by Richard, thus the one in the office / box room is very often in use with Edward printing off templates (nets) for his school shape club or playing the latest instalment of "The Sims". So, guess who has to use his work laptop instead! I'm not complaining really, as both the boys have a good understanding of the technology, which is now very much a part of everyday life.

I changed our car in March, not because I particularly wanted to, but having discovered what it is like to travel through a hedge bottom backwards, I realised that I wasn't going to be able to drive it out of the field in which it was now parked! They say that the majority of accidents happen on local roads within a five-mile radius of the driver's home and this was no exception. I was travelling with Richard, calling to pick up a work colleague on the way to a local computer fair, on a road that I use everyday but... The road surface was damp and a bit muddy and when I tried to slow down for the double bend the brakes didn't have as much effect as I had hoped!! The good news is that we missed the tree and we both walked away uninjured. It just goes to show, that despite all of the safety features built into modern cars, you still need to travel at a speed appropriate to the road conditions (and allow a safety margin)! The new Mondeo is a bit smarter than the old one, having more mod cons and although it can also go a bit quicker than the last one, you won't find me travelling down Yarnfield Lane at speed these days, not even on a sunny day!

Sadly, Alison's Cousin's Husband (Paul) died in August (he was only in his mid fifties), words can't express how this must make the rest of the immediate family feel. Although not totally unexpected I don't imagine that you can really prepare yourselves for that sort of thing and our thoughts are obviously with them. On a happier note, my Aunt Margaret and Uncle Dennis celebrated their Golden Wedding Anniversary at the end of September and we were pleased to meet up again with cousins from my Dad's side of the family that I haven't seen for many years. This coincided with our Niece (Natasha) going to Durham University, whilst her brother (Alexander) is in his final year at Kings College London. It doesn't seem 5 minutes since we visited Elaine soon after Natasha was born (Doesn't time fly!).

The family Holiday this year was to Disney Paris, I had this idea that I would look for a late booking, thus saving money... But having kids of school age and with Alison working at a school, you are obliged to take your holiday in July / August, which is of course when everyone else is on holiday! Still, in the end, we had a good time, managing to fit in a day in Paris, including a cruise down the Seine, the Eiffel Tower etc. as well as 3 days in Disney. Richard had been earlier in the year with his school, so had already sussed out the best rides, but the Studios were not open then, so he was quite impressed with the film sets etc. as well as discovering the "Rock 'n' Roller Coaster", which I have to admit I went on twice in quick succession myself... They don't have anything like that at Goose Fair, although we still had to make the annual pilgrimage back to Nottingham and enjoyed it just as much really, but in a different sort of way. As the A50 is such a good road, you can be there in less than an hour so Alison tends to go back quite regularly visiting friends, Church, shopping and even the occasional David Cassidy concert!

Alison had a worrying experience in September... Following a night's sickness and after becoming severely dehydrated, she was taken to the A&E department at Stafford Hospital with suspected diverticulitis. Subsequently, she spent a week on the ward getting back to normal. Since then... so far, so good, having had no re-occurrence with anything like the same severity. It may be related to the hysterectomy operation that she had a couple of years ago, we are not sure and she still needs one further examination before we can be certain, but it does make you realise the importance of good health above all else!

Edward seems to be making good progress at school and spends a lot of time researching homework projects. Last half term, he and Alison went to Bath in order to investigate one aspect of Roman Life. They spent a full day there exploring the Roman Baths and an enjoyable time was had by both. I don't remember having to do so much work for school in my day, but then that was before the introduction of the National Curriculum. It seems that the children these days spend as much time preparing for and taking tests as they do actually learning anything in the first place! He has moved to another scout group locally and enjoys doing more challenging activities such as climbing and caving. In May he also went with his school to Coven for a week's camping and outdoor activities. He enjoys being creative, as I have already mentioned, he organises a lunchtime Shape Club at school and makes cardboard models of such things as Tetrahemihexahedrons, Rhombicubioctahedrons and small stellated dodecahedrons (needless to say the first two failed the spell-checker!). He still goes to Swimming Club on a Saturday morning (when he can be bothered to get out of bed!) and has recently gained his 800m distance badge.

Richard spent a couple of weeks in May at my workplace for his year 10 "Work Experience", working in our multi-media / e-learning department - designing learning packages, web pages etc. for which he received some excellent feedback. He returned again for a week in the summer and is currently looking for a college place to do an ICT course when he finishes his GCSEs next year. When not listening to heavy metal music at high volumes, he has taken up skateboarding and has the necessary shoes, hoody, baggy trousers and scars! He is still growing skyward and coping with being a teenager. He gets up at some un-earthly hour in the morning every Sunday to work at the local paper shop, helping to unpack and sort the newspapers before taking a couple of rounds himself. With some of the money he bought himself a season pass for Alton Towers, which he has made good use of throughout the summer. The finale was a full day there, riding from 8.30 in the morning until 9.00 at night (including rides in the dark) followed by a fireworks display!

Alison continues to work at the first school with nursery/reception children each morning. She does her Yoga Class on a Monday afternoon and I continue to fight the bureaucracy at Stafford College, running my evening class on a Tuesday. The company that I work for now is wholly owned by Accenture after BT sold their 50% share in the summer. It seems strange to be working for an American company, having worked for BT "man and boy" so to speak for the past 27 years. So who knows what the future may bring? Either way, I hope that next year is good for you and your families, have a Happy Christmas and we look forward to hearing from you soon.

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