



willing to take that risk and told David so. He smiled, shrugged, and then began: "Well, we started our Christmas rather early last year, because we decided to throw our party about a week before. As you know, Sam and I don't go for lots of big parties, like some folks do around our way. And we do like to have Christmas Day itself pretty much to ourselves.

"So we reckoned it'd be a good idea to invite everybody around a bit in advance. And that had another big advantage, too. Because, with so many folks going out of town for Christmas, it meant we caught them before they left!

"Well, we made the place real warm and homey with a glorious log fire blazing in the fireplace . . . And, of course, we had a huge fir tree—in fact, it was so big it was pretty near brushing the ceiling!

DECORATIONS

"I'd fixed the decorations by wobbling about on the top of our stepladder, so I felt a very personal pride in that tree!" David laughed, evidently remembering one or two tricky moments, but we'll maybe never know more about them, because he went straight on:

"There was no set time for folks to arrive or anything like that. It was all real casual—like most good parties are, I guess, and everybody just came

around when they'd quit working or when they felt like it.

"And we all had a great time. There's not much else I can tell you. There was music, and lots of kinda 'dip-in-and-come-again' things to eat that kept us going till about five in the morning! And that's about it, I guess."

Christmas Day itself was very different . . . "I always like to be close to my Mom that day," David told me . . .

"That day, most of all. The general pattern has been much the same during the past few years. Sam and I stay home in the morning, and sometimes a couple of friends'll call round and we'll mull some wine and exchange presents.

"After lunch we split up and each go visit with our folks. I don't like to say it, but I've a suspicion that little tradition may well have started because we'd be getting pretty hungry by then! But I like to think the food was always very much a side attraction!"

"What about the Christmas you were in Hawaii?" I wondered. "Did you manage to make contact with your families that year?" "Sure thing!" David came straight back. "Because, you see, we got home for Christmas Day."

I was confused. I was sure I'd read some place that Sam and David had missed their plane and had been stranded back in

Hawaii, although they'd planned all along to get back to L.A.

David put me right. "Sounds like you only got one half of the story," he laughed.

"We missed our scheduled flight home, sure enough. But, when it comes to having our Christmas plans messed about, Sam and I can be pretty determined guys.

"There just had to be another plane that could get us back in time! There was . . . and it did!

BEAUTIFUL

"We maybe had a slightly more bumpy ride . . . But 5.30 a.m. on Christmas morning saw us touching down at L.A. airport. "It was incredible, because it was a clear day—wonderfully beautiful! And to get a clear day, without haze, in L.A. is really something special—any day of the year!"

David smiled at the memory. "I guess I've never felt so much like Santa Claus in my whole life! You see, we'd cabled home from Hawaii to break the bad news about missing our plane, so no-one was expecting us.

"When I walked through Mom's door, it was the best present I could have dreamed of—seeing her face light up, as I wished her 'Happy Christmas'.

"That's the sort of thing that Christmas means for me."