

Dear friends,

## *Emmanuel - God with us*

Well, despite the best of intentions, it is late December already, we are in the midst of Church Carol Services, and piles of Christmas cards are waiting to be put up. Yet we still have no Christmas tree or turkey and most importantly - the Christmas letter has yet to be written! Life in the Cutting household is its usual frenetic self. But we have enjoyed receiving your letters and will attempt to share some of our year with you.



**Laura writes:** Hi everyone, happy Christmas, I have had a great year this year and hope you have had a great one too! As you may have heard, for my 12th birthday, I got what I had dreamed of since my old dachshunds died, a Labrador, **Tilly**. At first I wanted to have a chocolate Labrador thanks to Carrie, one of my closest animal friends who belongs to my godmother Helen, she was a chocolate Labrador and since I first met her I had wanted one just like her, she is so well behaved and so beautiful. I set my heart on one like her, but then a black

Labrador is what we (Tilly is very much of a family dog) got. Since the day that we saw her for the first time, we knew she was the one we wanted. Even though she is a lot of hard work, she is improving and she is the best dog in the world!

School is good this year; last year at the end of the year I had got very tired and started giving up, when perhaps I shouldn't have, but this new year at school is great and I am pleased with the way I am progressing with my work. Also I am finding new friends in the new people in my class. Also I am improving in my out of school activities such as my horse riding; all of the people that I am riding with think that it is my turn to fall off again because in the last few weeks they have come off and I haven't...YET... so only time will tell. Also I think I am progressing in my gymnastics, even if I am saying goodbye to some people that are going up to the next group - I am on the way to doing back flicks! (I have wanted to be able to do them for a very long time now). So there you have it, this is pretty much what I have been up to this year. I hope to see you soon and will look forward to sending you a letter of what I have been up to next year. Happy Christmas and have a great 2005!!!

**Hannah writes:** Hi everyone, Merry Christmas and I hope you're all well. This year, highlights have been doing well in my SATs last May, turning 14 on a plane returning from Cyprus early in the summer, and starting my GCSEs this September. My GCSEs are great because they are subjects that I have chosen, such as Music, Drama, and Art. I have stopped having flute lessons, but still play often in the music group at church. I also have been playing saxophone for just over a year now and am enjoying it. However the biggest change was probably getting our puppy, Tilly, 7 months ago and it's been a great experience having her! Once again, Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

**Kay:** continues to teach three days a week at Court Meadow School in Cuckfield. Following some re-organisation in the summer, she said "goodbye" to four of her older pupils whom she had taught for the last 6 years or so and moved classrooms to teach a smaller age range of 9 children with Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities (mostly Cerebral Palsy, visual impairment and complex Epilepsy). The slight change in pupils and staff has worked well and been both refreshing and



stimulating - though still hard work! As ever, managing 6 staff often requires more patience than 9 children! Liaising with her job share partner is currently working well and the change of days means that, in theory, if not often in practice, Kay has a Friday off with Alastair.

Memorable events this year? Attending several weddings, including those of Alastair's cousin Peter in May, and his sister Catriona in July (and having to find suitable outfits for the girls...!), being fascinated by apologetics at the clergy wives conference in October, discovering that a very close friend has cancer this Autumn and not managing to attend the wedding of another close friend in Sydney in December. (We do still hope & plan to go back to New Zealand as soon as timings and finances allow.) Oh and of course, the look on Laura's face when we told her on her birthday that we had given in to her pleas for a Labrador! Tilly is great fun and VERY hard work, but Kay is enjoying the exercise!

**Alastair:** of the members of the family, has had probably the most ordinary of years. Sadly, with the passing of Smudge the hamster, Alastair is finally left as the family's sole male. Things might appear to have dropped to a new low if the answer the question 'what happened this year?' brings 'Memorial Garden' to mind: but appearances can sometimes be deceptive. The existing Garden was almost full, and in wanting to provide something better than just ordinary, we have modelled our new one on the Labyrinth from Chartres Cathedral in France (twinned with our diocese of Chichester). It is possibly a first in the country, and it will be brilliant. You can have a glance on progress on [www.copthorne.org](http://www.copthorne.org).

Also at church, we have taken one of the riskiest of pastoral decisions: chopping the one main Sunday morning service in to two, with distinctive and different characters, for a trial for 6 months or so. We had found that actually one-size-does-NOT-fit-all, and this allows us to celebrate being diverse and support differing pastoral needs. It does however mean we now feel smaller, and not all the congregation yet grasp why... but in fact comparable statistics from last year indicate we are up by about 10%. Introducing a rather difficult debate at the Diocesan Synod, and chairing a local 'review group', were both at the rather taxing end of what is otherwise quite an enlightening and fruitful involvement in the wider Diocesan/Church of England structures.

So what of holidays, I hear you ask? Well, we had a pleasant week in a rather basic cottage in Devon in February, joined Kay's brother & family in Scotland for a few days after Easter and took the girls (after two cold, wet summers in the UK to "somewhere hot") to Cyprus in July - managing this time not to end up in hospital as Kay had done in 1992, though she did come home with a broken finger! Alastair enjoyed the amazing archaeological and historical sites, though as it was so hot, the girls preferred to stay in the pool. If returning to New Zealand is ever to be a possibility, holidays will have to take a back seat for a year or two - so if you know of anywhere really cheap, let us know!

Wishing you every blessing

Alastair Kay Hannah and Laura

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