

14 Anderton Street,
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9th. December 2019

Dear Friends,

I was recently congratulated on completing another trip around the sun. Fortunately you were all along for the ride, and we hope you had a satisfying journey. We cannot stop the world to get off, so here's wishing the next time around fulfils your expectations. Poss and I have had a quiet year, I'm not sure if that's a good thing or we are becoming boring old farts.

Not long after posting the last letter, we had unfortunate news. Andrew and Nicole split up and Ivy has become a shared child, spending time with Andrew then time with Nicole. We do not know why this has happened, we may find out in time. We suggested to Nic that she move back to Newcastle but she wants to stay in Melbourne. It means we don't see Nicole or Ivy as much as we'd like. We did catch up when we were in Melbourne in March, again in Coolangatta in July, and Nicole is visiting later this week. She does not have a paying job at the moment, she is volunteering with a refugee support group. She is still living in Yallambie, and is sharing the house with a friend. We were surprised to hear she had joined a woman's AFL team as she knew nothing about AFL. She really enjoyed it and we were lucky to catch a game. Her team mates say she is fearless and learning fast. They are already in pre season training for 2020.

As is usual, Beth has changed jobs since the last letter. But this time she was invited. She was working at the Lambton Park Hotel and was happy there. We ate there a few times and it was a pleasant venue. But the owners sold the hotel and Beth was not so happy with the new owners but not sufficiently motivated to leave. Then the people who sold the Lambton Park bought The Bennet in Hamilton and asked Beth if she would work there. The kitchen was completely refurbished and Beth knew the owners so had no trouble agreeing to move. It is a bonus for us as it is within walking distance. We were getting disillusioned with our Tuesday night trivia, the quality of the food wasn't the greatest and the drink prices were higher than most pubs. Then the rather personable quiz master moved on and his replacement left much to be desired. When we found out the Bennet trivia was also Tuesday night, what choice did we have? The food is great, the atmosphere is good, our trivia knowledge is challenged and we were getting a firm grip on 3rd last of about a dozen teams. Our big blind spot is TV and movie trivia, but a few weeks back Sandra joined the team and we started placing a little higher. Last week I invited a new neighbour to join us and he is a TV and movie critic. Third place!! and that was without Poss, the trivia queen. I'm looking forward to see what happens tomorrow.

Sandra has also become a regular visitor for Thursday dinner. Nothing seems to have changed in her life, same digs, same employer. She still has Michael several nights a week, he is now completing Year 5. Sandra and Adam have started the High School discussion, where will Michael go in 2021? Adam has moved into a flat at his parents' house so they are now living 15km apart. Michael's current school is not near either of them, so it is not an easy decision.

Scott and Joanne's life seems more frenetic as the years pass. Joanne is close to completing a Master of Information Studies (Children's Librarianship) correspondence course at Charles Sturt University. She has two one term subjects to complete, and had the choice of doing one in 2020 and one in 2021, or cramming one of them into the 2019/2020 gap. She has elected for the shorter path but it means studying while trying to juggle all the pre Christmas activities. I think she is still sane. She said recently "I am never going to study again", then the next sentence started "But...". Poss and I are child minding most school holidays, and lately we have been supplementary transport for when Anna, Emily and Lucy need to be moved at the same time but in completely different locations. Anna has elected to start High School next year at the Hunter School of the Performing Arts, and was accepted after an audition playing the clarinet. The school is serious about performing, Anna is already going to band practice at the school and has attended several live-in practice camps of a few days each. It is hard to keep up with all the swimming, music lessons, dance, gymnastics scouts and other activities. The whole family does Taekwondo and have coloured sashes to prove it. Joanne (as if she didn't have enough to do) is also a scout leader. Emily and Lucy are busy bees as well, Emily keeps a fairly tidy room and one is lucky to make it past the door in Lucy's room. Poss finds the chaos hard to handle and spends half a day a week trying to tidy up.

Sadly, Poss's mum Dawn is poorly. She moved into Coffs Harbour Legacy house over a year ago, and at first all went well. However, she insisted that she could get around without help even though she really should get assistance from the staff. This resulted in several falls some of which needed medical intervention. For whatever reason she is affected mentally and she is not the person we knew. Poss returned downhearted a few days ago after staying with sister Barb and visiting mum several times.

We are in good health. Poss decided she should lose a bit of weight, she joined Curves gym. The exercise room is within easy walking distance, Poss goes for a workout 4 days a week. Five or six mornings she also walks the 3km walking circuit that Sandra and I were doing a few years ago. Poss has lost the weight, and I think is happy with her body. I, on the other hand, have stopped regular walking. In March I damaged my knee which made extended walking painful then, as it was getting better, my big toe started playing up. In the last few weeks all this subsided and I can walk a couple of kilometers without trouble. This should be the cue to resume walking for exercise but so far I haven't taken the hint. Fortunately most of our shopping and entertainment is within walking distance so some exercise comes with the territory.

