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Australia  
9<sup>th</sup> December 2016

Hello Everyone,

Another year has quickly flown past us here in Pascoe Vale . Can Christmas be nearly upon us once again?

As always, this gives us a chance to think of our friends and family and shout out our Christmas hello. It is also our chance to prepare to celebrate the birth of Christ, the true reason for this Christmas holiday period. Another big year for us all so let's get into it without further ado!

It has been a quieter year for us overall – perhaps we are now reaching that point in life when we can sit back a little and celebrate life.

“Hotel Erickson” has been quieter this year but we did still host various short and longer term stays.

- Our friend Peter from England spent Christmas with us last year, staying on into January and enjoying trips with us to places such as the Great Ocean Road, western Victoria and the Dandenongs. Peter and Fiona were back again recently to spend a further week with us in early December. Again, a chance for us to see some of those wonderful Victorian spots that we sometimes take for granted
- Bertus and Sandra from Holland stayed with us for a week when they were in Australia for our annual 24 Hour walking event
- Lots of stays by Chris, Rachel, Olly and Annie (and plenty of very welcome babysitting of the grandchildren by us)
- Quite a few stays by Paul, when his work with the Labor Party necessitated a spell in Melbourne. We also had a fair stint looking after his cat Milo – the cats eventually agreed on a pecking order, with Sooty at the top, Milo in the middle and poor Smokey at the bottom.
- The usual overnight stays by many of our friends on their various trips to Melbourne.

We are also lucky in that David and Matt live locally and are regular dinner guests.

So overall our large house still gets more than its fair share of usage!

We also had our fair share of trips this year. Tim breathed a sigh of relief when his usual 2 week walking camp in Falls Creek in the Victorian high country was not held last January (however, it is on the agenda for this coming January and Tim is busy organizing). But the lull did not last long as we drove to Adelaide the following month to watch Chris in the Australian racewalk championships. This was followed by a roadtrip to Canberra in March when Tim was supporting one of the long distance walkers in an event there. Then another drive to Canberra in June for the big annual racewalk that is always held on the Queens Birthday weekend. Tim was then in Sydney a week later for another long distance walking activity. But these were all warmups for our big trip to South America in August – more of that later.

Lois has now completed her ninth year working at Broadmeadows Community Legal Service and it was a big year, with the Service amalgamating with the Moreland Community Legal Centre and now rebranded as the Northern Community Legal Service. There was considerable uncertainty in this merger and Lois did not really know if she would have a job at the end of it. But all worked out well and she was able to continue on with her current role, much as she had previously. She is now working 3 days per week, mostly in the office in Airport West but with one half day as an outreach lawyer in Broadford, north of Melbourne.

After such a tumultuous year in 2015, Lois is now in remission re her cancer, with her regular blood tests confirming zero activity. With this behind her, she has been able to resume some of her other activities, returning as a church warden at St Linus' Church and resuming her role as church rep on the parish kindergarten committee.

The Essendon 'Curves' gym, where she has worked out for quite some time, closed during the year. After a quick search, the ladies decided on a similar gym in Moonee Ponds and now the "Curvettes" meet there for their morning workouts and post-workout coffees!

Lois had one issue that deserves some airplay. She woke up one morning in April with a cold and with her hearing just about completely gone. Since then it has been a case of many trips to doctors and an ear specialist, along with the insertion of draining tubes in the ears, but so far no cure. Her hearing remains impacted. We can only hope that time cures it – certainly some days are better than others, an indication that the damage may not be permanent.

Tim is now 8 years and counting as a retiree. His usual comment still remains true - how did I ever find time to work? He has enjoyed more free time this year after stepping back in 2015 from some of his many sporting roles. This has meant a bit more time for reading, gardening and supporting Chris who was preparing for his third Olympic Games. Many have been the trips to Geelong to ride the bike for Chris as he pounded out the long training miles.

David is now into his fourth year working with the State Revenue Office (see <http://www.sro.vic.gov.au>), the Victorian government's main taxation agency. He continues to work in the Melbourne CBD and enjoys his role and its various challenges. He made a flying visit to Thailand in April but, apart from that, it has been a case of head down at work. He has been sharing a house in Airport West but is due to move into a new share house with youngest brother Matt in Brunswick next month. That will be closer to work and is a very vibrant scene – I am sure the boys will enjoy it.

I recently decided that having both a station wagon and a sports car was a tad extravagant so I decided to keep the MX-5 and get rid of the station wagon (as you do!). David has now taken it from me so all has worked out well.

