

14 Anderton Street,
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29th. November 2017

Dear Friends,

Poss and I hope 2017 has been kind to you, and 2018 lives up to your hopes and dreams.

An early start to 'the letter' this year, the next few weeks could be very busy. I alluded last year to Poss having some joint issues, she is going 'under the knife' next week to have her right shoulder joint replaced. Her arm will be in a sling for several weeks with very limited use, followed by months of physio. There is unlikely to be time for the leisurely contemplation of the year's doings.

I've said that one is old if the first topic of conversation is medical. Our time has come, the calendar is punctuated with all things dental and medical. Fortunately, none are serious, just the march (or, at our age, the meander) of time. Poss is now officially a pensioner, she turned 65 in April.

The year has been unremarkable, for which one is quite thankful. We have been in our 'new' house for 10 years and it is still not fully renovated. The neighbours have remarked how good the front looks now there's a side path, a front deck, and a garden in the making. A big improvement over the weeds and mounds of old bricks. One neighbour, an architect, said how good it looked, 'but what are you doing with the front fence?'. He is quite right, the daggy fence needs some work to look as good as the rest. I think it is an axiom that renovations are never quite complete. Possibly a good thing, what would one do if they were?

Our social life is much the same as last year; Tuesday trivia, Wednesday eats, Kooragang planting days, family gatherings. Sandra now joins us for dinner at home most Thursdays. She was living less than a block away sharing half a house with a friend. There was only one bedroom which they had divided with wardrobes. It was a workable but not comfortable arrangement but all they could afford at the time. Last year Sandra started part time with Peter Evans & Associates, for whom she had worked previously. The extra money allowed them to move in March to a three bedroom unit in Elmore Vale, about 10km away. Although it was far more congenial as a living space, it was not so convenient for commuting. So when the lease ran out in October they went their separate ways and Sandra moved to Cardiff. She now commutes by train and since we live a couple of minutes walk from Hamilton station it is convenient for her to drop in on her way home. I think she visits more often than when she lived around the corner. But sadly she and I no longer have our morning walk.

Scott and Joanne are flat out being parents of three girls involved in Scouts, Tae Kwon Do, swimming, music lessons, dance, gymnastics and more. Joanne just completed the second year of a Master of Information Studies correspondence course at Charles Sturt University, with excellent results. Anna and Emily are doing well at school and have bits of paper to prove it. Lucy finishes preschool this year and will join them in 2018. It will be the end of an era for Poss, who has over the years been baby sitter, then preschool pickup, on the days both Scott and Jo are working. This leaves us open to planning extended trips away, until now we've only had a week here and there. Jo, Scott and girls took advantage of our time share in Coolangatta in July. They thoroughly enjoyed it so may do it again in coming years. We kept it in the hope it would eventually be used by the extended family, and pleased they used it.

Beth and Steve seem settled in the house in Wallsend. Beth has inherited the gardening bug from Poss, tending her plants in her spare time. She did change jobs as I thought she would, but a few months later than I expected. She has a friend who is a waitress at 'One Picket Fence', a breakfast and lunch eatery. The friend let Beth know there was a job, Beth took it. She likes the hours, finishing in the afternoons so having the evenings off. For the first four months of a new job Beth thinks things are great (unless they are really terrible), then reality takes over. We are past the four month mark and she is still happy so she may be there for a while. Steve is still at Coco Monde, no sign of a change there.

We were invited to visit Andrew and Nicole in Melbourne last February, to celebrate daughter Ivy's 1st birthday. We were all set to go when we were told the party was cancelled, they were moving. So instead of going to a party we spent several days helping them move from East Ivanhoe to Yallambie – a suburb we had not heard of before. They are renting a three bedroom house with quite a large yard in a cul-de-sac. It is a significant improvement on all their previous digs, which were too small and often shared with others. There isn't a lot going on in Yallambie, maybe that's why we didn't know about it. But it's not far from Eltham which is still an interesting area with echoes of its hippy past still evident. Andrew now has a full time job with the Yarra council, which services inner east Melbourne. He is still teaching circus skills but has cut back, partly due to the long commute time for his day job. Nicole is a home mum, I think Ivy keeps her busy enough.

