



I Avoca Cres
Pascoe Vale, Victoria, 3044
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Hello everyone

It's hard to believe that it is a year since I penned my Christmas 2023 letter. But that is indeed the case so it's time to put fingers to keyboard and reflect on the year past.

And what a year it's been, with the world at large in ongoing turmoil and with a new Trump America to keep us all on our toes. Thank goodness for our relative isolation here in Australia. For all our challenges and issues, we can still sit back and count ourselves lucky that our geographic location protects us from so much of the angst and anger that pervades society today.

It is a little over 4 years since Lois's passing but she remains front and centre in our thoughts and we remember her in all our various functions.

I continue my active retirement (16 years now), finding the time to do lots of bike riding, along with reading, racewalk officiating, the occasional social outing and lots of gardening on the home, church and other fronts. But overall, I have not been as busy as years past. Perhaps I am finally starting to wind back a little and smell the roses.

I travelled to Europe again this year for what has now become my annual bikeriding sojourn. I headed off in late July for just under 4 weeks of cycling with former walking mate Harold van Beek, who lives in Luxembourg. As usual, Harold 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 middle period in central France and the final week back in Luxembourg.

As usual, I left the planning to Harold and he decided that we would base ourselves in Grenoble while in France. This was a great choice as we were surrounded on all sides by mountains and we were able to challenge ourselves with a few of the big Tour de France climbs. While I won't bore you all with a day to day description, I will mention two climbs

- Alpe d'Huez is arguably professional cycling's most famous climb, with riders negotiating its 21 hairpin bends as they climb 1120m in 13.8km, at an average gradient of 8.1%. It's by no means the longest and definitely not the toughest climb but it is relentlessly steep and is the one climb that is on every bike rider's bucket list. I did it with Harold in 2022 and we were happy to revisit it again this year. And just to make the day worthwhile, we then skirted around to the Col de Sarenne (which is a bit higher) before completing along day in the saddle.
- In 2022, I had failed on Col de la Croix de Fer (had to call it quits about half way up) so this time I was keen to complete it. It's longer than Alpe d'Huez and higher (23km in length and 1350m of climbing and averages out at between 6% and 7%) but has some very steep sections and was super tough. The good news is that we made it to the top, and then took in the Col de Glandon to round out the day's ride.

Overall, we rode on 20 of the 25 days and clocked up just on 1500km. Will I go again in 2025? I never say no but I don't say yes either when asked this question. Each year sees me a year older and eventually Father Time will catch up. All I'll say at this stage is – maybe! I've included a few photos on our 2024 Christmas website (see link below).

This was definitely the highlight of my year, just as was the case with my cycling sojourns to France in 2022 and Italy in 2023. I can't thank Harold and Fernande enough for their hospitality and friendship. I'm the weak link when riding with Harold but he puts up with my slower pace with uniformly good humour.

And of course, my local rides around Melbourne would be much less enjoyable without the company of Brian and Richard. And I even get to test myself out against Andrew when I get to Canberra or he gets to Melbourne. So I am blessed with an abundance of good friends and good riding partners.

I have had a couple of cycling hiccups over the last 12 months. Last December I had a hip replacement so was out of

action for 3 months. Obviously the op was successful and I bounced back with enough time to get fit for my European tour in August. Alas, no sooner was I back from Europe than I had a big spill while cycling locally and managed to fracture 10 of the ribs on the left hand side (you only have 12 per side). This necessitated another couple of months off the bike but I am now back in the saddle and making up for lost time. You know the old saying – you can't keep a good man down!

In previous Christmas newsletters, I have usually reported on all the activity at 'Hotel Erickson' and the many interstate and overseas travellers staying here at Avoca Crescent on either short or long stays. This year has been very quiet by comparison, with Fiona in January and Marius in February but no one else since.

I managed to fit in a lot of interstate travel this year – Adelaide in February, Canberra in March, Brisbane in May, Canberra again in June, Sydney in September and Sydney and Adelaide again in October. The visits were for a mixture of walking admin, cycling and one funeral.

I continue to keep myself busy at the 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 continue 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.

I also coordinated a big repair job on the house this year, getting windows, weatherboards and assorted other bits and pieces replaced. The building has withstood the ravages of time pretty well (it was originally built in the early 1930s but nothing lasts forever). Hopefully it will now outlast me!

Finally I have spent a most enjoyable last few months helping my cousin Peter Cuffley complete his family history book 'The Sweeneys of Culla Hill, Eltham'. A bit of family history - my grandfather was a Carrucan (from Irish stock) and I was part of the editorial group that published the Carrucan family history book in 2011. My grandmother was a Sweeney, coming from another of the Irish families that formed part of the great diaspora (although her grandfather Thomas Sweeney was actually sent here as a convict rather than a free settler). Peter has been researching Thomas and his life in Australia for many years now and has finally put it all together for posterity. I have been getting it ready for publication, formatting, adding photos, etc, and we hope to have it out for Christmas. For Peter, who has been publishing books for some 50 years now, I think this will be the most satisfying of the lot.

And now onto news of the family.

