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Australia
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Hello Everyone,

With Christmas only a week away, the pressure is building. Who is coming on the big day? Do we have all the presents sorted? Have we missed anything?

But really, these are the incidentals. The real joys of Christmas are much more significant. As always, Christmas 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!

We should be sitting back and celebrating life a little more at our esteemed ages and perhaps that is the case. But a quick review shows us as still keeping busy.

“Hotel Erickson” has been kept busy this year with its usual array of short and longer term stays.

- Our friend Rosemary made the long trip from England in February and spent 5 to 6 weeks with us. As always, this provided us with a chance to see some of those wonderful Australian spots that we sometimes take for granted.
- Ivo from USA stayed with us for a week when he was in Australia for our annual 24 Hour walking event.
- Paul and Jini DeMeester from USA, over for some walking in September.
- Lots of stays by Chris, 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 number of stints (including one right now) looking after his cat Milo – the cats have agreed on a pecking order, with Sooty at the top, Milo in the middle and poor Smokey at the bottom.
- Trips to Melbourne by nearly all of our Darwin based relatives – Tim’s brother Terry, his nephew Tom, niece Sue and husband Tom and baby Terry.
- A stay by Tim’s brother Mick when he was in Melbourne for heart surgery.
- The usual overnight stays by many of our other friends on their various trips to Melbourne.
- And finally, at the moment we have racewalkers Perseus (from Sweden) and Natalie (from England) staying with us.

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

So overall our large house continues to get its fair share of usage!

We also had our fair share of trips this year. Tim kicked off the year in early January with his usual 2 week walking camp in Falls Creek, in the Victorian high country. Then a week’s shared drive to and from Adelaide the following month to show Rosemary some more of Australia and to take in the annual Australian racewalk championships. This was followed by a roadtrip to Canberra in March when Tim was supporting one of the long distance runners 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. But these were all warm-ups for our 4 week trip to Great Britain in August (more of that later). Finally, Tim finished off the year with a 3 week stint in Bogota, Colombia, supporting some walkers on a high altitude training camp. Ok, our holidays do still seem have racewalking lurking somewhere in the background!

Lois retired in April from her work as a lawyer with Northern Community Legal Centre, after 10 years of service. Since then, she has been enjoying a well earned break from the rigours of what was a demanding job. She has now registered as a private practitioner and will do bits and pieces to keep herself current. Of course, her other regular commitments continue, with her roles as a church warden at St Linus’ Church and a church rep and treasurer on the

parish kindergarten committee, and with her regular morning workouts and post-workout coffees with her friends at the Infinity Fitness gym in Moonee Ponds.

Lois remains in remission re her cancer, with her regular blood tests confirming zero activity.

You might remember that in last year's Christmas newsletter, we noted that Lois had been struck with a severe loss of hearing after a heavy cold in April 2016. That was eventually diagnosed this year as due to permanent nerve damage. So she is now the proud owner of hearing aids. The TV can now finally be turned down to a respectable level!

Tim is now 9 years and counting as a retiree. His usual comment still remains true - how did I ever find time to work? Now that Chris has retired from his international racewalking career (see below), Tim is no longer driving to Geelong to ride the bike for him as he pounds out the long training miles. But it has been a case of swapping one bike ride for another as he has taken on young Melbourne walker Adam Garganis and is coaching him now, with 3-4 sessions per week on the bike. But that still leaves plenty of time for gardening, reading, training, computing and generally doing the one hundred and one things that continue to make up his week.

You've all heard the buzz word 'decluttering'. With a bit more time to ourselves this year, we tried our hand at it, getting rid of years of paperwork and ruthlessly attacking years of collecting. Many were the trips to the recycling plant! The house does look a bit 'decluttered' but do you ever really finish this process?!

It was also a big year for work on the house, with our bathroom renovations completed, along with lots of painting, both inside and outside.

David is now into his fifth year working with the State Revenue Office, the Victorian government's main taxation agency. He now works a few days in the city and few days in Ballarat each week, as he is part of a project aimed at providing new business-related computer software. He took some time off work in October and went on a big European trip with some of his friends, taking in the Oktoberfest in Germany, then travelling across more of Europe, visiting the Netherlands, Ireland, Scotland and England, and finally flying home culturally enriched but significantly poorer from a monetary perspective. He and youngest brother Matt continue living in their share house in Brunswick. It is a vibrant inner city environment which we are sure the 'boys' enjoy.

Rachel and Chris and the kids had an exciting mid year, with their new house in Point Lonsdale completed in June. This saw a flurry of activity with the big move completed over a few weeks. They and their two dogs are now settled in a wonderful new estate called 'The Point', with parkland and a lake 100m away at the end of their street. Olly and Annie have their own bedrooms, a cause of great excitement. Of course, it was a big year apart from that, with Olly starting school at Queenscliff Primary School and Annie starting kinder. In 2018, Annie will join Olly at Queenscliff Primary School - wow, it's hard to believe that they will both be school kids next year.

We are lucky enough to see our two grandchildren most weeks, either down there or up here at our place for sleepovers that are ongoing highlights for us. Our large rambling house and our many knick knacks make for interesting exploration for both Olly and Annie.

Chris continues in his job as a recreational officer with Deakin University in Geelong. For Chris, his 2016 Olympic walk was to be his last one, as earlier this year he announced his retirement from international athletics. With 3 Olympics under his belt, he can look back on a wonderful career with many highlights, including a Commonwealth Games bronze medal and Olympic top ten finish. He has now commenced studying to become a nurse and finished his first semester just a month or so ago. He will study full time while continuing to work part time at Deakin. The next few years will be busy ones indeed.

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 various State elections and various lower house by-elections on the table this year, he was kept busy with many interstate stays. Not much time to smell the roses for him next year either, with further significant political events on the horizon. He will be staying with us over the Christmas period and then looking for a good break over January before the political heat returns.

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! He has played quite a few gigs with his original band 'The Gnomes' this year, so we have been able to join the predominantly young pub crowds to enjoy the music.

Tim's eldest brother Mick was down in Melbourne in July for tests, followed a week later by a triple bypass heart operation. We are pleased to report that all went well and that Mick is now back to full strength and working around his farm once more.

And to finish, some info on our latest European holiday. Although Chris had announced his racewalking retirement by that stage, we decided to travel to London in August anyway to watch the World Championship racewalks and to catch up with many of our old friends and travel once more around the UK. The first week was spent on the move – to Thame to see Rosemary, then to Birmingham to see Fred, then via Chester, to Caernafon, to Backwell to see Bill and Chris and finally back to London where we stayed for a week with Peter and Fiona in Woking. While in London, we caught up with old family friend Richard Ireland whom we had not seen since 1980. After the week in London, when we caught up with many more friends, we headed off for the Isle of Wight to see Jill and Jim, then to Cambridge to see Sue, Norwich to see Kathy and Laurie, to York and finally back to London. Tim then flew home while Lois stayed for a further week, catching up with Beryl in Maidstone and spending further time with Rosemary in Thame.

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/2017.shtml>.

To all our friends, local and remote, we wish you a Christmas filled with peace and joy and hope that 2018 will be a year where the world moves closer together in unity, tolerance and mutual love and acceptance.

Happy Christmas and best wishes for 2018.

Tim and Lois

