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Latest update 13<sup>th</sup> December 2015

Hello Everyone,

Wow, the year has flown as always and it's time for our Christmas letter once again. But this year, rather than it being a last minute effort, we are putting fingers to keyboard in late November rather than in the final leadup to Christmas.

As always, this gives us a chance to think of our many 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!

"Hotel Erickson" was not as busy as usual this year, due to a few health issues which you will read about later on. But we did still have our usual influxes of friends for short stays and longer stays.

- lots of walkers staying with us in the summer, with very enjoyable longer stays by Alana and Quentin from NZ and Heather from Wales
- our friend Rosemary from England, who came out for 5 weeks in March/April
- our Darwin family visiting us at various times: Eric and Tom and Sue and Terry
- our friend Peter from England who is out here now and spending Christmas with us.

The house was a little quieter overall with Matt moving out to a shared house in Brunswick but we still see Matt and Dave at least once a week and we get regular visits from Chris and Rachel and Olly and Annie) and lots of fly-in visits from Paul from Canberra. So we are empty-nesters in principle but not always in practice!

All I will say is that it is lucky we have a large house as it does still get more than its fair share of usage! Just last week we had 10 of us (family and extended family and friends) staying here concurrently for a few days!

We had a much quieter time this year with regard to trips. Tim started the year with his usual 2 week walking camp in Falls Creek in the Victorian high country – this is an annual camp he helps organise and run each year. Then in June we travelled to Canberra for the yearly big racewalking carnival. Then in August we headed off for 9 days to Beijing to wave the flag for Chris who was walking in the IAAF World Athletics Championships. Lois does sometimes say that her only trips are in conjunction with walking fixtures but Tim knows she is only joking!

Lois has now completed her eighth year working at Broadmeadows Community Legal Service and it remains as busy and as challenging as ever. She had managed to reduce her work commitment to 3 days per week, one at the head office and two doing outreach work at Broadford, about an hour's drive north of Melbourne, and one at Sunbury, on the northern outskirts of Melbourne. It has temporarily blown out to a 7 day fortnight to allow for a catch up with an excess of clients! She is also being kept on her toes at the moment by a planned amalgamation of the Broadmeadows and Moreland Legal Services. This adds a degree of uncertainty as to the future but she will cross those bridges when she comes to them.

But it was a very tumultuous year for Lois in other ways as she was faced with the reality of a major cancer scare. We made the decision early on not to announce it far and wide but simply to tell family and very close Melbourne friends, and just let the word spread from that. So if you didn't know, our apologies. The shortened version of affairs follows.

Lois was diagnosed with a the reproductive system cancer, requiring urgent surgery. Then it was a very stressful wait until surgery could be scheduled 1-2 weeks later.

The operation was quite complex and she was in hospital for a further 12 days as it took much longer than expected for her to recover. Her first week or so at home saw very slow progress and it was a case of waiting until she had recovered sufficiently for chemo to commence. She lost about 10kg in weight, very significant for her as she was not exactly big to start off with!

Chemo eventually started in late February and, over the next 6 months, she went through a full cycle, administered weekly via a drip into the arm. The good news is that, although she was understandably very tired throughout most of the process, she was spared the nausea that used to be associated with chemotherapy. Anti-nausea medications are now part of the weekly infusion and they certainly seem to be doing the trick. The chemo finished in early August, just in time for us to travel to China, and her first post-treatment blood test in October show that she is now clear. It is now now a case of fingers crossed and regular blood tests over the next few years as the doctors continue to monitor her.

At this stage, we must thank our friend Rosemary who came out from England in early March, spending 5 weeks with us and providing some much needed support and help for Lois.

With such a major health scare and with her long bout of chemotherapy, Lois decided to step back from her many church and parish kindergarten responsibilities and is only now starting to get back into the swing of things on the local front. She returned to work in May and was also able to return to the Essendon 'Curves' gym in early July and is now back into the swing of her 3 morning workouts each week. The "Curvettes" also have regular outings and social functions which Lois always enjoys. We are most thankful and wish at this time to thank our family and friends who have been such a wonderful support to us during such an uncertain time.

