

23 Nov. 96

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Dear « 1 »,

Notice the date - not even December and I am looking forward to writing to you! A rather mixed year for us, 1996. We have had loss and stress, and more working time for Sue than we wanted - but we all remain in good health, in jobs and in places we are currently happy with, on the whole.

The major event of the year was the death of my Mother, at 82. She was in pretty good health until the last days, and told me she was comfortable with leaving life, just the day before she died. Sue and I flew back to England on the first plane we could get, but she died whilst we were travelling. Still, we had spoken the day before by phone. This was just a year from our previous visit to see her. We miss her very much - somehow particularly at this time of year.

We were very fortunate that we could get Marjorie Honour to take the funeral service. She was Deaconess at Oakley, where we last lived in England, and had met Mum then. She is now a Vicar in Bournemouth, and we had met her quite by chance on our visit there last year (see last year's letter!) Those of you that were at the funeral will know she did an excellent job then, and Sue and I can tell you how helpful she was talking things over with us, and setting things up.

This was a very different affair from when Sue coped with her Mother's death about ten years ago. This time we were together, and Joan and Reg were there as well. Mum had left a will, and a nearby solicitor was primed to deal with the details. And there were only two rooms of belongings to disperse.

However, there were brighter sides to our visit. Besides Joan, Reg, and Marjorie's support, we met other friends, and visited old places / memories. I found comfort in visits to Sandbanks at Poole, and to Christchurch harbour - both places that my parents and I enjoyed when I was a child. We were very lucky in a visit to Sue's old home in Brighton. We were welcomed in by the current owners, who showed us round with justifiable pride, and fed us tea and local gossip. Sue was happy to see the house as a place of happiness. We also went round Brighton, had a nice tea and froze solid on the pier (yes, even us Canadians!) - all very normal and reassuring.

The other 'down side' events, from the point of view of Sue and me, are the moves made by John and Wendy. As suggested in last year's letter, John moved to Vancouver in British Columbia in January. That makes him as far West of us, as the UK is to our East, around 3,000 miles. The up side was that he quite quickly found a good job in his field,

and what is more - he still has it. Wendy went out to holiday with him, liked it, went to holiday again, still liked it, and drove out there in October. She is still with Price Club / CostCo (they have amalgamated), but in a lower grade part time position, as that was what was available. She is looking to see if she can get some employment with hours that would allow some further education courses. So now we have both our children moved as far West of us as we moved ourselves 11 years ago.

On the whole the year has been uneventful apart from the above. Which is not to say placid! Sue has had to work many Saturdays this year, and is often not home till eight p.m. (sometimes much later), & since our alarm goes at 5:40 a.m., this makes for a very long day. All this is because the program she is working on had a very unrealistic completion date, so now the 'workers' are being pushed to make up for the estimating mistake. Which makes the day stressful as well as long. My work at Pratt has not been so stressful, though, there is much more work available than we can cope with. Our major problem as a Company is that we cannot get people with the skills necessary to do all the work that is out there. Still, that means that employment prospects at Pratt Canada look as good as just about anywhere.

Sue had a further couple of 'up sides'. One was that it was Mothers Union Conference year. Last time four years ago was on the East coast. This time it was on the west coast - Victoria in British Columbia. Sue did not find the area very interesting, it was somewhat rootless and artificial. However the climate and the conference itself were good, and it was nice to see people Sue only meets every four years. Also some friends from here now live in the area and Sue met them, and saw their new (still building) house. When visiting Victoria, it is obligatory to have tea at the 'Queen Victoria's Britain Rules the waves' Hotel (I may have the name a bit wrong). Apparently, tea was as good as it ought to be - for the price! A highlight for Sue was a visit to Bchart (pronounced boo-shart) Gardens. This is on the sight of a worked out quarry. The planting was originally all done by Madam Bchart - well she had help, but was hauled up and down the cliff face on a bosuns chair herself, whilst planting into the crevices.

