

Christmas 2015

Geoff keeps a daily diary. On New Year's Day, we sat in our little caravan in the bush flipping through its pages in preparation for writing this annual epistle. We marvelled at how much we had forgotten. A worry, that. So we will start with what is freshest in our minds.

Christmas Day 2015 we will never forget. We decided to celebrate it quietly here in Canberra with Erica and Ray, our clergy friends from Holy Cross. So we were at home when our good friend, Kate-up-the-road, phoned to say she had called the ambulance for her husband, Bryce, a gentle retired clergyman. Erica, who had been ministering to Bryce regularly, and I went up the road to help. Bryce died soon after we arrived. It was a couple of hours before all of us, including Kate, sat down to a meal marking Christ's birth and Bryce's death, mysteriously intertwined.

These events help to put 2015 into perspective for us. Life, death and new life.

I got stuck into a writing project this year. I am writing a biography of a man who died suddenly at the age of 50 on Australia Day 1982. He was Vernon Cornish, the Anglican Bishop-elect of Tasmania. Why I am doing this is a long story. I hope by next year I can tell you how to get hold of the finished product and you can read all about it. Meanwhile, if any of you knew Vernon, please let me now! I will interview you. I am thoroughly enjoying the privilege and challenge of writing about someone's life journey. The Australian Centre of Christianity and Culture have kindly given me a desk to work at and space to store Vernon's extensive archives, and regard me as one of their Centre Scholars.



We paused with a very large Western Grey Kangaroo in Perth after visiting the Cathedral where Vernon was Dean

Meanwhile, Geoff continues to put books together for friends, brushed up his photography, organised his photo collection and put together directories for both churches. (Yes, we still attend both churches—Geoff is church secretary for the Ainslie Church of Christ and I am for Holy Cross Anglican.) Geoff also put together a community talk, 'Tales of a Grocer's Son', indulging his fascination with the history of food companies.

I did my best to avoid taking on organisational jobs this year, paid ones at least, so that I could concentrate on my writing. But as we are both involved in various clubs and church activities, many of which we wrote about in our last epistle, we are never short of things to do. These continue and multiply! Hosting gatherings of the local Student Christian Movement was a new one and fun.

The Cornish project took us to Perth and then Brisbane to interview people and dig into archives. We went via Hong Kong where we caught up with friends and marked the seventeenth anniversary of our first 'date'. The venue was different and the date was a week out but the orchestra was the same. Close enough! Another memorable moment was visiting my former workplace, the Christian Conference of Asia, to be greeted by a band of monkeys at the gate.



The Hong Kong Wetland Park was a wonderful oasis in the big city

We sought out other green spaces in Hong Kong. Yes, bird-watching—the list grows! Birding also took us to Norfolk Island with the Canberra Ornithologists Group (COG). As well as meeting the Green Parrot and other endemic birds, we learnt a lot about the intriguing history and complicated politics of this beautiful dot in the Pacific Ocean. In six months' time, Norfolk Island will become more integrated into Australia. This is causing a lot of angst among the locals. While

they anticipate having access to Medicare, there is anxiety about the loss of independence and their distinctive way of life.

It is now seventeen years since I moved to Canberra from Hong Kong and soon after Geoff joined me here and we married. Canberra will soon claim the record for the place I have called home the longest at one stretch. I don't think North Essendon will ever lose that prize for Geoff (fifty years).



We spent ages watching a flock of Norfolk Island Green Parrots quietly feasting on fruit trees

Anyway, we are well and truly Canberrans now and fiercely fond of the bush capital. We have been here long enough to see neighbours come and go from around us. In 2015, Bryce died, Jenny next door moved to a retirement unit, and Liz and Kieran and their two boys moved to another suburb and will very soon move to Bangkok. And we now have Kate-down-the-road with Justin and their three young boys.

House sitting, house sitters and guests remain a big part of our lives. We house sat for family in Toowoomba and Brisbane last summer. Meanwhile, Harold and Pat (Liz's Canadian parents) house sat for us and then joined us in Queensland while Liz and co. moved house. Amanda, a kindred spirit and another Canadian, made our spare room her base for three months while she finished her PhD on the Forty-spotted Pardalote, an endangered Tasmanian bird. We basked in her glory as she was interviewed on ABC radio and spoke to COG about her research.



The evidence of Chris's exchange with an SUV. No-one was hurt though the other driver probably had a harder time with insurance companies. She went through a stop sign

Our ailments have been pretty minor in the big scheme of things. Geoff had surgery to help his waterworks flow better. (It snowed in Canberra that day.) I had my first bout of real flu, fainting with flair in the shower for good measure. We both kept the dentist in business.

On Christmas Eve, the day before Bryce died, the Alves far-flung family stopped where they were to have a special afternoon tea to mark the 100th



No, Geoff wasn't in the car accident. We both did a first aid course this year. We learnt a lot!

cousin) passed away.

So the circle of death, life and new beginnings goes on.

We hope that the coming year is one of joy and peace for you. Thanks for keeping in touch. That means a lot to us.

anniversary of Alice Alves (nee Forster), Geoff's mum. Later this month, the Ledger family will gather in Toowoomba to mark the 100th anniversary of Arthur Phillip Ledger, my dad, who was born on Australia Day. There are not too many of their generation left now. We visited Aunty Meg (my mum's sister) with Helen and Ron. She's doing pretty well. However, Aunty Thelma (Geoff's mum's