

# News from the Potting Shed

Christmas 2013

(Below) Isaac and Joshua  
enjoying the summer.



## Contact us

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**Christmas round-robin newsletters often get criticism for being heavily-glossed updates of over-achieving children, exotic holidays and job successes.**

As I was writing this newsletter I read the following critique of the social networking site Facebook:

“Now that social networking has become universal, we’ve become increasingly sensitive to what we share on Facebook. Speaking on a stage in front of a mixed audience of family, friends, and acquaintances makes it hard for most of us to be our genuine and authentic selves. As a result, we tend to see people sharing only their proudest moments in an attempt to portray their best selves. We filter too much, and with that, we lose real human connection.” – Chrys Bader (<http://takeaswig.com/the-end-of-the-facebook-era>)

Let’s put that right shall we? Let’s connect!

This year began, as many before it, with a January, and so far we’ve had every month, predictably in sequence, just as last year. July, August, September, October and November satisfyingly spelled out JASON, and September, October, November and December are still incorrectly claiming to be the seventh to tenth months, respectively—some of us read Latin at high school, you know. I propose we bin June and July, shift the existing months back down to their original places and add *Undecember* and *Duodecember*. Who’s with me? You can sign the petition at the end of this newsletter and return it to the usual address (terms and conditions apply, only one application per household).

## The minutiae of everyday life

What? Oh, us? Right! What did we do? Looking back on this year I initially wondered if we’d actually done anything of note. And then I looked through our photo archive ([flickr.com/photos/garethjmsaunders](http://flickr.com/photos/garethjmsaunders)) and our **Trello.com project board** (what do you mean not everyone has an online project board for charting goals, managing life, home, children, admin, finances, projects, website developments... just me, then?) and I was quite surprised. Loads happened, squeezed into the gaps between meals, finding shoes, and bedtimes (“Where’s Monkey?!” This evening, dear reader, he was in the oven in the play-kitchen in Isaac’s room. Obviously.)

Two thousand and thirteen goes down as the year that we finally changed **dentists**: from private to NHS after a list was opened. Reassuringly, it turns out that a government-appointed dentist also looks into our mouths, fills them with pointy metal sticks, pokes about in them a bit and sends us off with helpful tips like, “only floss the ones you want to keep!” And all for less money! So, all good on that front.



Our **Historic Scotland family membership** expired this year, on 31 July 2013. Scotland is packed full of historic monuments: carved stones, castles and tower-houses, cathedrals, abbeys and churches, gardens and mansions, parks and palaces, prehistoric settlements and shiny, modern visitor centres. What an opportunity to explore, to show our children what a rich past this country has.

So in the twelve months that we had open access to over 70 attractions the length and breadth of Scotland, and free entry to over 400 events... we managed to visit a castle. One! One castle, in St Andrews, which is

about 10 miles from our front door. And I say 'we': I wasn't even there, and I work in St Andrews!

In October I tidied both **the linen and the towels cupboards** on the landing. I know! It took me about a whole afternoon. It wasn't just tidying though. No. There was some folding too. We played a game that I like to call 'win it, or bin it'. The rules are very simple. I'll tell you them here in the hope that you may also want to play along at home. Basically, you take everything out of a cupboard, and then one by one you make a decision: win it (keep it) or bin it (bin it). The stuff you win, you put back into the cupboard, but neatly; the stuff you want to bin, you bin. Clothes recycling banks take all sorts of fabric, and the stuff that's not fit to wear by others gets turned into rags for industry. Or costumes on *The X-Factor*, or something.

Nearly two months later, the towels cupboard is still really tidy. The linen cupboard a little less so as the boys like to climb into it with torches (battery-operated, not wooden with fabric-dipped-in-pitch) and pretend that it's a spaceship. It's not a spaceship: it's a cupboard.



Reuben, Joshua and Isaac made a 'swamp' using common household objects.

This year we also reorganised how we use quite a few **rooms in our house**. It started last Christmas: the living room became the dining room; the dining room became a small living room; the guest room became Isaac's room; Isaac's room became the study; the study had a gas boiler removed and became a larger living room/TV room; the utility room stayed a utility room but acquired a new boiler; Reuben and Joshua's bedroom lost two single beds but acquired a bunk bed; Isaac's room acquired a single bed, as did the attic. In the end it was the Rev Green in the linen cupboard with the torch. You see now why I use a project board?

## Visitors

With the loss of a guest bedroom to Isaac (we don't regard him so much as a guest now as a permanent member of the family, now that he's paid his membership fee) we've not had quite as many people to stay. But those who have come we've warmly welcomed, accommodated either on the sofa or on an inflatable mattress in the new giant-telly room, and we've thoroughly enjoyed their company.



Of note was a far-too-fleeting visit from my Mum, and two very dear National Youth Choir of Great Britain friends: Mark T Powell (who was visiting from Oregon, via London, to Edinburgh, en route to... erm, London), and Danny Curtis (aka 'DC') from Manchester, en route to here, from Manchester.

## Health

In April of this year I had two minor operations: one on my eye, and the other... an eye-watering operation. Details on request, or search my blog for 'minor operations'. (The squeamish need not apply. You have been warned.)

