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Victoria, 3044
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Hello everyone

As Christmas 2022 quickly approaches, it is time to put fingers to keyboard and reflect on a year which has been as eventful as ever.

At last, we poked our heads above ground and tentatively re-entered the post-covid world (well, post-covid restrictions anyway). It was so wonderful to take a few trips (we've all been overseas this year – more of that below), participate in a few social occasions and finally mingle outside the immediate family. I've had the 4 covid jabs on offer and have managed to avoid catching covid so far, but they say a new wave is getting underway so vigilance is still needed.

It is a little over 2 years since Lois's passing but she remains front and centre in our thoughts.

I continue my active retirement (14 years now), finding the time to do lots of bike riding, reading, the occasional bushwalk, lots of gardening on the home, church and other fronts, and a small amount of racewalking. My big commitment for the year continues to be organising the Coburg 24 Hour Carnival which is held each April. Yes, there are still lots of people willing to challenge themselves with a 24 Hour walk or run around an athletics track. As they say, it takes all types!

I am enjoying my bike riding at the moment and lashed out in March and bought a very nice second hand top flight racing bike. I also participated in a number of quite long rides over the course of the year – the Alpine Classic (140km), Little Vic 3 Day Ride (around 260km), the Otway Classic (145km) and the Amy Gillett Classic (140km). There are longer 1 Day rides around but I think that around 140km is my comfort limit – any further might be a bit problematic for me!

I also headed off to Europe in late July for 3 weeks of cycling. My mate Harold, who lives in Luxembourg, had been saying for some time that I should come over and ride with him, so I decided "Why not do it this year?" He had a bike ready for me and all I had to do was bring my bike shoes, helmet and riding gear. We spent the first week riding around Luxembourg, the second week in France and the third week back in Luxembourg. One of my main aims was to do a few of the Tour De France climbs, so the highlight was a successful ride up Alpe d'Huez, one of the legendary climbs in the French Alps. Harold had me out nearly every day, doing rides between 50km and 120km – a bigger workload than I normally do, but I survived. Oh, by the way, my luggage took an additional 2 weeks to arrive and then got lost for a further week on the return journey back to Australia. So I spent most of my time there borrowing what I needed from Harold!

I am also keeping myself busy on the Parish Council of St Linus Anglican Church and on the Parents Advisory Committee of the St Linus Kindergarten, two activities which Lois undertook for many years and which I am continuing in her absence. There is always something to be done, whether it be odd jobs or gardening or such like, but it is enjoyable and satisfying work.

The St Linus kindergarten has certainly kept me on my toes in more ways than one this year. We were successful in applying for a \$500,000 major refurbishment grant which sounds great until you consider what that entails – locking in a commercial builder who can work to a pretty tight timeline, liaising with all the parties involved one way or another with the kinder, and finally finding an alternative location for the kinder to operate while the refurbishment occurs.

Along with a few others, I spent most of the third term school holidays completing the shift of the kinder from their back hall to the church front hall, and completing all the remediation activities required to get the final tick of approval from the Education Department. And then we have to do it all in reverse once the build is completed.

David is now into his tenth year working with the State Revenue Office, the Victorian government's main taxation agency. He continues in his IT role and is kept busy coordinating new project designs and keeping the developers

and testers on the straight and narrow. After 2 years of working from home, he now does a couple of days in the office and handles the remaining work days remotely. Like the rest of us, Dave fitted in an overseas trip this year, travelling to England and Ireland to see friends in July/August. He was away for 3 weeks and all went well.

Chris is just coming to the end of his third year as a fireman with Fire Rescue Victoria and remains stationed at the Niddrie Fire Station. As per the fireman's life, he works 2 day shifts, followed by 2 night shifts, then has 4 days off. Suffice to say he gets his share of fires and call outs. He looks after Ollie and Annie every second week, so I come to the fore when his workdays clash with his family days, and on those occasions I take the kids to and from school, give them dinner and often have them sleeping over here at Avoca Crescent. These are wonderful times and I feel so lucky to have such an active role in their formative years – Ollie is now 11 and Annie is now 9.

