



Christmas News - Heppell - Brightlingsea

great asteroid adventures! the newsletter has reawakened & landed...

...look, I know it's a bit late - it's been a busy old year really - nice, but very busy, very very busy - highlights below:

quick summary: Disneyland for Melissa, Amelie & Louis, Australia for Josie & Juliette, sailing + skiing for everyone, a house for Cali & Toby, + crocodiles, school, promotions, nativity, gym, more sailing, quite a lot of rum &... well, read on:



As this is typed (so late that the many on-line readers - especially Juliette's old and much loved class - are saying "Oi!, where is it!!") we are up in the French Alps - all children and grandchildren assembling for Christmas and / or the New Year. We have warfare scale fireworks, a huge Spanish ham, industrial quantities of cheese and a lot of skiing ahead for all. As usual, then a very, very white Christmas. Sadly our ageing Ship's Van's gearbox rather struggled to get up here and may not get back; some of us may have to stay skiing forever as a consequence.

Anyway, let's start with the small people's year: Simon and Melissa's pair, **Louis** and **Amelie** - now 4 and 7 - are both loving school (being taught by your mum is interesting!) and have the fullest-lives-ever what with sailing, reading, swimming, rugby (Louis), ballet (Amelie) and so very much more. We watched as their Nativity and 12 days of Christmas plays streamed live across the Internet, chatted all year via text, Facetime and email, enjoyed them tweeting from their harvest festival, and hugely enjoyed their company, not the least during 10 blissful Disney-days in Florida. Carole spends lots of her (now retired) time with them - and loves every minute. In Pyefleet Week this year Louis sailed with both dad Simon and grandad in the Brightlingsea One Design - they did OK when g'dad stopped hitting islands and other significant hazards. Amelie and mum Melissa won the Mirror class, but Amelie's heart now lies with her Oppie and she completed her first races alone this summer - in some pretty lively breezes. At this point of the year - well into December - she is still out twice a week helming her boat on her own, on the sea, regardless of the cold. Well, she is 7 now! Having the national Olympic sailing centre as your playground does help. As official water babes, both children swim like eels and enter swimming galas - Amelie's variety of strokes is pretty impressive whilst Louis came second in his swimming gala race just a week or so ago - well, he is 4! Both are thriving at school, were very early readers, love books and combine this with a familiarity with technology (a Chromebook for Ams this Christmas) and a very sporting and outdoor life.

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Fulfilling a long term promise (“when you are big enough...”) Carole and Stephen took them both (with Melissa) to Disneyland in Florida this year and had the most magical days enjoying scary rides, meeting princesses and pirates whilst of course pretty much living in their Peter Pan and Elsa costumes. Oh, and fitting in a visit to NASA of course, with a bit of surfing too. What a blissful childhood!

Little person number three, George and Juliette’s gorgeous **Josephine Lily** is well past her first birthday now and at 15 months has retained the fascination with the sea that began on her trip to Australia earlier in the year, with Mum, Juliette and Stephen & Carole. Josie was rather taken with kangaroos, beach culture and HUGE prawns. Australia seemed to like her, and her Mum’s lectures / talks too. They’ll be back.

Back home, Josie loves her river trips in the launch we keep on the Thames and she enjoyed her first race on My Alice this year too. Interestingly, although she walks well and is now onto the beam at gym, Josie chose to prioritise speaking - probably because her mum talks nineteen to the dozen (!) or maybe it’s the regular mealtime Facetime family chats - but something has given her a remarkably large vocabulary - well over 50 words at 12 months and over 100 now - so that she is officially a chatterbox who also sings, signs and counts rather alarmingly well. We we all get random Josie Facetime chats too - she can press the right buttons - which can be quite distracting on a motorway! Josie also has quite a social whirl of Little Gym, Sing and Sign, Swimming and more. Carole of course is also a regular in Josie’s week - and loves every minute (hmm, spot a pattern here?). Josie’s good progress towards water baby status was confirmed in Australia (see below) where discovered waves - her obsession for this year which joined her love of books!



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Staying with Josie's keepers, **George** and **Juliette** had a pretty fab year. Maternity leave was fun, with Juliette and Josie luxuriating in hours of classes and coffee mornings with NCT pals and of course a bit of a highlight was the aforementioned trip to Australia with nanny and grandad. Sydney, South Australia, Melbourne, including driving the Great Ocean Road and even a trip to Warramboll added up to a good mix of work and sightseeing.