I've not been totally slack. We were in the library, on their notice board was a call for volunteers for a trial run by the Hunter Medical Research Institute (HMRI). They wanted people older than 65 with a sedentary lifestyle. The trial involved an exercise regime and drinking an extra 500mL milk a day for 18 weeks. I was accepted for the trial, and was given a full checkout at the beginning, after 2 months, and at the end. They said I put on 2Kg of muscle and lost 1Kg of fat. I guess that's good. The full results will not appear for another year but it was interesting and beneficial although it didn't help my knee. We also continue "tennis" each week if the weather permits.

The only extended time away from home was a trip to Melbourne in March. The justification was a Moe High School reunion so we did some value adding. The actual reunion was an enormous crowd milling round in the local Scout Hall for a few hours (the school no longer exists, it was demolished years ago after it was fire damaged). I drove to Moe on the day with a friend from school days, Teddy Baarda. Poss decided a day in Melbourne was preferable. The weather was traditional Moe weather, wet and cold. Reminded me why I haven't had the urge to return. There was a smattering of people from my years, pleasantries were exchanged. Then it was all over and we were back in Melbourne. We stayed with Nicole for a couple of days and with other friends. On the way back we stayed two nights at a down in the mouth pub in Orange. The day we stayed we packed in as much as we could, lookouts, galleries, wineries, food. Plenty to see in Orange, worth a return.

We did something similar with a trip to Mudgee. Poss has followed through Facebook the work of a Mudgee artist and wanted to buy one of her paintings. I thought it would be a nice couple of days away to drive there and collect the painting, so we did. We were more familiar with Mudgee than Orange, we had our 40th wedding anniversary there and had several other visits through the years. We also took advantage of our timeshare in Coolangatta in July. Nicole and Ivy came for a few days, and Poss's sister Barb and niece Kate stayed a night on their way home.

I was walking near the local primary school and noticed a banner advertising computer lessons for seniors. While I was looking at it, one of the tutors saw me and invited me to come in. I said "and why would I do that". "Because we can teach you how to use a computer". "I know how, I've been working with computers since 1967". "Good, then you can become a tutor and help others". And so it came to pass. Monday morning is maintenance morning when all the computers are updated and made ready for the week, and I go along to help with that. I also sit in on one or two classes a week to help when needed. It's a bit of a social club, there may be more tutors than learners, and I'm sure some of the learners come along just for socialising although they do pick up some things along the way.

Work on the house has been minimal. The shade cloth I was erecting this time last year went up and then down, and now it is about time to put it up again. We had a set of cubes that acted as bookshelves along our internal corridor, they were a little wider than necessary, taking up space in the corridor. I created bookshelves that were narrower and higher. They accommodated more books but the shelves are shorter than the space occupied by the cubes. This left a section of wall that now has our hall stand. The poor old hall stand had no particular abode since we moved in, now 12 years ago. We tried it in the kitchen, and in the front lounge, but it didn't sit comfortably in either place. The space was not planned for the stand, the length of the shelves was dictated by the timber sizes. But when we moved the stand into the space, it was like it belonged there.

Work on the block of land is non-existent. I went there in January to find the tractor would not start, flat battery and the alternator not working. Also the termites ate the solar battery stand with several batteries tipping and spilling electrolyte everywhere. This ate into other things and created quite a mess. I was thinking of camping there but with no power to run the tools and no water it was a bridge too far. At the moment the fires make it a dangerous place to be, only one way in and out. Although the bushfires have not reached it, one thinks it is a matter of time. I did get a quote to make the access track more functional but it was too high. I had thought to sell the block and buy closer to Newcastle but there is nothing I can afford. A problem for Ron (laterRon).

Day to day life is pretty much the same as always. We got adventurous with our Wednesday evening dining out. Originally they were intended only to be venues to which we could walk. But one of the friends who join us can't walk far so we 'did' two other popular Newcastle restaurant strips, Darby St and Honeysuckle, by driving there. Then a few weeks back the friends decided they would join us once a month rather than each week so Poss and I have gone back to walking to the locals, including the places our friends didn't like. Our local strip (Beaumont St) is getting a distinctly Asian influence, with several dumpling places, and Indian, Persian, Thai, Korean restaurants. We also have a vegetarian takeaway and a vegan restaurant, and of course the 10 hotels within walking distance. The changes are almost weekly so we are not stumped for choice. We are still planting trees once a month. We've been doing it for over 20 years now, so a plaque has been erected in recognition – Cashin's Corner.

This may be the last posted Christmas letter. When I started the letter in 1989 home PCs were rare, mobile phones were \$4000 bricks, telephone calls were costly. So post was best. How things change. So make sure we have your email address and maybe we can save some trees. Ours is (still) family@cashin.net Here's to another year of prosperity, happiness and good health. Please keep in contact. Or best of all, visit. With love to you all.

Alan and Poss xx