

WISHING YOU ALL A MERRY CHRISTMAS

From the Southampton Anthonys [Christmas 2009]

Dear friends and family: this is written by Chris on behalf of Liz, Clive and Hugh.

Waking up to a wet wild windy November morning reminded me that it is time to write this seasonal letter. If you discard this contribution to Joyful Noel before reading further can I urge you not to burn it; you know you don't want to be the butterfly who precipitates calamitous global warming.

Last Christmas day was celebrated in a perky sort of panic as we woke to a local power cut. Liz of course coped well with the help of guests who carried our nervous turkey to various ovens around Southampton to get him cooked in time. Our eight guests included very special neighbours, ex-neighbours and displaced orientals [also very special].

As usual, I was soon off to Tirupati in India for 5 weeks teaching with Prof. Sai Gopal in Sri Venkateshwara University. British Airways at last acknowledged my importance and upgraded me to business class. As previously, my visit started in Mahabalipuram on the coast (with my friend Gopi). It is always a very heartwarming experience to meet up with old friends and students in Tirupati, and I was soon at home in the chaotic Ghandi Road and the peaceful Sindhuri Park hotel eating cashew nuts with everything [to please my friend Moin]. Every year the town expands and sadly [for me] it is gradually fusing with the small rural villages, paving over my beautiful countryside. I am now scanning in my 25 years of photographic slides to produce a small picture history of this process. I missed my friend Madhu who has moved for two years to Dubai as a water engineer for a 2km long building in the desert; fortunately, in April, my friend Leigh was able to give me a free flight to Dubai where I spent a few days with Madhu in a traditional Arab hotel. We didn't go to the more flashy part but spent most of our time in the old town.

Liz's year reads almost the same as last year: doing her thing in Highfield Church, playing flute in Laura's band, organising her home group, mentoring, praying [for you], working on the PCC and Diocesan Synod, and looking after me and Hugh and our friends. As if keeping fit by cycling or walking everywhere is not enough, she swims 30 lengths of the University pool every Thursday. Our camper van [Kontiki] continues to serve us well and Liz shared it with a friend at the New Wine Conference in Somerset. Last year while I was away she and Hugh imported Peggy. This year while my back was turned [in India] she arranged the replacement of my scruffy wild hedges and derelict fences [my bird sanctuary] to be replaced, leaving room for runner beans and a patch of wild flowers.

Clive's busy life continues in the Police, stationed near his home in Hythe on the edge of the New Forest. Phone conversations with Clive usually have a happy family background of changing nappies, feeding and controlling Kenny, Carrington and Bailey. His energy is so impressive; after a picnic in the new forest with them all I needed two days to recover. They are all doing well and Kenny has just started 'School'.

Hugh's year started very well. At the end of 2008 he was told that he and 3 library colleagues were being made redundant. Fortunately the University has a policy of re-location. This worked well although the wisdom of the policy was not matched by the competence of the Human Resources department which was rarely humane and remarkably unresourceful. After a lot of very impressive work [by Hugh and his excellent Union representative] he is now very happy - on a higher grade, full time, double salary, doing a much wider range of interesting work, with excellent colleagues in the wonderful National Oceanography Centre. A musical highlight of Hugh's year was a recent performance of the 2nd Symphony of Sibelius, with the Southampton Concert Orchestra.

My musical highlights include playing [in private] piano trios of Schubert, Shostakovich and Smetana, string quartets of Beethoven and Shostakovich, and performing Nielsen's 4th Symphony and the 1st Symphony of Walton in the City of Southampton Orchestra. Hugh and I shared in a special experience last week in a performance of the Organ Symphony by Saint Saens; the first time that we have performed together [in the Charity Symphony Orchestra]. Needless to say this was also a musical highlight of Liz's year (she says).

I was reminded that this year is special when I received a formal invitation from my niece to attend a celebration of my twin brother's 70th birthday, asking me to share any memories that I might have. Fortunately I am still able to remember him and we had a great time, brilliantly organised by Pauline and helpers, in Leavesden road Baptist Church Hall where I had spent my teenage years in the Boys Brigade and church youth club. I was embarrassed, and Hugh greatly amused, by an elderly lady who had to remind me that she had been my first girlfriend.










As well as that celebration I used this special year as an excuse for further self gratification. Liz took me to stay for a week in an AgriTurismo converted farmhouse in the Tuscan countryside overlooking San Gimignano. I asked our host Stefano, while drinking his wonderful wine, if he had seen the film Tea with Mussolini [set in that town]. "Yes of course, many of the cast stayed here - Franco Zefferelli [the director] parked his campervan over there".

This led to the idea that we would return there in the late summer with Hugh and our campervan; if it is good enough for Zefferelli it is good enough for us. So we three set out with bikes and kayaks in the Kontiki at the end of August through France to Italy. After a wonderful journey drifting through the Dordogne, the Auvergne and the

Cevennes, we arrived at one of our favourites sites beneath the pines on the edge of a lake at the end of the Verdon Gorge. Early September is well past the French camping season so we shared a 450 place camping site with 12 others including an especially nice young couple from Belgium [Bep and Michel], Michel being a greengrocer from whom Liz learned all about her favourite Jonagold apples. The weather forecast for Italy was very bad so we cancelled our original plan and stayed longer under the hot pines. We eventually dropped Hugh off at Nice airport. We have childishly re-named Nice as Nasty as it has almost no helpful road signs, and is full of traffic jams, as was the motorway and every road around. It was sad to fling Hugh out onto the road by the airport [no parking for high vehicles] but a relief to leave this less attractive area of France, setting off North, over the Col de la Bonnette [2,800m] to Larche - a favourite site at [1800m] in the mountains. We then meandered back home by way of Les Hautes Alpes, Drome and the Ardeches. A new feature this year was our two nights in France Passion sites [not what you may think]. These are places to camp our van free for a night, on farms or other rural places. Both were excellent. One was in the car park of a fromagerie where we had a dinner of 3 courses – all of cheese. We have now completed our own rough guide to our campsites of France [email me for a copy or download it from our website], based on about 20 years of travelling in our old Merlin and new [18yrs old] Kontiki.

As you see, it has been another very special year for us all. Thanks to you all for your friendship and support. With love from Liz, Chris, Hugh, Clive, Tiffany, Carrington, Bailey, Kennedy and Peggy the cat.

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Chris, Richard & John 27th June	Clive with Kennedy	Granny and granddaughter
		
Peggy with Hugh	Hugh's new workplace, the NOC	Our 'home' near San Gimignano
		
Our kayaks near Verdon Gorge	After our first joint concert	Clive at work

More beautiful wonderful Pictures of our year are on my website: <http://www.chris-anthony.co.uk/holidays.html>