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12th December 2004

It was a bit of a surprise to return from tropical sunshine to find that the Glyndebourne Touring in town and the shops full of Christmas things. So may we add our greetings and wish you and your family a very happy Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

We have had a quieter but cheerful year. We have seen quite a lot of our oldest grandson, William, who started at Malvern College in January and who, from time to time, we put on or take off the plane home to Indonesia. We also had a visit from his mother, Nicky, and brothers, James and Charlie in the summer and will see Michael just after Christmas. Mike seems to be involved ever more in Indonesian Oil politics in his role of joint director of the Total operation there.

They see more of Stephen, Mike's brother, on his frequent visits to the far East where the market for anodised aluminium appears undiminished, despite the dollar slide. We have visited the Düsseldorf family a couple of times – they are busy re-modelling the house as well as translating, and caring for the growing children, Sarah and Timothy, who have both settled in at new schools.

We saw Paul and family for the girls' annual concert a week or so ago. Both Felicity and Fiona are progressing well with periods away engineering in Finland and attending special "gifted" courses in the west country. Fiona is now Head Girl, a role which suits her well; she was very excited to receive the pupil of the year award for the whole school.

We spent the summer at home and, despite the poor weather, managed walks in eight successive weeks without getting wet. The walks were necessary as Pat was still recovering from a knee injury (one ligament gone, another badly torn), sustained skiing in January. Happily she seems fully recovered and is raring to go again. The walks followed a lovely week of six operas, a concert and a play at the Buxton Festival; the highlight there was meeting a couple of University friends whom we last encountered almost fifty years ago.

During the convalescence we managed a couple of trips to Munich, a lovely visit to Northumberland, and a nice holiday boating on the Shannon-Erne canal – the crew consisted of Pat, who could hardly get on and off the boat but could throw mooring ropes and secure them, and my sister and her husband, both sprightly eighty year olds, who could manage the shore duties at the locks. On the continent we twice visited a former neighbour from Keele who now lives high on a mountain above the valley of the upper Rhine.

The thing that at times seems out of hand is the work! The project with the WMO came to an end with the publication of the IGACO report, promoting the establishment of a global monitoring network of satellites, ground stations and aircraft to monitor the changing atmosphere. Perhaps recklessly, I agreed to help with the coordination of not one, but two projects concerned with atmospheric composition, pollution and satellite observations, and these seem to involve rather more effort than anticipated. Nevertheless it was fun to run a large meeting at Rutland Water for a lot of old friends and to attend (usually to run) meetings

in Leicester, Bremen and Geneva. While things seem fraught at times, it does make an interesting alternative to the garden (which is growing reasonably well).

Apart from servicing the committee meetings for the Hospice at Home Appeal, we did a bit of real work by selling tickets and balloons on mostly rainy occasions. The appeal looks to be on target but would always benefit from further donations if you are willing.

And what of the tropical sunshine? Well in November we took a truly splendid holiday in Ecuador and the Galapagos. We spent a week with forty others on the ship Isabela II, visiting eight of the Galapagos Islands, followed by several days in the Ecuadorian rain forest. The Galapagos were marvellous, much better than our already high expectations. As is pointed out to one, the wildlife is not tame, simply unafraid, which means that you are close to the marvellous birds, sea lions and iguanas, and can take pictures impossible elsewhere in the world. One is able to go, supervised, ashore and to walk, as well as to swim and to snorkel, in ideal temperatures. The rain forest of course was wet – amazingly wet – but Sacha Lodge was well organised and we had a grand young naturalist to guide us. And, like the trips we arranged for ourselves in Argentina, the travel was South American - very well organised so that from arrival to departure, one is passed from courier to courier who look after the arrangements and tickets. It is unlike anything we have experienced in Europe or North America. Altogether, we really would recommend Ecuador as a holiday destination.

Now we are looking forward to Christmas – although there are two meetings abroad and a couple of birthday parties before we depart for Austria. This year we are celebrating with our Düsseldorf and Indonesian families, skiing together in Hochgurgl; unfortunately Paul and family are unable to come. There will be eleven of us on the slopes, but we shall not be able to keep up with our grandsons who are now snow boarders. You can appreciate now why Pat was so keen to get thoroughly fit again.

Again, happily, we and the family have had a most fortunate year. We do hope that you and yours are fit, well and enjoying your own lives.

With love from us both.