

midwinter Scott Family Christmas Letter, 2012½

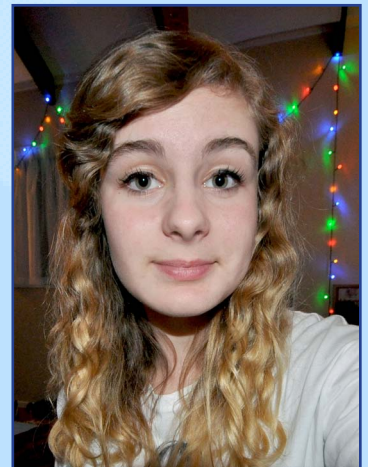
Those of you who live in the northern hemisphere may be intellectually aware that December 25 falls in the middle of what can be a very hot summer in the Antipodes, but if you have never visited there at Christmas it can be hard to appreciate the difference it makes to the way Australian and New Zealand residents of European ancestry choose to celebrate their Christmas traditions. Cold seafood and a nicely chilled Sav Blanc in the backyard, park or beach are infinitely preferable to having the oven on for 3 hours to cook a turkey and all the trimmings, followed by steamed pud and custard, when outside it's 30°C+ in the shade! But the traditions can be sorely missed by people who were raised on a childhood of Bing Crosby's White Christmas, Jingle Bells, and other snowy Xmas tales. One day some clever Trevor realised there are some very small parts of Australia (and some very large parts of New Zealand) where the consumption of large quantities of turkey, baked ham, hot pudding and mulled wine could be made to coincide with actual snowfall. Thus was born the now-popular idea of 'mid-winter Xmas' or 'Xmas in July'. This is fortunate for us, because at the end of 2012 we were so busy getting and keeping our house ready for sale that December 25 whizzed by with the speed of Santa's sleigh, and the 'annual' Christmas letter was metaphorically boxed up with the rest of the non-vital stuff, to be sorted out at a later date. On Xmas Day the kids and I headed off to join Jonathan who was already in Sydney, stayed 2 weeks with Dad and visited Jane's new farm.

In March 2013 we found the perfect buyer - they loved the property, were highly experienced so knew exactly what they were taking on, were happy to keep the chickens and sheep, and had plans of which I approved - planting out the gully to restore it to a native wetland. Living there had been a marvellous experience, but with all four of us now at school in Hamilton, it was time to move on. We finalised the sale of our lifestyle block, and moved into our new house in town, on 18 May 2013, two weeks before the busy end of semester. There followed 2 weeks of unpacking and rearranging, one week of studying and exams, and then I headed off to Sydney to spend a fortnight with my Dad after getting an email to say he had been in hospital for the 3rd time in about 2 months. Having satisfied myself that Dad's hospital visits were unrelated, and that he's in pretty good shape generally for someone who's about to turn 88, here I sit in my study, a cold steady July drizzle outside, the smell of warm baking filling the air, and only a couple of boxes behind me still to be sorted. It's time to unpack the Christmas letter and bring you up-to-date with the doings of the Scotts in the last 18 months. Accordingly, it's 1.5 times as long as usual and, in keeping with the upside-down timing of our letter, I've decided to reverse the usual order and go from youngest to eldest. Sit back and hopefully enjoy!



Edwin turned 12 in 2012 and finished his first year, Year 7, at Berkley Intermediate. He really liked his teacher, Mr Smith, who was Merinda's teacher 2 years earlier. He decided not to take up the challenge of going to Japan, however was delighted to host Masataka in 2013, and went to Hong Kong in Aug 2012 with his Dad instead. Edwin spends a lot of time on his computer, he especially enjoys playing Minecraft and has done several school-holiday courses including Minecraft Tekkit, Code Avengers, Lego Robotics and Xtreme Game Programming. In 2012 he sat the ICAS (Education Assessment Australia) tests and got Distinctions for English, Science and Computing. Despite hardly ever being seen with a book in his hand, he continues to be a superb speller. Now in Year 8, he really liked designing his own silver ring in Materials Tech class, he is taking piano lessons after school, his teacher is Mrs Wilkinson, his best friends are Jarad and Johnny, and he is delighted to be able to walk to school, shops and Johnny's house from our new home.

Merinda celebrated turning 14 on Xmas Eve 2012, after completing Year 9, her first year as a high school student! Her first term was spent at St Peters, a private school in Cambridge with a hefty reputation and an even heftier price-tag to match. Despite being in the top class, she found the work was not challenging intellectually, so she moved to Hillcrest High School, where she has flourished, coming top of her class in English, Social Studies, ICT and beating her best friend Sam to overall 1st place in their class by 2012's end. She took up roller-blading and goes regularly on Friday nights with her other best friend, Isabella (Izzy). Now in Year 10, Merinda still loves drawing, and is demonstrating a flair for fashion (handpainting her own 'skeleton' jeans) and interior design (her new room is très chic). When it comes to sorting and downsizing her stuff, she has a ruthlessness we envy! She also makes a mean salad, and is a skilled Settlers of Catan player. Merinda worries that she is going to be 'short' and laments the fact that her feet have not grown for 2 years, but still managed to swing an upgrade to a double bed in the move.



At 46 I was more than twice the age of the other students when I returned to tertiary education in 2012, after a 27-year hiatus, to start a 3-year Bachelor of Computer Graphic Design. Despite my advanced age (or perhaps because of it - no late night parties!) I finished the year with four A+ grades, two As, one A- and a B+. I was surprised to find I really like programming. Meanwhile, the weeds and chickens proliferated, and the farm began to seem more like a chore than an enjoyable lifestyle choice when added to full-time study, and driving Merinda to and from school every day. Despite that, for me the highlight of 2012 was assisting at a caesarian delivery of 2 live ewe lambs from Beauty, a ewe who was born on our property. In November 2012, I 'decluttered' the house, photographed it, and listed the farm for private sale. To prepare for the move, in first semester 2013 I took 2 instead of 3 papers, finishing with an A and an A-, and was very chuffed to be told I'd got the top mark in the exam and top mark overall in the Computer paper. Looking forward to walking to Uni and back (2km each way) next semester and losing some of those 20 excess kilos!

Jonathan has had 2 birthdays since the last Xmas letter, greedy pig, turning 57 in 2013, getting the world's widest-angle zoom lens and a new iMac. Travel-wise, he went to Sydney for 2 months sabbatical to work on modeling implant electrodes in the Bio-Implants Group of NICTA, had conferences in Hong Kong and Dunedin, visited colleagues in Wellington, and was an expert witness in Invercargill, the most South he has ever been. Also on the plus side, the government bought him a refurbished nose. Meanwhile he gave 110% at Uni like always, managing 8 post-graduate students even though "the world no longer values academics". He spent a lot of time last year bemoaning the fact that he can't find a new hobby that appeals. However, the move to the new house has perked him up a bit, as he really appreciates the gas central heating, not having to worry about chicken poo on his shoes, and walking and cycling to Uni. This year he is taking an evening course called Management in Higher Education, getting an A+ in his first semester. He, Edwin and Merinda separately made it into the local newspaper at least once, and are on a first-name-celebrity basis with most of the staff at the local supermarket.



To everyone who has read all the way to the end:

Happy Christmas In July!

With love & best wishes from Edwin, Merinda, Kay and Jonathan Scott.