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### *To all our friends and family*

After a warm and sunny October, winter started early this year with two falls of snow in November, and we have already had several cold rides to work in temperatures of  $-10^{\circ}\text{C}$ . It all looks wonderful at the moment and we hope it lasts until Christmas when we are looking forward to a crush here with two of our families coming to visit us.

So it is Christmas time again and it is lovely to think of old friends and to be able to wish you and your family a truly happy Christmas and prosperous New Year.

Our year has been really splendid with two Christenings and several large birthday parties.

Sarah, Stephen and Connys daughter was christened in Düsseldorf in April and it was a welcome chance both to see all our own family together and to renew acquaintance with Connys. Sarah is already a world traveller having just returned from three weeks in Australia where her parents enjoyed a belated honeymoon. Within five days of their return Stephen was off again to Korea; his work seems to be going well, but with enormous amounts of travel.

Charles, third son of Michael and Nicola, was the second to be christened, near Bath in August. Another chance to see our family, this time with Nicola's. The other two boys, William and James, are growing up fast in Paris. Michael is still with Total Oil and seems to be much in demand at their head office (he gets there by bike at the moment!).

Paul is progressing well at Thomas Cook's head office and is concerned now with the extensive system (computing, personnel and financial) required for providing refunds for missing traveller's cheques. The two girls, Fiona and Felicity, have inherited the family's energy and enthusiasm and are making great strides at school.

All the three mums, Rosalind, Constanze and Nicola, are fully engaged in bringing up their lively families but still find time to pursue vigorous social lives and voluntary activities.

Since I wrote last year we have both become sixty and since we seem to have had nothing but parties and kind words, we can thoroughly recommend it as an age! There were three parties for my own: it started with a splendid presentation at the Institute with the biggest bunch of flowers (a Herrenstrauß) I have ever seen. Then a party at home which we gave for our Garmisch friends and another at the Haycock at Wansford, where we had all our family together with a number of UK friends for a couple of days, just after Christmas. Then to cap it all, we had a most enjoyable family dinner for Patricia in August. We made off with piles of loot and have spent much of the rest of the year either listening to it or reading it!

After mentioning all these celebrations, it seems a bit much to tell you that we have travelled extensively as well, with weeks in Istanbul, Helsinki, Boulder, Thessaloniki and Athens. These all had some connection with work but we used the opportunity to enjoy the places as well.

There have been a lot of short trips too particularly to the UK to visit Pat's mother, who is sadly in poor health but is well looked after in her comfortable nursing home. We also attended a splendid meeting for Brian Thrush's retirement (he is professor of physical chemistry in Cambridge). A happy chance finding of our address led to a visit to see Robin Pearce; we were laboratory assistants together at Harwell and had not seen each other for forty years!

We also used the US trip to visit friends in the North West and Canada. We were splendidly entertained for more than a week by Bob and Marcia Brown in Seattle. We played some bridge, drank margaritas and visited the coast together. None of us will forget the attempt to swim early morning in the icy Pacific! Then on to Kamloops to visit my first research student, Colin James, whom we had not seen for twenty years, and his wife Katie, whom we had not met at all before. It was wonderful to find that conversation seemed to pick up where it had stopped so long ago and that after a few moments it was as if we had never parted.

Last winter was good for skiing and we had a nice week in Grindelwald and several weekends away in Austria. You might well ask why we don't stay at home to ski. Well we do: we skied on Christmas morning before coming home to make our Christmas dinner; but we find it better to get away for the weekend rather than try to fit in skiing with all the things that always seem to need to be done at home or at work.

Thanks to Paul Dutro, a new American acquaintance here, we have acquired season tickets for the opera in Munich. Our heads nearly bang the ceiling but we are able to hear some wonderful performances. A further treat was to attend the opera in the Roman arena in Verona.

The project for which I am responsible finishes at the end of this year, but the secretariat will continue for another year to clear up. It is also highly likely that there will be a follow up project for a further six years. This will be decided in the next few months. With the end of one successful project and the possible start of another, there has been immense amounts to do, exacerbated by the necessary, but time-consuming, travel. However what is done seems to be appreciated and the work should ease up a bit shortly, although there is still our biennial Symposium to run in March; it looks like being as big, if not bigger, than ever. Patricia is heavily engaged in work as well now, and is editing a large part of the ten-volume final report of our project that is being published by Springer. Happily the Institute has now recognised her contribution and is employing her on a proper contract.

Tomi Cvitas, my colleague, has returned to his job as professor in Zagreb. It could not have been easy adjusting to the poor financial conditions there but he is very happy to have his family united again. If, as we pray, the Bosnian peace holds things could soon get better there.

We wondered how on earth we were going to manage without Tomi when a near miracle brought us a replacement. We stopped at a mountain hut for a beer while out on a walk and found ourselves talking to a young lady biker with a dog. She turned out to be Kerry Kelly from the USA who was perfectly qualified to help us and was looking for a change of job. Within four days we had a new colleague. She lives in Munich with her husband Ross who is over here on a contract with a computer firm. Kerry is trying to inject a more youthful approach into what we do as well as tidying up our punctuation (she is an experienced editor as well as being an environmental engineer) and we are both enjoying working with her.

As you can see life is still being extraordinarily kind to us. We do so hope that you are in a similar situation and we send you all our very best wishes at this happy time.

*Patricia and Peter*