

WISHING YOU ALL A MERRY CHRISTMAS

From the Southampton Anthonys written by Chris on behalf of Liz, Clive, Hugh and Peggy the cat.

Dear friends and family: Do not read this letter out of a sense of duty; feel free to screw it up, discarding it, muttering it's the same as last year, innit. Correct, and you could use the saved time to save the world or put out the bins. We have had a wonderful year and been spared living in interesting times, so highlights suitable for bragging or eliciting sympathy were relatively few. [Is anyone else irritated by people on TV only *empathising* nowadays; I prefer *sympathy* if you have any to spare.]

As usual I went off in January for five weeks to Tirupati in South India to teach in SV University and to meet my old friends there. The crazy crowded friendly streets of Tirupati really feel like a second home. The dining room in the University guest house was being refurbished so breakfast and lunch were brought in by bike from restaurants in unattractive little polythene bags tied with string from which I squirted my luke-warm curries onto plates wiped clean on the cyclist's shirt tails. While there I met Dr Chowdappa who had been a student with the present Head of Department [SaiGopal] on my first visit in 1982; he asked advice about a good place for his son Vinay to study in the UK. Vinay earned my admiration by driving my friend Moin and me to Mahabalipuram on the way home, proving him to be the only safe driver in India. Predictably he is now in Southampton as an MSc student and a welcome addition to our family. As he seemed to be living in hall on a diet of cornflakes and pizza my interest in cooking Indian food has been rekindled; Wednesday night is curry night, please come.

1st August was our 40th (Ruby) wedding anniversary. Liz suggested that our 40 years together were so enjoyable because we are somehow complementary; I agreed – she cooks, I eat; she does the garden, I sit in it etc. ad. inf. To celebrate, I was planning exotic holidays in Istanbul or Venice but heard Liz muttering quietly that she would prefer to go camping in Scotland. We had a wonderful time there, in September, driving our Kon-tiki camper van a total of 1600 miles in rain and gales and a little sun, protected from the famous Scots midges by Avon's Skin-so-Soft. We visited friends in Sheffield (John & Barbara Guest) and Northumberland (Nigel Chandler) on the way, followed by a few days in the Cairngorms, eventually reaching the far North West coast near Ullapool, Enard Bay and Clachtoll where we sat in the van, rocking in a force 9 gale with gusts of hail, watching flocks of gannets dive-bombing the mackerel. On the way home we stopped off to play string and flute quartets with friends (Colin, Alison & Sophie Mather) in Wigan (the cradle of civilisation).

In spite of unusually bad weather we enjoyed our annual adventure in France in June, after an inauspicious start. Setting off to catch the night ferry a threatening red dashboard light suggested the alternator was broken which would soon give us a dead starter battery, preventing anyone behind us disembarking from the car ferry [etc etc etc]. With doubled heart rates, dry mouths, adrenaline dripping out of our ears we drove to our mechanic friend [Jonathan Willis] who, after loaning us a box of spare parts and a huge charger, found a loose wire going to the alternator. Out went the red light and off we went with 3 pairs of eyes challenging it to come on again during the drive to Portsmouth. No Problem. This year we kept to the West, going to the Pyrennees by way of our friends in the Dordogne, arriving in Argeles on the Mediterranean before releasing Hugh to fly home to earn our pensions. We drifted back by way of the Corbieres, the Camargue, Causse Mejean and the Auvergne, stopping at a France Passion site at a bison farm on the Causse Noir; our target auberge was not open but they sold us delicious tinned bison stew, best eaten with spicy Corbiere red wine in a camper at 7 degrees in a howling gale.

Liz has continued 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 Deanery Synod, looking after me and Hugh and our friends, and providing a drop-in centre in the camper van at the New Wine Conference in Somerset. As she does not have enough to do she joined the Communicare group in the church doing what it says on the tin. She keeps fit by walking, cycling or swimming everywhere. While I was in India she went with Hugh on a pilgrimage around her 4 brothers, braving blizzards on the way. Together we recently met up with my godson Matt Smith in Birmingham to celebrate his Civil Partnership with Martin, a wonderfully gay affair; another special shared highlight was Mary's Cowbridge Music Festival in which she played [cello] beautifully, alternating with an excellent trumpet player and a rather manic tenor from Welsh National Opera [the Go Compare singer].

