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Dear

Oh dear it's the season to be jolly again, never mind, we'll get over it. We've, of course, had another move this year- we left stunning Port Hedland and its iron ore in January and moved here to Alice Springs when Mike's company had to significantly reduce the number of pilots in Port Hedland. He's still working for the same company although it's been bought by Paspaley Pearls and has changed its name from Skywest to Pearl Aviation. Alas, this doesn't mean he gets free pearls as perks! He is now a first officer on a Metro 23 which is a 19 passenger turbo-prop aircraft. He flies to and from the Granites mine once or twice a day during the week and he usually has a reasonable amount of time off which is nice. We like Alice, it's friendly and reasonably small but there's a bit more going on than in Port Hedland as it's twice the size and a major tourist town. We're also right in the middle of everything going on in Oz- we're only about 2000km away from each major city! We've bought a house here- an ex housing commission house (like a council house) and have been busy lately, painting, re carpeting, and generally sprucing it up. We have benefited from an unfortunate incident- Mike's Plane went to Perth for maintenance on 11th October and one of the engineers pressed the wrong button and retracted the undercarriage (raised the wheels) whilst the plane was on the ground causing 1.5 million dollars worth of damage -whoops! Anyway the company had to cross-hire another aircraft which came with its own crew which meant that Mike had about 6 weeks paid holiday to help paint the house- it's a hard life! They now have another plane to fly and the original aircraft should be back soon. One of the other pilots here, Phil, is an ex cabinet maker and whilst he was also on enforced leave he generously helped us make a new kitchen bench and cupboard and replace all the old white melamine bench tops with a jade Formica so whilst we haven't exactly got a new built in kitchen it's the best

we could do on a limited budget and it looks much nicer as well as being more practical.

Sam is growing like a weed and running around causing mischief wherever he can. He'll be 21 months old at Xmas and, as yet, seems blissfully unaware that his comfortable life is due to be rudely interrupted on 3rd January or thereabouts when Cathy is due to produce Tiffwatt 2. According to the ultrasound results 'it' will probably be a girl unless 'he's' hiding something!

In order to stop Sam from turning the T.V. on and off all the time, we plugged it into a timer switch so that it wouldn't work until about 7pm- undeterred, Sam has quickly worked out that if he unplugs it and puts the plug into another socket the T.V. works! He's also an expert at getting at anything supposedly put out of his reach, he simply grabs a chair and pushes it over to wherever he wants to get to, so life is 'interesting' at the moment.

His life is a mad social whirl of play group, Kindergym, story-time at the library and visits to play with friends, not to mention assisting with the painting and helping with housework. He's also an assistant 'Neighbourhood Watch' co-ordinator to Mum and has probably caused the street sign-up rate to rise as he captivates hearts wherever he goes.

He is gaining new words daily and was very distressed today as he told me his balloon was 'bro-ken' - I think he was hoping I'd be able to fix it!

Mike is secretary to the newly founded "Central Desert Canoe Club"- yes - it is a somewhat strange thing to have in a town whose single river contains water only following heavy rain- once a year at most, however this particular canoe club plays Canoe Polo at the local swimming pool- a little known and somewhat violent game where, it seems, the main aim is to attempt to drown opposing team members in order to get at the ball!

Sam has been doing the rounds of all the Xmas parties recently and has had several close encounters with a white bearded, red suited (and in this climate heavily perspiring) stranger who tries to sit him on his knee and give him sweeties- Sam, to his credit, is obviously very aware of stranger danger and clings tightly to mum's neck crying and refusing to have anything to do with this man. He does manage to consume the sweeties once over the trauma though! We're treating his "Santaphobia" with repeated exposure in the time tested way and will be hosting the playgroup Xmas party on 14th December when 'the old man' will be making another appearance.

Having been extremely busy with the house recently we have found that time is quickly running out to send cards - it's already 9th December and we haven't sent a single card or present off I'm afraid to say, we had intended to enclose piccies of Sam but haven't got round to taking them so, don't panic,

we have decided that we will send pics of Sam together with the new babe sometime in the new year, as, no doubt we will be writing to everyone again then.

We've had a busy year with visitors- both sets of parents have been out- it's amazing what an incentive having a grandchild is. They were kept very busy fixing things and keeping Sam amused, they didn't do much sight seeing but they did get to go to the unique Alice Springs lawn sales- which are like car boot sales but held on peoples lawns. They're great fun and a must for bargain hunters, we're unashamedly addicted.

Clare and Peter joined us briefly last Xmas in Port Hedland- making a marathon trip around Australia on Xmas eve and losing their luggage en-route which was luckily reunited with them on Xmas morning. This year, Sally will be with us on 27th December for three weeks- she has foolishly volunteered to be here to help out around the time of the birth- for which we are hugely grateful. The whole Watson family have combined their visits with us with diving courses in Cairns- Mike will be the only Watson (except Sam and Tiffwat 2) who hasn't done one so if we ever get back to a coastal town we will have to rectify that.

This year has been wonderful for us in that, for the first time since we were married, we are in a stable position, with steady work, and no need to move for almost a year now, which has given us the opportunity to do what the rest of the world does, and be domestic, plant flowers and veggies, mow lawns, clean the pool (more of a hassle here than the lawn even!), go to work on a regular basis, and be home for a significant amount of time, and always be there to read Splodge his bedtime story. I guess that this can sound boring, but it is such a wonderful change from an almost too exciting life for some time past.

The house has a huge garden, with a play house on stilts with a slide;(Sam goes UP the slide, and DOWN the ladder.....), and an aviary, which has been converted into a greenhouse, Alice style: it keeps the birds out, and shades the plants; which is ideal, especially with reticulation providing a 'rainfall' from the ceiling. The water from the aircon has also been plumbed into the tomatoes, and are thriving, although we still wait for the crop!

Sam has just started to develop a vocabulary, and is able to say single words such as "hot, tea, empty, broken, fart, sharp and no." He will point at any perpetrator and say "Ooo, fart!", which can cause surprise!

Anyway, I'm afraid we really have run out of time and MUST send these cards off- it's now 15th December and somehow I doubt they're going to make it on time- apologies to one and all and a very merry Xmas and happy New year.

Lots of love + kisses