Poss had a week off grandchild duties in July, so we took the opportunity to visit Andrew and Nicole for a second time for a catch up. On our trips to Melbourne we usually take a break staying with old friends Brian and Rob Sheehan, who have a farm near Euroa. The stopovers usually involve a bit of light work like collecting firewood or fixing fences. It is very enjoyable and fortuitously a convenient distance from Melbourne to break the 1000km journey which would otherwise be a couple of hours drive too long. For the first time in quite a while we had to scrape the frost off the windscreen before driving away, a reminder of Armidale days. The stay in Melbourne was relaxed, we had no commitments other than to enjoy time with the family.

Our only other destination this year has been the family around Woolgoolga. We stayed several times with Poss' sister Barb and husband Gordon at Emerald Beach. We were able to surprise Poss' mum Dawn in June, walking in on her birthday celebration lunch. Dawn is now 89, and still living independently in the Woolgoolga retirement village. Her unit has been a home away from home for me, when I work up on 'the block' - the 80 hectares of bush inland from Woolgoolga that we bought many years ago. I watch the weather forecast and if they predict 4 or more days of reasonable weather I drive to Dawn's place, then commute each day to the block. I think Dawn likes having someone around and I sometimes get to be useful.

Progress on the block has been slow. The caravan was falling apart due to the wooden corner struts failing. It has to be around 50 years old, all fittings are imperial sizes. One corner had collapsed several centimeters, causing the door to jam badly. This must have been a problem for a while as the door was moved from its original mounts. This was repaired by removing several sheets of the aluminium cladding, jacking the frame straight, putting in new corner struts made from marine ply, and replacing the cladding. Much silicon sealant was used to seal everything, and it seems successful as there are no leaks so far. The door went back to its original position, closing and locking without problems. I am advised that to be liveable, the caravan needs to be roofed over to stop it getting too hot in summer. This is on the 'to do' list. A roof is also needed to collect water as there is no nearby stream, and will serve as a place to mount some solar panels for power. The caravan will be good for sleeping but a separate kitchen and bathroom is needed for long stays. Add that to the 'to do' list.

Last year I was 'evicted' from the neighbour's property and had to move my storage shed. We acquired a large area of outdoor pavers and these were used over a plastic sheet as the floor on which to erect the shed. This is necessary as the ground is very alive with ants, termites and a myriad other crawlies that would quickly establish homes otherwise. Once the shed was up, a frame was built for the half a ton of batteries. Currently (a pun) these are charged with small solar panels and drive a small 240 volt inverter. I was using a noisy generator to run tools, no longer required now the inverter is powered up. Although adequate for intermittent use, the arrangement won't provide enough power for full time residency. I am in the throes of creating a serious system with adequate panels and a more powerful inverter. The aim is to run a domestic refrigerator continuously with plenty of spare capacity for other uses, an essential for extended stays.

Joanne and Scott gave me their garden shed as it was very dilapidated and they didn't think they needed it. The catch was I had to pull it down. It was reduced to individual pieces by removing all the fastenings, transported to the block, each piece straightened as far as possible, then reassembled. It is a welcome addition to storage as the other shed is used as a workshop as well as a store. There won't be much work on the block for a few months while Poss is recovering from her shoulder operation, she will need daily help while use of her right arm is restricted.

We've been made more aware of motor sports this year. Newcastle hosted a round of the Supercars competition, on a new street circuit through some of the oldest parts of the city. The setting is spectacular with numerous ocean and harbour views. Over the three days of the event, the weather was as good as it gets. I'm sure anyone who saw the event on television was impressed. The event was deemed a success by most, but caused an enormous amount of disruption. We had a look around the day before it started, the bus took ages to work its way through the chaotic traffic. Newcastle is also in the throes of implementing 'light rail' with sections of major roads blocked off. Hopefully next year is better, the city is hosting the race for another 4 years. On event days we could clearly hear the cars even though they are 4km away. We watched on television, as close to the crowds as we needed to be.

Another event, the World Rally Championship, had a stage down the unsealed section of Sherwood Creek road, which is the road I use to get to the block. We didn't go but I've watched onboard video from one car as they hurtle past the access track at astounding speeds. I negotiate the road at 40 to 60 kph, they averaged over 125kph.

Family Christmas this year is at Scott and Jo's. We are planning a quick trip north before then to say hello to Poss' extended family. We haven't planned beyond then, we shall see how well and quickly Poss' shoulder recovers from surgery.

Here's to another year of prosperity, happiness and good health. Please keep in contact. There's no excuse these days when there's phone, email, SMS, Skype, Facebook and snail mail. Or best of all, visit. With love to you all.

Alan and Poss xx