Hugh's new job as library assistant in the National Oceanography Centre is as successful as he had hoped, with the bonus of watching great ships coming and going, including the new Queen Elizabeth. His violin playing is getting faster, higher and a pleasure to hear, especially as an alternative to the sounds of his X-box military activities. We enjoyed sharing the Formula 1 Grand Prix season, exciting to the end. We have now met 2 more of Hugh's internet friends, one a Belgian Grand Prix enthusiast and student of sports journalism, and a lady acquired by grooming on a cat forum website, who also indulges in a sort of martial arts roller skating in fishnet tights. She visited us to hear Hugh play in a concert and was great fun and a biochemist to boot. The concert was by the Charity Symphony Orchestra in which Hugh and I both play; six hours rehearsal in St Mary's Church at about 7 degrees followed by a concert the same evening which included Mahler's Songs of a wayfarer and Holst's Planets. Hugh's Southampton Concert Orchestra continues to improve, giving challenging concerts including Brahms's 2nd Symphony.

Highlights in my musical year included a glorious performance [with City of Southampton Orchestra] in the Guildhall of Dvorak's Cello Concerto, played by a great young cellist Pei-Sian Ng, and the recent concert in Thornden Hall which attracted a full house by including Rachmaninov's 2nd piano concerto and Prokofiev's Romeo and Juliet Suite [with Alan Sugar's theme tune]. We also played a short piece by our composer/conductor John Traill which included many half hidden quotes and adaptations of other composers, including Shostakovich's 5th Symphony and Richard Strauss's Alpine Symphony. This explained why it felt familiar in parts as I had played that in a one day orchestra performance in Oxford a few weeks earlier. The Rachmaninov concert was special in that it attracted a friend to come here from Japan for his honeymoon; it was good to be able to make some attempt to repay the hospitality I enjoyed with Daisuke a few years ago in Nagasaki.

Clive's busy life continues in the Police, stationed near his home in Hythe on the edge of the New Forest with Tiffany and our 3 grand children, Carrington (9), Bailey (8) and Kenny (3) who were all great company during New Forest picnics and a memorable day of biscuit cooking. Clive has taken up kick boxing with success and broken toes in competitions in which he usually comes 2nd. When I asked about what he enjoys about his job now he said not working nights and occasional job satisfaction like breaking into old ladies flats to rescue them from hypothermia.

Our neighbouring Boldrewood Biological and Medical Sciences building, my home for about 35 years, was finally vacated for demolition, celebrated by demolishing a Boldrewood cake. A consolation was a gift of a couple of good microscopes [Wild and Zeiss] enabling me to become a real biologist again, hunting for protozoa from our pond etc.

I shall end by listing bits and pieces that got left out: We were injected against flu, the house was injected with insulator to keep it warm, we grew some beans, the neighbour's cat took to eating Peggy's evening dinner, we got a new boiler, the chimney was swept for first time in 20 years, I built a wood shed with the help of Carl, we all fell over in the snow, Darren (a previous research student) came to visit from New Zealand, we had deep snow on 1st December.

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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 For more pictures go to my website: www.chris-anthony.co.uk



Lunch in Tirupati



Off to dinner in Matamale, Pyrenees



Still life with microscopes and cat



Campsite in Scotland



Darren Day brightening our lives



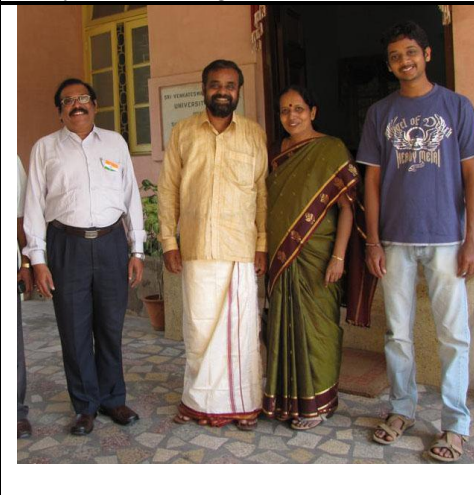
Mary at Cowbridge Music Festival



Biscuit making



The end of Boldrewood



Sai Gopal, Chowdappas and Vinay