David is now into his twelfth year working with the State Revenue Office, the Victorian government's main taxation agency. He continues in his IT role, coordinating new project designs and keeping the developers and testers on the straight and narrow. In the post-covid world, he works from his home office for 2-3 days per week and only travels into his city based office when he has to. But I suspect that idyllic lifestyle may soon come to a close as big companies are now actively working to get their staff back onsite fulltime. Dave and Matt travelled over to Ireland for a wedding on June and Dave then went on to visit friends in London. In fact, all 4 of the boys travelled overseas this year, making us a jetsetting family indeed.

Chris is coming to the end of his fifth year as a fireman with Fire Rescue Victoria and is currently based at the Keilor East 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 is now qualified on the high ladders so gets a birds eye when the big factory fires come around.

Alas, no sooner had I finished this letter than Chris also had a big cycling accident, with a broken collarbone (that required a plate to be surgically inserted) and 4 broken ribs. He will be off work for a fair while but at least the driver was identified so all Chris's costs look like being covered by the Transport Accident Commission. Yes, cycling is a dangerous occupation so be careful out there!

Amie has taken on a new role with her work, involving lots of overseas travel. To say we are all insanely jealous is almost certainly an understatement.

Chris and Amie look after Ollie and Annie every second week, so I come to the fore when Chris's workdays clash with his family days, and on those occasions I take the kids to and from school, give them dinner and occasionally 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, who is now 13, is just finishing his first year (Year 7) at Northcote Secondary College while Annie, who is now 11, is about to graduate from Primary School and will join Ollie at NSC next year. Exciting times!

Ollie has thrown himself into life at NSC, is in the Junior Guitar Ensemble and acted in the school musical this year (a very impressive production of the Broadway show 'Newsies'). As if that's not enough, he is also involved in an

acting school and was part of their end of year performance just a week or so ago. He also continued with his field hockey this winter, now part of the Essendon Hockey Club U14 team, and continues with his cricket this summer, playing for West Coburg Cricket Club in the U14 competition. Talk about making the most of his time! Annie is also enjoying herself with her netball, with matches most Saturday mornings. She also does tennis and has just taken up the drums, so also has a wide repertoire of activities.

Chris, Amie, Ollie and Annie also had a major overseas trip this year, to see Amie's family in England and to spend some time in Dubai. It was the first major trip for the grandkids and was a wonderful introduction to the wider world.

Paul continues in his role as the National Secretary of the Australian Labor Party and is still living in Canberra. As the Australian Federal Election is going to be held early next year (date still to be announced), the next few months will be very busy as he coordinates the Labor election campaign, with a view to ensuring that the party is eventually re-elected as the Australian Government. There have been quite a few articles in the major newspapers, all highlighting Paul's role and influence on the Australian political scene. He also travelled overseas this year, to England for the British Election. As British Labour won in a landslide, it was a very satisfying trip from his perspective.

And now to the really big family news – Paul and partner Dimity are expecting their first child in late April. We are all so excited for them and we look forward to adding a third grandchild to the Erickson household. And just to cap off that particular theme, my nephew Eric and his partner Nikki in Darwin are also expecting their first, due in early April. It's raining babies. I am sure there must be a pop song in there somewhere.

Matt played in a number of music festivals and gigs over the year but it's a tough time for musicians here in Australia, with many of the festivals closing down and with the number of live venues shrinking. He continues to play with a variety of artists, the mainstay being Ajak Kwai, and he normally plays one or other type of guitar. He continues with his music teaching, with private students and at a couple of local schools, and is pretty much full time when he adds up his total hours. Adding it all together, it makes for a busy lifestyle.

Matt and his partner Jess travelled over to that Irish wedding (mentioned earlier) with Dave and then they travelled to the Balkans to visit Jess's family. Matt finished his trip with some time in Sweden catching up with more friends. It was a big trip for them and it all went well.

On a personal note, it is wonderful to have Matt still sharing the house with me.

With three of the boys living locally, we often meet up for shared dinners – Dave, Chris, Amie, Ollie, Annie, Matt and Jess. We think of Paul on such occasions as he works away in Canberra. On the occasions when we do have Paul down, they are opportunities for even greater celebration.

Our wider family is also going well.

My eldest brother Mick sold his dairy farm last year and is now living in his own little house on the farm of his son Andrew outside Cobram. That way, he can work as much or as little as he wants on the farm without the hassle of being chief cook and bottle washer. We have caught up quite a few times this year. His daughter Sally lives just down the road from me in Moonee Ponds but she is a busy beaver and catching up remains a challenging scenario (although we do occasionally manage to sync our busy calendars).

The family of my late brother Terry in Darwin is also doing well. Diana was down in Melbourne just a couple of weeks ago and stayed here with me. We also keep in close contact with our cousins Eric, Tom and Sue and their families.

Sadly, we said goodbye this year to Lois's brother Neil who fought valiantly against but eventually lost his battle with cancer. He was surrounded by his loving family throughout his struggle and he accepted his passing with dignity and good cheer. I also said goodbye to my first cousin Lars who had been born in Sweden but who moved to Australia as a young man and lived in Sydney. His father and my fathers were brothers in Sweden.

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/2024.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 2025 will be a year where the world moves closer together in unity, tolerance and mutual love and acceptance.....

Tim