Times are exciting for Rachel and Chris and the kids. During the year, they bought a house block in a new housing estate in Point Lonsdale and their new house is now well on the way to completion. With an expected occupation date of April 2017, they didn't want to take out another 12 months lease on their current rental house in Ocean Grove so they have just completed a short term move to Queenscliff and are now staying with Rachel's parents Bob and Pat.

Rachel continues to work at the Geelong Courts as a social worker and Chris continues in his job as a recreational officer with Deakin University in Geelong. So they both have part time local jobs. Their hours are of course built around the needs of two pre-school children. And how they are growing! Olly turned 5 in early August and will start school next year at Queenscliff Primary School while Annie turned 3 in April and will start kindergarten next year. We are lucky enough to see them just about every week, either down there or up here at our place for sleepovers that are ongoing highlights for us. Our large rambling house, our large gnome collection and our many knick knacks make for interesting exploration for both Olly and Annie.

Chris had his best year ever in his racewalking and yet he hardly raced. He won the 50km Australian Olympic trial in December last year, thus gaining his Olympic spot nice and early. With his various family commitments, he bypassed the World Cup in Rome in May and then opted to stay locally in July while the rest of the team did their final Olympic prep in St Moritz. So he had only a very small number of races during the year, as he concentrated on putting in consistently big miles. With Tim and his coach Brent on the bikes every week, it all went according to plan and he headed off to Rio under-raced but in his best form ever. With the concerns about the zika virus, Rachel and the kids chose to stay home but Lois and I were able to go and wave the flag.

His Olympic walk was without doubt his best ever race. The 50km walk was contested on the hottest morning of the Games and the course was fully in the sun – no shade of any sort. He walked as part of a big chasing group early but then came through the field in the last 15km to eventually finish 10<sup>th</sup> in a PB time of 3:48:32. He was one of the few walkers who actually kept his feet after finishing – most were so distressed that the finishing area was littered with prone figures.

Paul continues in his role as National Assistant Secretary of the Australian Labor Party and still resides in Canberra. His busy lifestyle continues, with interstate trips a necessary and regular part of his job. With a Federal Election scheduled in July, he spent about 8 weeks in Melbourne working on the campaign and we hosted Milo, The Wonder Cat, for the duration. As Milo has been here before, it did not take him long to settle down but it is fair to say that our 2 cats had their noses out of joint for the stay!

Matt's various musical endeavours continue to keep him on his toes - playing in a variety of bands and even doing a bit of touring, doing lots of studio work and teaching music in a number of local primary schools. It is fair to say that life as a full time musician is very busy!

And to finish, some further info on our big South American trip. With Chris to compete in the Rio Olympics, we had decided last year that we would go to support him. We had also decided to make a trip of it and to see more than just Rio. So we headed off in late July to Lima in Peru. From there, we embarked on an 8 day tour which offered a couple of days in the Amazon, some days in the ancient Inca capital Cusco and a day at Mahu Picchu. It was a wonderful tour but a bit of a challenge for Lois who developed altitude sickness. Luckily, she recovered immediately we returned to Lima and we were then able to enjoy a further 5 days in that city, doing various day tours.

From there we flew to Rio and went into Olympic mode for 10 further days. Lois's sister Bev and husband Greg joined us in Rio, booking an apartment only 3 minutes walk from our airBNB booking. This enabled us to do pretty much everything together - lots of tours to sites like Christ The Redeemer, Sugarloaf, Copacobana and Ipanema beaches, etc. The Olympics was challenging on many fronts but we did not let the challenges mar our enjoyment of what was a once in a lifetime trip. Overall, we were away for 24 days, eventually returning home in late August.

Once back home, we opened up our house to our builder, Gavin, who is now completely renovating our main bathroom, toilet and laundry area. The revamp is supposed to be completed by Christmas so we are keeping our fingers crossed. Tim has been helping with the painting and with ordering all the necessary items like bath, toilet, laundry cupboards, etc, etc. The list goes on!

So in summary, we are all well and have survived another year full of friends and family and work and recreation and challenges.

If you want to see our most recent photos and you have internet access, point your web browser at link <http://members.optusnet.com.au/~terickso/2016.shtml>.

To all our friends, local and remote, we wish you a Christmas filled with peace and joy and hope that 2016 will be a year where the world moves closer together in unity, tolerance and mutual love and acceptance.

Happy Christmas and best wishes for 2017.

Tim and Lois

