

Another year gone, but it has been quite an eventful one. For us, three main events dominated the year: our trip to the UK, putting a deck and spa in the back yard, and finally completing secondary education for all of our kids (yay!). The first and the third were related in a way, as the main motivation for the trip was that the Pipes and Drums band in which **Jeremy** is the bass drummer were heading to Inverness for the European championships on June 29<sup>th</sup>. This was far too tempting for **Emily**, **Linda** and **James**, who promptly shot off Up Over to tag along (like several other families of band members) for three weeks, leaving **Timothy** and **Joshua** to look after **Beau** (and enjoy a few weeks of peace and quiet!). Jeremy left a few days before us with the school group itself, who were keen to get some practice in at some local competitions on the previous weekend, and the three of us caught up with the school trip in Stirling. We had a glorious few days driving across Scotland, renewing our acquaintances with quite a few familiar sights (including the Glenfinnan rail bridge made famous in the Harry Potter movies) and some new ones. The highlight of the latter was a day trip to Iona, which was well worth the wait and the bus ride full of scenic views across Mull. How could we have spent so long in Scotland all those years ago and never been here? Oban was also a refreshing place to visit, and one that we will on our return list! We then wandered up to Inverness the night before the big day, wondering whether we were in the right place as we had several days of glorious sunshine! We stayed in a castle with some other families from the band, which was an experience in itself. On the day of the championships, the weather returned to form, with a solid Scottish downpour in the afternoon. The competition, as expected, was a few leagues above the Australian version, and the band were thoroughly inspired. The scale was a bit overwhelming – for the final massed bands, it took 45 minutes just for all the bands to march past and assemble. Once all was ready, and the massed bands began playing (a highlight of the event), the heavens opened again and down came the rain again. But nothing could dampen the spirits of all concerned, and another highlight was the band playing at dinner in the castle. Jeremy and the band headed back south the next day, and we followed via Culloden (bumping into the pipe band from Scotch as they marched around the battlefield) and then back to our old haunt of Edinburgh. The old charms were still intact, but with a lot more people around and a layer or two of Harry Potter stuff that was new to us. Both Linda and James swear that the trip up Arthur's Seat used to be shorter! After what seemed to be all too short a time, we collected Jeremy (as the School trip were heading back home), and drove south to take in York, Stratford, Cambridge, and finally London. There is always more to be seen than we could see, of course, and now that we have the taste for it again, it probably won't be a further 20 years before doing it again!

**Jeremy** has now completed Year 12, and has managed to fit in a lot of things while doing so, including taking part in the musical Legally Blonde, a major part in the play The Real Inspector Hound, the aria competition, a jazz combo, several concerts, including one in the Melbourne recital centre and of course the Pipes and Drums, for which he also doubled as the Drum Major. This meant that in the Anzac Day march, he was the one in the front of the band “with the big stick” and the ceremonial sash. He also managed to fit in some part-time work, switching mid-year from Kmart to join his sister at Boost. We are yet to hear any complaints about the noise! He passed his driving test soon after his birthday, making now four drivers at home, and yes, driving to school was a thing for a little while. This is now past, and despite his activities he did very well in his final year, and is looking forward to Monash next year for a combined degree in Arts and Music.

**Emily** has marched on in a similar fashion to last year, having now completed 2 years of her Arts degree in history. She seems to be getting better at writing essays all over the place, sometimes taking over the kitchen bench and table with source material. She has increased her hours at Boost, and has managed to get quite a few regular shifts, often with some overlap with Jeremy. Sibling rivalry is still very much a thing! She and Jeremy put together their resources to buy car from their aunt which used to belong to their grandparents (which sent James down memory lane, having done something very similar with his sister many years before!), and have managed to make great use of it since. Having more drivers than cars catches us out every now and again, but there doesn't seem much prospect of any further increase in the number of drivers yet!

**Timothy** and **Joshua** still follow much in the same vein as previous years. Timothy has had some driving lessons, but both seem to be way too familiar with public transport to be too keen to following in the footsteps of their younger siblings!

**Linda** has enjoyed Jeremy's increasing transport independence, with several rides to school. Now that we have finally entered the post-secondary parental era, this will presumably increase (although it has been noted that there are 6 people in residence at our place, some of whom are adults!). Another busy year at school (with not much mid-year break this time) has her very much looking forward to relaxing at home over the holidays. Speaking of which, we have finally bitten the bullet and done something about the back yard. We now have a deck and a spa, newly completed, but still have a lot of cleaning up and organising to do. In 2020, our vision is to have it all looking great by Christmas!

With best wishes from all of use for a refreshing Christmas and a prosperous New Year,  
James, Linda, Joshua, Timothy, Emily & Jeremy Harland

