

# Around the year with Chris and Geoff

**A** happy Christmas and new year to you all. We hope you enjoy this latest missal from Canberra.

This year began in a way we will never forget—with the devastation of the Canberra bushfires. We had returned from Christmas holidays in Toowoomba to find smoke on the distant horizon. Less than a week later these fires reached the western suburbs, taking four lives and more than 500 homes. As we live on the northeastern side of Canberra, we were unscathed, except for the nervousness which affected everyone. It's still hard to comprehend the damage, especially in the wilderness areas—70 per cent of the ACT was burned.

In February, we flew off to Geneva as Chris needed to meet with the other officers of the World Student Christian Federation to discuss its increasing financial difficulties. We stopped in Hong Kong in both directions and Geoff stayed longer on the return trip to do some more work with the Christian Conference of Asia.

On 28 April, as we were packing to go to Wangarabell to spend a few days there with Ian and Jeannine Alves, we got the news that Dad Ledger had fallen and broken his hip. Chris spent a good deal of her time over the next few days with the mobile phone in a cow paddock seeking good enough reception to keep in touch with the family about developments. On our return from East Gippsland she flew to Brisbane to be with them. After a week, she returned to collect Geoff and the two of us drove back to Brisbane together. Dad's surgery had gone pretty well and ten days after his fall the hospital had him packed and ready to go home to the hostel to be nursed there. But a last-minute check showed his wound had become infected. Several more visits to theatre in the course of a few days really knocked Dad about and he developed pneumonia. This was more than his body could cope with, and Dad passed away on the afternoon of 18 May, aged 87. Along with other members of the family, the two of us were privileged to be with him when he took his last breath. The funeral in Toowoomba and the memorial service in Brisbane were wonderful gatherings of family and friends.

**O**n 1 May we had visited Geoff's dad's grave in Pambula on the fifteenth anniversary of his death. Certainly, the events of May were the fulcrum of the year as we said goodbye to the last of our parents, all four of whom had been born within twenty-six months of each other.

The day after returning to Canberra, Chris flew off to Geneva again for another meeting. In fact our original idea had been for Geoff to go on ahead some weeks earlier to Hong Kong, but these plans had been cancelled because of the SARS epidemic. We are grateful now that he was not out of the country when Dad needed us. Soon after Chris returned from Geneva, we returned full circle to Wangarabell so that the beauty and peace of that place might work its magic.

In August Geoff helped organise the Australasian Religious Press Association's convention in Canberra. This was a great success and included a visit to Government House where we chatted with the new governor general.



Canberra, 18 January 2003: Dark clouds of smoke as high winds and temperatures fan a disaster



New York: Ground Zero



31 October: Halloween was a new experience for us. Chris hands out Aussie chocolates in New York



Jerry being Jerry

The rest of the year followed what had now become a pattern for us. Geoff donated his time and talents to publishing, including church handbooks, pamphlets, Bible studies and newsletters, a book by Ashley Barker, a urban missionary friend working in the slums of Bangkok, and a history of Holy Cross Anglican Church by Philip Bligh. Both these books have sold very well. He went to Melbourne three times during the year, for an AGM, Ashley's book launch and to produce an issue of *The Australian Christian* when subeditor Nigel was ill. Chris beavered away at the PhD. And we continued to travel. In October and November, Chris had a WSCF executive committee meeting in New York, so we bought an around-the-world ticket and stopped off in Samoa, Paris and Hong Kong as well. Chris left Geoff in Hong Kong to work with CCA again and to visit China with his friend Simon, while she returned to the PhD. While we were in New York, a new great-niece, Alice, was born to Giz and Brett Butterfield. We will meet her at Christmas.

Highlights of living in Canberra included the hot-air balloons on Canberra Day in March, the Anzac Day service at the War Memorial in April and the old Peugeots on the rerun of the Redex Trial in July.

We also enjoyed some visitors through the year. Christine's sister Alison and Graham from Nambour came on a long-overdue holiday. We hosted Ja Naw, a Christmas Bowl visitor from Burma, and Kia from Papua New Guinea. Cousins David and Denise from Deniliquin, and Anne and Bob from Sydney called by. Geoff's brother Robert came from Melbourne (and went with us to nephew Christopher's eighteenth birthday on Sydney Harbour). Geoff's other brother Ian and Jeannine and Christopher came for Floriade. Friends Nigel from Melbourne, Ian from Perth and Helen from Adelaide visited too. And Eileen from Toowoomba, who conducted Dad's funeral so beautifully, came for dinner with her son Henry, who lives around the corner here.

Healthwise, Geoff is fighting fit except for the odd virus, Chris has a frozen shoulder and is finding all sorts of new uses for a husband (doing up bras, for example) and Jerry the cat just keeps on going on, with the help of his annual shearing session. With a redesign of the garden and fishpond, our renovations are finally complete. Our interests continue to be walking in the nature reserve, the garden, Geoff's computer, birdwatching, cats (at Jerry's insistence) and travel. Our involvement with our two churches continues.

And so we come to Christmas again. Last Christmas Day we spent with Dad Ledger at his hostel as his dementia meant that a big family gathering was difficult for him. How glad we are that we did. It was a lovely day. This Christmas we are spending at home in Canberra and are delighted that ten family members from the Alves' Sydney branch are joining us. We'll also be celebrating our golden wedding anniversary, counted in months that is!

Another year had gone by and we still cannot announce the completion of Chris's PhD. It is very close, though—it is now just a matter of a summer of proofreading and final touches.

2004 is an open book. Who knows what life after a PhD might bring? May it bring you as much joy and as many happy surprises as we hope it will bring us.

With our love,

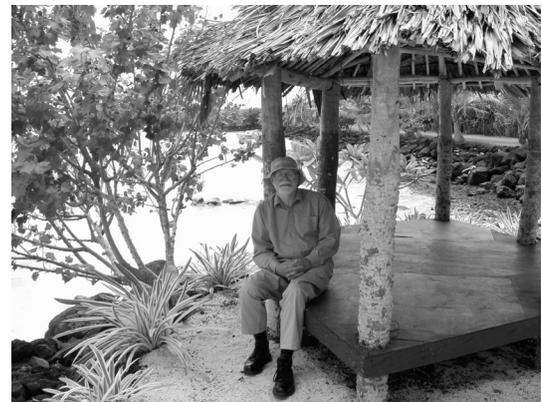
Geoff Alves and Christine Ledger  
54 Grayson Street, Hackett ACT 2602, Australia. Tel: + 61 2 6262 5975  
galves@netspeed.com.au/chrisledger@netspeed.com.au



Christine overseas: A WSCF meeting in Geneva



Geoff overseas: In the snow in Switzerland ...



... and on the beach in Samoa



Christmas Day 2002: Christmas dinner with Dad Ledger at his hostel in Brisbane