Last year I took Ollie and Annie to see the Harry Potter stage show. This year, I took them to see Lano and Woodley (a very funny Australian comedy duo) at the Melbourne Comedy Festival and we headed off again in late November to see the Melbourne production of Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol.

Ollie played his first season of field hockey this winter, being part of the Essendon Hockey Club U12 team. He played goalie on a number of occasions (much to the pleasure of his uncle Matt who also played in that position in his younger days) and we were very excited when his team won their Grand Final. Ollie and Annie are now doing the Little Athletics summer competition each Saturday morning and Annie is pondering what additional sport she might take up next year.

Chris and Amie moved into their new house in Pascoe Vale South, only 2-3 km from here, in January and have enjoyed settling into their new home with the kids. I pop over regularly to do their lawns and garden, have a cuppa and/or drag Chris out for a few bike rides (although Chris is the one in front and it is always me dragging along behind!).

Chris and Amie also travelled to Europe this year, leaving just after me and going to England first before a few days in France. Although we had not planned it, we found ourselves only 25km apart one day in France so we met up for morning tea in the city of Nance. It was a wonderful random occurrence – travel to the other side of the world and then unexpectedly run into each other!

Paul continues in his role as the National Secretary of the Australian Labor Party and is still living in Canberra. It was a huge year for him, with the 2022 Federal Election held in May. He was the Campaign Manager, leading a large team which was based in Sydney in the months leading up to the big day. It was a result for the True Believers, with Labor gaining a majority in the Lower House and able to govern in their own right. After 10 years of chaotic government that had shifted further and further to the right as time passed, it was a wonderful result for those of us who had hoped for something better. Paul was correctly identified as one of the big players in the win, as the Labor Campaign masterfully unfolded. Rather than talk further about it, I refer you to Paul's address to the National Press Club in Canberra, post-election. See it at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ipmWNC_3Dw0. Dave, Chris, Paul and I all travelled to Canberra and were in the audience to hear his analysis of the win. Paul was finally able to take some time off in September and headed for Europe, spending 3-4 weeks travelling around Italy and surrounding areas. He was soon back into work mode and has just now returned from a trip to far north Finland (Lapland) where he attended an international conference.

As the music scene finally returned this year, Matt found himself busy with music festivals and gigs far and wide, in Perth, Sydney, Brisbane, Canberra, Adelaide, Hobart, Darwin, Alice Springs and more. It was great to see him back in business. He continues to play with a variety of artists including Ajak Kwai and Ben Power and he normally plays one or other type of guitar. He continues with his music teaching at a couple of local schools and is just about full time when he adds up his total hours. Adding it all together, it makes for a very busy lifestyle.

Obviously not wanting to be left out, Matt also travelled to Europe just before the rest of us, attending a wedding in Sweden and spending 3 weeks in total in that country. On a personal note, it is wonderful to have Matt still sharing the house with me.

Alas, not all news has been good this year. My brother Terry was diagnosed with lung cancer 3+ years ago and it started to really kick in this year. I spent a week in Darwin with him and his family in February and was then back there in October for two further one week stints. On my final trip north, my oldest brother Mick accompanied me and we had the sad task of bidding our final goodbyes to Terry, as he was moved to palliative care and eventually quietly passed in his sleep on Friday 28th September. His family brought his ashes down to Melbourne earlier this month and on Monday 13th December his remains were interred at the Eltham Cemetery, where so many of our relatives (including our mum and dad) are buried. That occasion gave his Victorian family and friends a chance to say goodbye.

The plot location in the cemetery was wonderful – right under a gumtree, in a little alcove of rocks. It even stopped raining just at the right time for the interment and subsequent wake at the Eltham pub.

Matt and I have a house guest here at Avoca Crescent for the summer, with Hungarian racewalker Anette out for training. She had expected to leave the winter snows of Budapest behind her but it is anything but a sparkling summer here at the moment. It has been a cold and super wet spring and early summer on the Australian East Coast and it is definitely not the usual hot leadup to Christmas.

I have searched the computer and put together my usual Christmas webpage with a selection of family related photos (see <http://www.erickson.id.au/erickson/2022.shtml>). As you can see, 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 2023 will be a year where the world moves closer together in unity, tolerance and mutual love and acceptance.

Tim