

Christmas Letter 2007



Last Christmas... (Sounds like the start of a song doesn't it?) ...was a good one, all things considered. We had the usual family get together, this time at my Sister Elaine's, with my Mum coming back to stay with us for a few days. Alison's cousin Geraldine, her daughter Sara and family came over to join in with some of the Christmas festivities and Mum enjoyed their company. Sadly, it turned out to be the last Christmas that we would all share together... Mum had been a little unwell following a fall the previous year. By early January her health had declined to the point where we all became concerned. Fortunately she did not have to suffer a long illness, although she insisted on staying in her flat as long as she possibly could. In truth, she had never really been happy since my Dad died in 2003, so I like to think that they can now be together once more.

So, on 7th April we became the oldest generation in our immediate family and began trying to put our lives back to "normal" although, as I am sure those of you that have been through this would agree, sorting out everything afterwards, is rarely straightforward. The good thing is that everyone has been very supportive, especially my Aunt (Jessie), who came over from Canada and of course, Alison. My Aunt and Uncle were planning on coming over in the summer anyway, so we were pleased to see them again, under slightly happier circumstances. My Canadian cousin (Andrew) also came over and stayed with us for a few days, so, all in all, that kept us fairly busy. After a promising spring, the summer in the UK turned out to be well... WET! Every summer, the Stafford Gatehouse Theatre performs a Shakespeare play in Stafford Castle grounds. This year's production was "Much Ado About Nothing" Despite the car park flooding and the actors almost getting washed off the stage at one point, "the show must go on" and it did... It was most enjoyable, watching from the covered seating! They all deserve a medal (in my opinion).

Towards the end of the summer, we managed to get away for a short break in London. We did the usual trip around the booths in Leicester square and came away with tickets to see Footloose, which was great entertainment... Small theatre but very dynamic, using the height of the stage to good effect. Alison had been wishing to visit Buckingham Palace for some time, so not having received an invitation from an available prince (even after kissing several frogs in our pond), we had to book in ourselves! Despite the state rooms being magnificent, Alison reckons that Hampton Court was even more impressive! Whilst Alison was visiting Henry's place, Edward and I spent the day at Thorpe Park... Not as impressive as Alton Towers or Drayton Manor you understand but then again I suppose we are a bit spoilt having two of the UK's best theme parks on our doorstep. The highlight of the day was our ride on "Stealth", supposedly based on drag racing... "Travel to dizzying heights of 205ft on the ride that accelerates from 0-80mph in less than 2.0 seconds"... Hmm!

Meanwhile back on the ground, things are much the same for me. I almost dropped into an Information Security Officer job a couple of weeks ago but then the person doing the job at the moment decided not to leave after all, so it's back to training for me for the foreseeable future... Not a bad job really and enjoyable most of the time. I am still an NVQ Assessor for some BT IT Apprentices based in the south and I did manage two day trips to Brighton this year, so it can't be that bad although I didn't make it on to the one remaining pier!

In between the numerous DIY jobs inside and out (re-designing and re-laying the patio etc.), I still repair computers and occasionally do the sound for a few aged musicians from work "The Stone Washed Blues Band". They don't play too many gigs, which is quite fortunate really... Although quite talented, their music is not really up-tempo enough for my liking!

Alison continues to work at First Steps Nursery two days per week... I think, having worked in schools for many years, she keeps them on their toes with regard to OFSTED. She also helps out at two local first schools on other days.

Edward continues to make mathematical models (3D shapes) and actually persuaded the librarian to let him put up an exhibition in the glass display case in the school library. He helped out again with the Gang Show this year as part of the backstage crew. They were celebrating 40 years of the Stone Gang Show, 70 years of Gang Shows nationally and of course, 100 years of Scouting. He still likes to play the keyboard and has enjoyed learning some of the tunes featured in the Gang Show, including "Danny Boy", "Everything I do", "When I'm 64" and other Beatles tunes. He still helps out at Aston Beavers, and is training to become a qualified Leader. They held a sunrise camp (under canvas but indoors!) to celebrate 100 years Scouting... He really seems to enjoy organising activities for the youngsters.

