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Once again, Christmas is nearly here; we cycle home from work in the dark; the hills have had snow on them for more than a month and now there is snow in the valley too. So may we wish you and your family, a very merry Christmas and a Happy New Year?

1991 has once again been an exciting one for the family since we have two new members (nearly!).

A new grandson, James Alexander, was born in May, a second son for Michael and Nicola. He is a large lad, on the whole well behaved, and he seems to be well appreciated by older brother William who himself is growing apace. There was a splendid Christening for James a fortnight ago in London where it was lovely to see the whole family and all the grandchildren together for once. Nicola is on leave from her legal work looking after the growing family. Michael is progressing well within his firm with ever more complex projects in the North Sea to plan and supervise; and now we have just heard that he is wanted at the Head office in Paris and will be moving there with the family in the New Year.

The second (the nearly new) member is Connie who last month became Stephen's fiancé. Connie, whom we have known for a couple of years now, comes from near Frankfurt where she worked until recently. In the middle of the year Stephen and she decided that, although he is away travelling for some five or six months a year, it might be more fun being together when he was at home in Germany; the move was clearly successful as they have now decided to take the plunge and get married. I need hardly say how happy the whole family is with this development. They are now in the process of buying a house near Düsseldorf. Last weekend we attended their engagement party at Connie's mother's house near Frankfurt. We were made most welcome by the whole family and had a lovely time with them all. Stephen's work continues apace and he seems to come back from the middle and far east and Australasia with ever bigger orders, despite the recession. Connie was in a similar line, trading with Eastern Europe, but is now seeking a new job near Düsseldorf. Meanwhile, she has spent two months this year with a family in Moscow, polishing up the Russian which she took at University.

The granddaughters, Fiona and Felicity, are growing rapidly into charming and endearingly mischevous girls. Fiona is enjoying school to which she seems to make a large contribution while Felicity participates in a veritable whirl of social activities which appear to make up young childrens' lives now. Rosalind has her hand full with the two young ladies and also manages an amazing round of activities herself. Paul joins in too, as well as progressing in his job; the latest project is the networking of computing for all the UK Thomas Cook offices; if you have trouble booking a holiday, you know who to chase!

Our own lives are dominated by travel schedules which are largely dictated by work. While we sometimes feel that we don't have enough time at home here, it is also something of a privilege to be able visit so many people and places.

We spent a cheerful Christmas last year with Michael and his family before visiting my sister in Northern Ireland for continuous Bridge and walks by the sea. Since then we have been able to visit the family and Pat's parents, who still keep relatively well at 86, several times. We have also taken opportunities to visit friends in London, Reading, Konstanz and Stockholm and made a new friend in Budapest. We have a couple of visits from other friends but of course we would like to see more of you, either here or on our travels!

In August, we bicycled from Mittenwald (about 10 miles away) down the Isar river to its mouth on the Danube near the town of Deggendorf. It took us six days to do the 360 km; the first of these was extraordinarily hot and the writer of our guide book took us enthusiastically up a 1500' climb over a small mountain. After that it was, mostly downhill, an interesting ride which took us to the middle of Munich itself as well as along the lonely stretches of this unfrequented river. The following weekend we then cycled upstream from Mittenwald 30 km to the source of the river in the Karwendel to complete the journey.

We were keen to hire a boat in Germany this year but for this a "driving licence" is required. So in May I travelled every day for a week to Munich to take a course, which culminated in a practical and theoretical examination at Seeshaupt on the Starnberger See. I don't believe I have ever worked so intensively for an examination, but I managed to prepare the answers to the 500 or so possible questions and, despite my rather curious written German, I got through and am now the proud possessor of two licences, one for

inland and the other for German coastal waters. So in September we were able to hire a boat in Berlin and motor along the rivers and canals of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern in the old DDR. The area there, although only 100 km or so from Berlin itself, is a wonderful, remote area with a maze of small and large lakes interlinked by rivers, canals and locks. Our boat was a roomy and comfortable and we had a superb holiday. The boating itself was full of excitements, including sharing an enormous lock with vast Polish tugs and barges and, at the end, a race along the interesting canals of Berlin itself, including one where the mast was too tall to go under the bridges. The crew (Pat) did a marvellous dismantling job in double quick time!

There was good snow last winter so we were out skiing most weekends in the local resorts, mostly over the border in Austria, and we spent longer weekends near St. Moritz and at Ischgl. Christopher & Gwenda, our old skiing partners came for a weekend as well as Paul and his family; it was interesting to see Fiona having a first flounder on skis.

Our thinking in the winter was dominated by the EUROTRAC Symposium which we had in Garmisch at the end of March. Four hundred people came this time. It was a very cheerful occasion, thought to be useful and much enjoyed by all the participants and a great credit to all those in the Institute who helped with the organisation and running.

EUROTRAC itself is rushing along, very successfully according to the independent review which reported this year. There were encouraging words too for the Secretariat but all eyes are now on two things: future programmes which might follow when the project ends in 1995 and an attempt to get our scientific results together and provide them in a form comprehensible to those who might use them to try to improve our environment. These two tasks require a lot of necessary contact with our participants so the extensive travelling is likely to continue at its present level.

Pat worked hard organising the posters and abstracts for the Symposium and since then has been almost fully engaged editing the proceedings, correcting proofs etc. At home, when not packing or unpacking our bags, she has found time to participate in her book club, climb hills, ski, take bicycle rides and crew boats.

However as I write this, Pat is having a bitter-sweet day. She is just putting the last stitches to her large embroidery of Stockholm, which was started about five years ago. It is an immense achievement, looks gorgeous and is a worthy companion to "Copenhagen" which was the previous marathon. We shall probably have to re-visit the ultimate shop in Copenhagen itself soon, to find another major embroidery to work on!

Our cheerful, lucky, family world is in stark contrast to the unhappy world portrayed in every news bulletin; it is such a contrast to the enormous surge of hope three years ago. People here are most concerned about the cost of unification and the violence against asylum seekers. However one thing one seldom hears about, which our boat trip showed us, is how much has changed in the old DDR and how much has already been accomplished. We visited the DDR several times before the change and the contrast is amazing. The streets in the towns now are full of cheerful shops and enthusiastic shoppers, where before there were none, and the investment being made to rescue the infrastructure is incredible. There is however much still to do and everyone is impatient. Also it is easy to dismiss the hooliganism as simply a minority but everyone is conscious here of not dissimilar events in the Weimar Republic which brought disaster in the end. However, despite the genuine worries about the numbers of immigrants which are far greater than any other country in the world, I believe the vast majority of people here are for stability and rule of law, and they are willing to do a lot to preserve it.

We do hope that all is well with you and your family this Christmas. It is lovely to be able to send greetings and of course to receive yours. We hope we may see you in the coming year.