The other 'upside' for Sue was her liturgical dancing. If you have not met this, it is worshipful and tasteful dance performed as part of a service. It may be done by any number of people, but is often done by a small group, or just a single person. This was introduced to our church by an invited group that gave a demonstration, and trained some of the congregation, including Sue. Since then she has danced on several occasions, which has enhanced the service to many of the congregation, and felt very good to Sue.

The situation for the rest of Canadians is not so good. Economically we are getting things in hand - inflation and interest rates are very low, balance of trade is good, the \$C is rising very slowly, and both Federal and Provincial deficits are being reduced fairly quickly. Unfortunately there is a down side of this to individual Canadians. Unemployment is

still high, and those in employment work for "lean and mean" Companies, which is a euphemism for the employees being under very high pressure. Also the deficit cutting is hurting - for two reasons I think, one just and one not. Canadians have got used to a standard of service from Government (health, welfare, social services, etc.) that we never could afford, and it always hurts to give up what you have got used to. On the other hand the cuts have been applied - particularly in Ontario it would appear - with less tempering of morality than could have been used to achieve the same results.

Our two cats, Fred and William, are still very much with us. Fred got to be very heavy, and we have had to diet him - well him and William, it would be very difficult to give them different food or quantities. William has not lost weight or vigour, and Fred has lost weight and waddle, and gained vigour, so this has worked out well. They are always out night, Summer and non - deep - snow - Winter. Sue worries over reports of dingoes, foxes, and racoons in the area, but so far - no problems. They are very friendly for cats. They are not lap cats, but when you move into a room and settle down, you will often realise an hour later that they have quietly moved in with you. Still Sue is thinking of getting a small dog - any suggestions. What we need is a good lap dog, a good watch dog when we are away or asleep, friendly, non damaging to the household even when left in all day, not likely to stray from a fenced but not dog proof back yard, does not insist on walks - but enjoys them when available, needs little or no grooming, does not get into fights or other entanglements with other animals, healthy without special care, obedient, looks like a real dog, and preferably intelligent and immune to quarantine laws should we decide to move. Any suggestions?

The house has worked out well, with little in the way of unusual maintenance. We think both the known problems it had when we purchased are now fixed. However, we have spent quite a lot of time on house and garden this year. The garden is now nearly to Sue's liking, and we are looking forward to little more than 'maintenance mode' from now on. We abandoned plans for a medium pond and 'stream' and now just have the tub and a very small pool just for a fountain. We painted almost all the exterior this year, and now plan an annual round of painting that should not take to much time in any one year.

Because the mortgage system here is generally a scheme with interest rates that are fixed for a term of years, we are still paying the high rates of two years ago. However if the rates remain low for another 12 months, we can now look forward to paying the mortgage off in another five years or so, which is a lot better than the 15 years we started with. This is dependant on our spending a very high portion of our high income on the mortgage, so though in income terms we are classed as a high income family, we have very little spare.

This has meant that we have had no holiday this year (our visit to the UK was obviously not a holiday, but cost us all of our reserve credit), and trips to the theatre, etc. have once again been very limited.

The boating scene has been active for me, though sailing our own boat has taken somewhat of a back seat. This was partly time (garden / painting) and partly weather. Generally the weather was pleasant this year, but the winds often were too strong or too light for sailing, just when I did have some time. Teaching boating skills in the winter months, and the search and rescue (auxiliary coastguard) work in the summer + winter training, have continued. The latter has had a somewhat increased workload for a couple of reasons. First is that I have risen through the ranks to the point when I now have to work out interesting training exercises for others to do, instead of just doing what I am told. Also our organisation is considering how much longer our existing boat will last, and what we should do about its decline. Somehow I found myself tagged onto the committee that is reviewing this. Still, it is very interesting to talk to boat builders and designers about their vision for search and rescue boats.

All our Love

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FOR NEXT LETTER

Forgot to mention that we went to Washington for the Barnes exhibition of VeMeres. Also that Sue enjoyed playing for the Spectra softball/baseball team on the island.