He took his GCSEs this year, gaining good grades (all A* to B - even in RE!). His skill in Electronics earned him an "Outstanding Achievement" award, so obviously we were quite chuffed as well! His latest pursuit is building a model railway in the loft. Typically with Edward he does not do things by halves, so there has been much discussion over the size of and shape of the layout but so far it seems to be working out. In order to fund his new found interest he exchanged his Sunday paper round for a Saturday afternoon and Sunday morning shift at the Garage, although, in all fairness, he does save at least half his earnings (a bit of a Silas Marner), so we can't really complain.

After getting such a good set of GCSE results, Edward opted to stay on into the 6th form and is now studying for AS Levels in Electronics, ICT, Physics and Maths. Through his school, he has done lighting and sound for regional productions (Victoria Hall Hanley) and is currently doing the lighting at his school production of Grease.

Richard offered to make his own contribution to the Christmas letter this year, so here it is...

The turn of 2007 brought a change in career path, spending the first 2 months of the year working as a temp for a local recruitment agency until March when I started a programme with Vodafone UK. I took a 7 week training and testing course to qualify for my position as a Customer Account Manager. Whilst I spent 5 days a week doing my full-time job I continued to be a creature of the night, working as a Bar Tender at the local J D Wetherspoons. After a night at the pub until 3am (serving side of the bar) Sunday mornings were not something I saw too often, with the exception of one Sunday in March when I got up to take part in the Stafford Fun Run with my Dad.

In June I waved my teenage years goodbye as I turned 20, celebrating in the usual way with family and then with friends into the early hours. Having been a regular on public transport for the first part of the year, due to being car-less, I purchased another car in August. This was put immediately to good use as I arranged a camping trip to Kiln Park in Tenby, Wales with my girlfriend Laura. I've continued to study through work, this year gaining a B-TEC National Diploma in Contact Centre Management and supporting Technical Certificate. Laura is now studying at Huddersfield University, taking a degree in Fine Art, so I spend most of my weekends driving up the M62 to visit her.

So, there you have it... That's updated you on our news for another year. As usual, if you ever venture as far as "Sunny Staffordshire", we would be more than happy to see you? I hope that your year has been a good one, that you have a Happy Christmas and a Healthy and Prosperous New Year.

Nigel, Alison, Richard & Edward





Last Christmas



The Stafford Fun Run



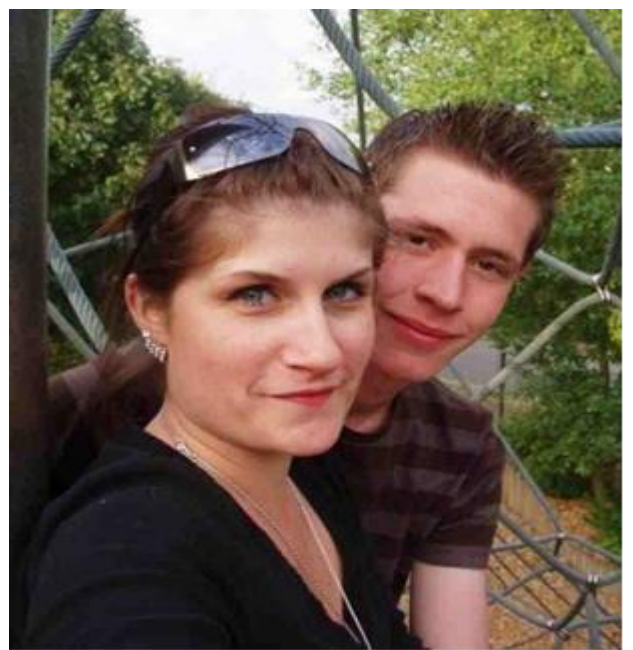
Edward lifting the turf for the patio redesign



Almost Finished



Waiting for the curtain to go up



Richard and Laura