I also had a largely pain-free year in 2013, unlike last year when not only did I have back trouble (which initially involved lots of screaming, morphine, a few tramadol and a couple of days of hallucinations), I also managed to sustain an injury to my neck courtesy of Reuben and Joshua jumping onto me from behind, while I was watching TV. That trauma resulted in the spinal discs at C6 and C7 being compressed, trapping my nerves and leaving both

arms numb. Not good for someone who needs to use a keyboard to do his job. I spent four months off work in the autumn of 2012 in the care of a fabulous manipulative physiotherapist called Clayton Hardisty, who practices in St Andrews. This year has been much better (until yesterday... but I'll tell you about that next year).

Jane's recovery from post-natal depression—as documented in the 2010 edition of our Christmas newsletter—has been steady and aided in no small part by both her new venture Jane Bakes Great... ([www.janebakesgreat.co.uk](http://www.janebakesgreat.co.uk)) and also a part-time job at the St Andrews Cheese Farm, where she mucks out the cheese byre, and feeds and milks the cheeses, and sometimes works in the café and kitchen.

## Cakes

**Jane Bakes Great...** has been producing all sorts of fun cakes and personalised biscuits and cookies this year including Toy Story, football, oil rig, owl, panda, whales, a pig in mud, a Bertie Bassett and liquorice all-sorts cake, and for Jane's dad Peter's retirement in July a cake depicting him asleep on an armchair.

Reuben and Joshua requested cakes too, for their fifth birthdays in November. Joshua wanted a Hobbit-inspired cake: Smaug the dragon sitting atop a heap of gold coins. Reuben's, however, was a tad more surreal: a mole emerging from a mole-hill, with Wilson—the red locomotive from TV show *Chuggington*—running around its base, about to bump into Gandalf the Grey!

Jane's most recent cake—apart from the current,



seemingly endless conveyor-belt of Christmas cakes—was of the USS Enterprise from Star Trek, for the husband of Joshua's teacher because...

## School and playgroup

In August of this year Reuben and Joshua joined primary one at Anstruther Primary School. They are in separate classes, P1A (Joshua) and P1N (Reuben) with the idea that 'planting' them in different 'pots' they would grow independently. It's a strategy that has thankfully worked, and we wandered back home from our first parents' evening with glowing reports of them both. (Incidentally, we discovered that parents' evening is nothing like mother's day or father's day. We didn't get any cards or presents!)

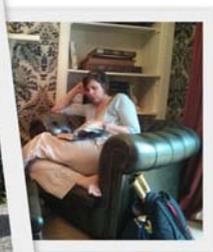
Meanwhile, down the road, young Isaac (who turns three in January) started at playgroup for three mornings a week. He speaks very fondly of his "pink goils", those are the women (goils/girls) who run the playgroup and dress in deep pink polo shirts. In the new year we'll look to start sending him to playgroup for five days a week before he moves up to nursery at Anstruther Primary School.



Reuben and Joshua on their first day of primary school.

## Selkirk Common Riding

One of our highlights of the year was traveling to Selkirk in June to join our extended family to celebrate the Selkirk Common Riding. One of my third-cousins from California, Robert Mailer Anderson, had been appointed the Colonial Standard Bearer to represent people and families from Selkirk who'd gone to live overseas. (My great-grandmother Georgina and his great-



grandfather Robert ‘Honolulu Bob’ were brother and sister; Robert was performing these duties exactly 100 years after his great grandfather had.

Robert, his wife Nicola Miner and four children, Dashiell, Lucinda, Frances and Callum, welcomed us as guests at Hoscot House, near Selkirk...ish, which they had rented for the best part of two weeks to accommodate a large party of cousins, aunts and uncles who flew in from California. There were about twenty of us in total.

We had so much fun that week. We’d not seen some of my American family since we last visited San Francisco in 2004, it was so lovely to have the time and space to catch up. There was a lot of laughter. And some cycling. And the most amazing food, cooked by a couple of chefs from Kelso.

Our three boys loved meeting and playing with their American cousins, racing around the country estate. There were sheep and tractors.

You can read more about it at [blog.garethjmsaunders.co.uk](http://blog.garethjmsaunders.co.uk), search for ‘common riding’.

## Projects

When Jane and I sat down in January to set goals for the year we planned a fairly simple, quiet year. We managed to keep it that way for the most part until June.

After the Common Riding the floodgates opened and life began to get busier and busier. By that point I’d already redesigned the website for All Saints’, St Andrews ([\[standrews.org.uk\]\(http://standrews.org.uk\)\) and was just beginning on a redesign for my parents-in-law’s website \(\[www.linnebheag.co.uk\]\(http://www.linnebheag.co.uk\)\).](http://www.allsaints-</a></p></div><div data-bbox=)

I’ve been collaborating with two friends on, I guess you could call it our memoirs of our time together in the National Youth Choir of Great Britain (NYCGB), approx. 1987-1997. While this has been a very time-consuming but immensely fun project, I put it on hold in the autumn to free up time to complete a couple of other projects. The first was to compile my annual Scottish Episcopal Church calendar in electronic format, for importing into computer calendars like Google Calendar and Microsoft Outlook. ([www.seccalendar.co.uk](http://www.seccalendar.co.uk)), the second was to work alongside NYCGB in their tremendous efforts to start an alumni choir. This meets for the first time in London on 18 January 2014 at Christ Church, Spitalfields, London. In England. Oh yes!

## 2014

Plans for next year include knowing where the children’s shoes are at all times, eating breakfast regularly, going on holiday for longer than two days, and writing a book.

See you on the other side.