

# ANITA STAADEN

**M**y daughter Vienna loves Christmas. She loves it so much she had her Christmas tree up and her Christmas village set out in the first week of November.

We have a number of Christmas traditions in our family, but two of my favourites are Vienna setting up our Christmas tree (Mum, do I have to wait until the first of December?), with her Christmas playlist up loud and Vienna singing along beautifully, and our annual tour of neighbourhood houses with the best Christmas lights displays, accompanied by Vienna's Christmas playlist and her singing along. There is a common ingredient here – Vienna, her Christmas playlist, and her joyous singing! She brings joy to my world and my Christmas.

# DEANNA AYRES

**C**hristmas for me is a time of celebration, a time to connect and reconnect with family. It's a time synonymous with music, which both inspires and irritates. At the irritant end, the jangly jingles played repetitively in shopping centres can become grating - but at the inspirational end of the scale some of the greatest music ever written is inspired by Christmas. "The Hallelujah Chorus from Handel's Messiah" to "Mary did you know", "Silent Night" and "O Holy Night" are poignant. It was December 1993 when our eldest son Guy and his wife Anna and their 3 year old Stephanie were in Rabaul, PNG. Anna and Stephanie were flown home to Melbourne as Anna had been in hospital in Rabaul with Malaria, and was nearly 8 months pregnant with Jonathan. Guy couldn't come back till February for Jonathan's birth. They were both upset not to all be together for Christmas, and Anna had arranged for Guy to spend Christmas day with very good expat friends in Rabaul, and he would call her at her parent's farm in Somerville at 9am in the morning. My husband Brian and I were to join them and we could all wish Guy a Merry Christmas over the phone.

Guy had enquired about flights as he so wanted to be with Anna, but they were all fully booked. Only Qantas had a Business Class seat available, but it was very expensive.

I had accrued a lot of Frequent Flyer points, and they were enough to cover his fare. Guy wanted to surprise Anna and Steph so flight arrangements were made. She and her family knew nothing about it, but their friends in Rabaul did and were excited about the surprise.

Christmas Eve we met up with our son Brett and his fiancé Nadia and went to Carols by Candlelight at the Myer Music Bowl in Melbourne.

As you can imagine we were all very excited

and waved our candles in the dark, sang beautiful carols, loved listening to the singers and the orchestra, then just as we were about to leave David Hobson sang in his tenor voice "I'll be home for Christmas, just you wait and see". It was just magic, and with a lump in our throats we stopped and listened, then hastily made our way to the airport.

Guy arrived at 1:30am and we all went home to Frankston and talked till 5:00am before we snatched some sleep. At 8:30am we were on our way to Somerville. I gave Guy my car keys and the loan of my car. His friend Craig had booked a few days holiday for them at Torquay on the Belarine Peninsula before he returned. Brian drove up to Anna's parent's house and Guy skirted through the apple orchard. Back then there were no mobile phones like there are today, but Brian worked at Telstra and had one of the first mobiles. It was as big as a brick and just as heavy, and Brian loaned it to Guy.

When we arrived everyone was trying to put on a brave face. I hugged Anna and wished her a happy Christmas – she muttered "it wasn't".

Just then the home phone rang and she picked it up, spoke briefly with Guy then slowly turned around and looked out the side door, put the phone down and ran out into Guy's arms. (Silently I thanked God for His unfailing love) There wasn't a dry eye, and we all celebrated with breakfast together. Anna came and slid her arms around me and whispered "Thank You".

My wish for you and your loved ones this Christmas, wherever you are, whatever you are going through, may you be blessed with God's Abundant Extravagant Grace, and may you know His Joy, His Hope, His Love and His Peace.

Merry Christmas!



Photo of a very gleeful Vienna looking at a Christmas Village on our Christmas lights tour.

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