



1 Avoca Cres, Pascoe Vale
Victoria, 3044
December 2020

Hello Everyone,

Christmas has crept up on me unawares this month, a victim to the many and varied forces that have been at work during this year to end all years.

My trips to the shopping centres or the inner Melbourne city area have been few and far between and the normally relentless commercial push has been absent these last few weeks, at least for me. It was only a couple of nights ago that I finally focused my thoughts. With whom and where will I celebrate this Christmas day? Have I bought the Chrissy presents yet?

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

What started off as a normal year for 1 Avoca Crescent was turned upside down and has remained unremittingly turbulent and fraught.

Summer started with Swedish racewalking guest Perseus Karlstrom using our place as his base for Melbourne training. He was eventually joined by his brother Remo and by Mexican walker Carlos Mercenario. We also hosted Don and Karen Dunfee from Canada for a few days in February. So we got off to the usual 'Hotel Erickson' start to the year.

Although Lois was by then struggling with her health, she did manage to get away in January for a holiday to Walla Walla in southern NSW with her great friend Jenny Kimpton. Little did we know that would be Lois's last major trip away. She did not come to Adelaide with me in February for the Australian Racewalk Championships so it was a quiet drive over and back for me and a relatively subdued trip.

As March came around, the media was full of news of the spreading covid-19 pandemic and, by the end of that month, we were in lockdown, with any semblance of normality now a thing of the past. Just before the lockdown took effect, we spent a day in Ballarat at their annual Begonia Festival. It was our last trip anywhere together.

Over April and May, Lois's health deteriorated. Her cancer had reappeared in August 2019 and she had been identified as a candidate for immunotherapy. By mid October 2019, the boxes had been ticked and she had started the trial. Alas, the various side effects of the treatment took such a toll on her body that she ended up critically ill in hospital in April and was eventually taken off the treatment. With all treatment avenues now exhausted, she went into the palliative care phase, not sure how long she had but knowing that it was months only.

The next few months were very hard for her, with ever more frequent appointments with specialists and further hospital stays in May and June, including a couple of emergency trips via ambulance. By July, she was on an increasing pain medication regime and permanently exhausted and debilitated.

We arranged phone calls with all her old friends and arranged visits for those of them who were Melbourne based. With the covid lockdown, no one from further afield could visit, a situation that Lois found very tough. It is so hard to say goodbye to someone over the phone. But that she did.

As best she could, she wound up her affairs, trying to pass on her kindergarten and church jobs and whatever else she thought needed actioning. It says so much about her that she could continue with all these tasks while fading away herself.

She was so worried that she might have to go into care and spend her final weeks by herself, with her family and friends unable to visit her. But it was not to be, and she passed away at home at 7:50AM on Thursday 13th August, with Paul and I in attendance. I feel blessed that we could be together at the end.

We held a small family service on Wednesday 19th August at St Linus Anglican Church in Merlynston, where we were married all those years ago and where Lois had worshipped all her life. Alas, with funerals restricted to only 10 people, that meant just the immediate family, but we were able to have the service live streamed so that our many friends could celebrate her life remotely.

Lois will be cremated and, when our pandemic has finally passed, her ashes will be buried in the St Linus memorial garden, alongside her mother and father. This is as per her wish.

The family all rallied around and supported each other during this time. And we console ourselves that Lois had a long and eventful life, and died at home surrounded by the love of her family.

It wasn't just Lois's death that left its mark on our year. So many other family members and friends and athletics associates have also passed away this year - John Millard, Hazel McLean, Jo-Anne Wells, Deryck Skinner, George Audley, Russ Dickenson, Rick Keam, Peter Ryan and John Morrison to name the ones who spring to mind.

But as they say, life goes on for those of us who are left, even if it is not necessarily a smooth ride. I am so thankful for everyone's love and support and their ongoing concern for me. We shall all be thinking of Lois when we meet at Christmas for our usual family celebration.

My Christmas letter would not be complete if I did not fill everyone in on our activities.

I continue my extremely active retirement (12 years now), mixing training and sports admin with family and friends and much else. All good on that front.

David is now into his eighth year working with the State Revenue Office, the Victorian government's main taxation agency. He continues in his IT testing role and he is kept busy with various projects. After share housing in Brunswick for some years, he is now sharing house with Chris in Essendon, only a stone's throw from the family home in Pascoe Vale. It has been wonderful having the two boys so close, especially when Chris is looking after Ollie and Annie every second week. David has worked from home since March and expects that to continue into 2021. The State Government is in no hurry to move its workers back into the city, given the current lack of a covid vaccine. He is enjoying working from home!

Chris is just coming to the end of his first year as a fireman with Fire Services Victoria (the new amalgam of the MFB and CFA). During that time, he has been based at the Tullamarine Fire Station in NW Melbourne. As per the fireman's life, he works 2 day shifts, followed by 2 night shifts, then has 4 days off. He has had his share of fires, including a couple of big ones, and is enjoying his new life. He has Ollie and Annie every second week, so I come to the fore when he his workdays clash with his family days, and on those occasions I take the kids too and from school, give them dinner and often have them sleeping over here with me. These are wonderful times and I feel so lucky to have such an active role in their formative years – Ollie is 9 and Annie is 8.

Paul continues with his role as the National Secretary of the Australian Labor Party and remains living in Canberra. It is a demanding role, especially with the sort of year we are just finishing, but he handles well the cut and thrust of political life and seems able to balance the many conflicting pushes and pulls. When his work sees him in Melbourne, he stays here at Avoca Crescent, something to which I look forward.

Matt's many musical endeavours have been hard hit by covid, with schools closing down for nearly 6 months and with the live music industry completely shut down. It all stopped for him in March – his school tutoring, his band playing, his studio work, any touring, etc, etc. He decided after Lois's death that he would move away from his share house lifestyle and come back home, principally to look after me but also perhaps after getting a little sick of the sharehouse lifestyle after quite a few years. It is wonderful to have him sharing the house with me. And during the last couple of months, the schools have reopened, his teaching has resumed and he is busy preparing for the music industry to come alive as well. Of all the boys, he is the one who has been hit hardest by the covid lockdown.

Normally at this stage, I would be pointing everyone to a jam packed webpage which celebrated a year in the life of the Erickson family. Well, the 2020 webpage does exist (see <http://www.erickson.id.au/erickson/2020.shtml>) but it is more subdued than normal and certainly has significantly fewer photos. But we are still here and kicking against whatever life throws at us.

To all our friends, local and remote, we wish you a Christmas filled with peace and joy and hope that 2021 will be a year where the world moves closer together in unity, tolerance and mutual love and acceptance.

Tim