Juliette is back teaching almost full time now, George is promoted further at Unilever, but still manages to fit in games of football. He has become an adept river skipper, and even gets occasional nights out at the cinema!. Only sad thing to report is the disappearance of the huge flock of London parrots that used to add a touch of the exotic to George and Juliette's back garden. It can't be Gizmo their (rotund) cat who is to blame; these days those levels of bird-devouring productivity elude even his many dreams.

Back on Portland next and to Amelie and Louis' keepers: **Melissa** and **Simon**. Melissa is loving teaching in the remarkable IPACA school we all helped to set up - superclasses, stage not age, et al. It's fab to see young 'uns bursting with self esteem as thousands around the world follow their West Base blog. Melissa also became a Google Accredited Teacher this year too, and thus gets to swap ideas with other fab Googley teachers too. Simon's business is still über cool for the fastest sailors and his coaching is in much demand (well, Britain only has the one double Olympic skiff medalist, so no wonder). Big news from Portland is that Simon and Melissa are moving. The tiny cottage that was once a 470 sailing base for Melissa and Bex is offically too small for a family of four and two cats - even if the cats are a lot slimmer than Gimo. So they are all off to a grand sea-view and lot more garden, but still on the Isle of Portland.

And all this moving house talk brings us to **Toby** and **Cali**. So you can probably guess their Big News right now. But first: their year, like the rest of us, began of course skiing en famille last January and ends the same way, if we all survive the fireworks. But in between - plenty: Cali changed jobs and is now doing her rather cool graphic things in Eastbourne. Meanwhile Toby's writing job has moved on from Sailing Today (we'll miss his lovely marina Gull's Eye Views - there were jolly useful last year on the way to Cowes!) and he is now Deputy Editor at the iconic Yachts and Yachting magazine. Since as a family we have read that from time immemorial, we are pretty pleased about this, and of course once upon a time Melissa was picture editor there too. So it's practically a family business surely?! ST and Y&Y magazines are both part of the same stable, all based in Chelsea, so that Toby has the long daily commute from Brighton to the posh end of London each day - thank heaven's for pocketable technology, 4G and folding bicycles! They still have their dinghy at Shoreham Yacht Club though, so moments of calm and escape are still available. As it happens, Brighton is a Heppell family home and is where Don Heppell was born and lived, so it's fab that T&C have settled there and their Big News this year is that "settled" = "buying a house there". With London, and London-commutable property prices hurtling up it has been a pretty stressful time as they jostle with dozens of eager buyers for each increasingly worse and pricier property but they have been lucky to finally find a good size house, near the station, with a garden and potential. Maybe their late Grandad was watching over all this and nudged a path through for them? Or they just got lucky. Or something. At any rate Christmas presents will be paint brushes, garden-rescue-equipment, paint catalogues and woodwork tools for Toby and Cali.

Woodwork tools? That brings us nicely back to **Stephen** and **Carole** in Brightlingsea where life as ever revolves around our wooden boats there. Our 107 year old oyster smack My Alice has had a lovely season racing with pals and family crewing. We seem to be adding more and more sail to her - and she loves the power! Gybing with seven sails up remains, er, interesting! Inexplicably we won the opening-of-the-oyster-season oyster dredging competition at West Mersea for a **second year running** and thus are officially old salts (rather than old soaks, which we count as progress). The Brightlingsea One Design was out in the summer (see above) and we have a new rather racy new workboat (Malice) to transport all the crew, sails

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and rum out to the My Alice. Our Porsche 911 is sold, a new "racy" 1927 Austin 7 is begun (see Xmas 2020 newsletter for completion probably!). Carole, having retired, is now a seemingly full time super-granny rushing from daughter to daughter's house; we are thinking of buying her a cape which Louis - who is so super-hero mad that he has Batman pants for Christmas - would be pretty impressed by.

Carole is still doing bits of research projects too, so she hasn't put all that experience away quite yet. Stephen's work is still full time, full on and all over the world - with remarkable projects everywhere from Australia to Denmark. Stephen's best bit is revisiting places where he has worked and hearing them say excitedly "you'll never guess what has happened to our kids!" and of course, he knows exactly what will have happened. Lovely, and pretty satisfying really. Carole and Stephen did manage a few moments together too, enjoying a fab short holiday snorkelling with tropical fish, and reading books in Egypt. They are going back next year...

So there you go, a bit late, but another year of good news, goodwill and good sailing. We count our blessings and hope for all the many thousands of you now reading this that life all comes together for you too, peacefully, at this time of the year. If we are not too up or senile by 2015, there'll be more news from this rather distributed family then. But until 12/15 last word of thanks goes to Harry Johnson who folded and posted paper versions of this in Essex after we'd beamed them over to him from the Alps. Thanks Harry!