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Hello everyone

Well, it's Christmas once again – as usual I find it hard to believe that another year has rushed by and a new one beckons. So it's time to put fingers to keyboard and send a fond hello to all our far-flung friends.

It has been the usual busy year for us on many fronts and it will take some time to briefly mention what everyone is up to...I suggest you sit down...it is sure to be an exhausting read!

There are no signs of any boys moving out of home – the lifestyle must be too cushy! On top of our own lads, we have also had our 'boarder', Marc, with us again this year. He is still doing his apprenticeship as a plasterer and spends Monday to Friday here. So the household continues to be a revolving door of young people and not so young people.

David realised that he would not be able to achieve enough points to finish his Mechanical Engineering Degree course this year so he chose to spread the remaining subjects and project work over 2 years and has been doing Uni part time and working part time. That means he will continue on in like frame next year with a view to finishing at the end of 2004. With his extra money, he has been able to upgrade to a very swish Ford Falcon – he now definitely has the best car in the household. He has also taken on cricket this summer but is currently sitting out for a few weeks as he tries to organise a transfer to another club where some of his mates play.

Chris is doing some final placement work (which will finish before Christmas) with Athletics Australia to fulfil the last requirement to complete his Uni course (Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Business). He will then be looking to pick up a position in a Sports Administration area. But he has part time work at the same hotel as David and he is progressing with his athletics (more details below) so may not be in too much of a hurry to push into full time work. He is keeping an eye on developments in the 2006 Commonwealth Games Organisation as that would be an ideal job to get. The Games will be based in Melbourne and they are gradually filling positions – but still only at the higher levels. He has had a great year with his racewalking and came 3rd in the National 30 km Championship in August, came 4th in a big interstate carnival in Canberra (20 miles), was placed in all the Victorian walking championships and in early December walked his first 50 km, coming 3rd in the Australian selection trial for the 2004 Racewalking World Cup which is to be held in Germany in May next year. His time was under the selection standard (he walked 4:19:48 to just get under the 4:20:00 standard) so hopefully this should gain him selection in his first Australian Team. Chris also played indoor cricket during the year and has recently swapped from that to lawn bowls. What's even more amusing is that he took up bowls because a couple of his good mates play - he decided to join them and play in one of the lower grades just for fun. Then a big article appeared in the local papers mentioning Chris by name as one of the big finds of the season and a young player with a big future. As he had not yet bowled a ball down in anger, his mates were suitably peeved and Chris has been making the most of it since (at their expense). Chris's band has had a fairly quiet year with only a smattering of gigs. Perhaps the boys are all moving into careers now and the band may be taking second place to other priorities.

Paul has now successfully completed the second year of his Arts Degree at Melbourne Uni. He has also been heavily involved in student politics and the Australian Labor Party. He is one of the leading lights in the Young Labor movement at Melb Uni and was centrally involved in fighting to get rid of the current Student Union Executive. You might say the mobile phone ran hot for months on end. He also does part time work at the offices of a couple of Labor Parliamentarians and has been to his fair share of Party functions, briefings and activities. He is in Ballarat at the moment at the National Union of Students Annual Conference. But he has been sensible enough to keep this in perspective and has managed to achieve another good set of academic results this year. He also does some part time work at a local pub in the bottle shop and manages to have a bit of a social life with his mates but it does not leave time for much else.

Matt successfully completed Year 11 this year and next year will see him in his final year of Secondary School. He has grown into the tallest of the boys and stands about 5 ft 10ins. He also sports an unruly mop of blond hair (a bottle blonde!) and is threatening dreadlocks. Saints preserve us! He finally gave up his field hockey a year ago and is focusing his energies into the musical sphere. Like David and Chris, he is now playing in a band with 3 of his mates. He plays a very good lead guitar. The boys have cut their first CD (a 5 track one) with 100 copies for sale via their mates! They have had a few gigs and have put their own website up on the net – with Matt as the webmaster. All that is keeping him pretty busy at the moment. He has made murmurings about wanting to be a music teacher but there is a lot of water to flow under the bridge before then. It is good, however, that he has a goal as he approaches his Year 12.

Lois has had her usual busy year. She has completed another 6 units towards her law degree and has now completed half of the course. She also continued her part time teaching at Kangan TAFE College this year – her 17th year – but is taking next year off so that she can focus full-time on her Uni course. If all goes well, at the end of 2004 she will only have some 4 units to go to complete the degree. She has applied for some voluntary work with the Broadmeadows Community Legal Service and is waiting to hear. She has also continued on with her many Church related roles – Churchwarden of the new combined parish and her work as a member of the Council for Anglican Early Childhood Services. In that role, she has had to mediate, advise and support a number of local communities in various Church-Kindergarten issues and changes. She also helps, along with her brother Neil and her sister Bev, to look after her mother, Win, who is now 89 and struggling with the demands of old age. And of course, on top of all that, she continues to support our large family in all ways possible.

Tim continues on with his usual activities. He is still working as a systems programmer for AXA Australia and this year has been probably the most demanding so far, with a very large number of projects involving out of hours support and weekends and nights spent in at work. The demands of an ever shrinking workforce and an ever increasing portfolio (the joys of working for a modern Stock Market driven company) make it a continuing challenge. This had been counterbalanced by his ongoing athletics involvement on the local Australian scene but more at an administrative level now – the knees and hips no longer tolerate training like they used to - and the forays into racing are becoming fewer. He has been advising Chris with his walking and has found this a very enjoyable activity. And of course he is still Secretary of the Victorian Race Walking Club and of the Australian Centurions so there are always newsletters to put out and correspondence to be completed and phone calls to be returned. This year has seen various forays into history with research and writing on family history and racewalking. This continues to be an interesting area to which Tim would like to give more time.

So as you can see, the family front has been pretty busy and positive....and thank goodness for that because it has been a depressing year on the world stage with George Dubya trying his best to make the whole world a little America, with Little Johnnie trying his best to make us all little Americans, with Australia showing itself to the world as an insular, small-minded society which houses refugee children behind barbed wire, with Australia moving further away from friendly ties to Asia, with right wing governments world wide moving further to the right and with the 'Coalition Against Terrorism' doing its best to further the causes of terrorism world wide. We can only pray the the balances will be redressed in the years to come and that Australia will once more move back to become the inclusive country it once was.

To end on a cheerier note, we (all except Dave and Matt) are off to Darwin in February to stay with Tim's brother Terry and his family and to do a bit of exploring in the top end. We are all looking forward to it. We shall fly up (too far to drive!) and then spend 8 days there, taking in such sites as Kakadu and the Katherine Gorge National Parks.

If you have access to the internet, you can catch up with the latest photos of us all by pointing your browser at <http://members.optusnet.com.au/terickso/2003.html>

We think of our many friends during our brief moments of sanity and hope that you are all well and that your year has been similarly filled with lots of good things. We send all our warmest wishes that your Christmas will be a time of peace and regeneration.

Kind regards

Tim and Lois