Tim is now 7 years down and counting as a retiree. His usual comment still remains true - how did I ever find time to work? But he has decided to call it quits on a few fronts to allow more time for the home front. Consequently, he has stepped down from officiating with Athletics Victoria and from his role as secretary of the Victorian Race Walking Club. He will still have plenty to keep him occupied but is looking forward to the extra time to garden, read, train, bushwalk and be with the family. For the first time in many years, he had a few longer term injuries to contend with this year so his racing and training were curtailed at various times – probably not such a bad thing overall. But he contends that he is now 100% fit again and ready to go! Some people never learn.

David is now into his third year working with the State Revenue Office (see <http://www.sro.vic.gov.au>), the Victorian government's main taxation agency. He is based in the Melbourne CBD and continues to enjoy his role and its various challenges – he even negotiated his way to a job promotion during the year. He has decided to curtail his karate for the time being, after more than his fair share of bruises and injuries and is now working on his golf! A much more sedate activity in our opinion. Being locally based, both he and Matt were wonderful sources of support during Lois's long recovery period.

Rachel and Chris have now been living in Ocean Grove for over a year and Chris is working as a recreational officer with Deakin University in Geelong.

Olly turned 4 in early August and will start kindergarten next year while Annie turned 2 in April. They have three days each week in child-care and various other activities to fill their week. And we are lucky enough to see them just about every week, either down in Ocean Grove 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 the both of them.

Chris continues to improve in his racewalking as he works towards Rio in 2016. With a win in the Australian 50km championship and second place in the Australian 20km championship, he was selected to represent Australia in both events at the 2015 IAAF World Championships in Beijing in late August. This is the first time he has ever been selected for the walk double and it reflects his position now as one of our best walkers over both distances. He was also honoured by being named as one of 4 team captains for Beijing (captain for the distance events). He also had quick trips to Nomi in Japan and Taicang in China early in the year as part of his preparation but they were indeed quick – flying overnight, racing, then flying back – as time is now a valuable commodity with a job to do and children to look after. Further, while the other team members headed off some time before the World Champs and either raced in Europe or spent time in overseas training camps, Chris stayed at home and used his own improvised heat chamber and treadmill to prepare for the heat and borrowed an altitude tent to simulate training at altitude. He joined the Australian team in their Japanese camp at the last minute and arrived in Beijing a few days before his first walk was scheduled. So it was a less than perfect preparation but a case of what must be done in the circumstances. As it was, it all worked out well with him finishing 13<sup>th</sup> in the 50km in 3:51:26 in very hot tough conditions – his highest ever finish in such an elite competition and only a couple of minutes outside his PB. This positions him well for next year's Olympics in Rio. And as a special stop-press item, Chris has just won the 2015 Australian 50km championship today (Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> December 2015), thus confirming his automatic selection for

Rio. So Chris is now officially in his third Olympics, a wonderful feat that few ever achieve. You can watch it live at <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL0TOjn6Q5SwYIK0R7edLc9fniHTjql6Hu>.

And yes, Lois and I are intending to go as well as part of a 5 week South American trip. We have already booked a few Olympic tickets and now that Chris is officially in the team, it is time for us to start planning our travel and accommodation. The Olympics are to be held in mid August.

Paul continues in his role as Assistant Secretary of the Australian Labor Party and continues to live in Canberra. It is fair to say that he travels a great deal - it seems that just about every week he is off to one or other Australian city on work related activities – but it is part of the job We see him regularly as he always stays with us when his travels bring him to Melbourne (which is very frequently). We think he must have more frequent flyer points than just about anyone we know! The main one who is affected by his travelling lifestyle is his assertive & beautiful cat, Milo, who must now be used to his frequent sojourns in his cat home away from home. Paul had to fit a house move into his busy lifestyle earlier in the year, as his previous rental property was not longer available. He lives in Forrest, a very pleasant suburb on the southern side of Lake Burley Griffin.

Matt continues to pursue his musical career, playing in a variety of bands (including an African reggae band), doing lots of studio work, teaching a selection of musical instruments and working in a music shop. He is also teaching music in 3 or 4 local primary schools and has just snared a major job for next year, teaching 2 days a week at a new school. It is fair to say that life as a full time musician is very busy! He is enjoying his share house in Brunswick and is normally over to dinner at least once a week.

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

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/2015.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 2016.

Tim and Lois

