

Tropical news

BRINGING YOU THE LATEST NEWS
FROM OUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS
AROUND THE WORLD

JANUARY 2007

*We wish you a very
Happy New Year*



Editorial Ramblings

As we move forward into yet another year, we often hear of folks who make 'New Year's Resolutions'. If we may indulge in including a wish, rather than a resolution, Grace and I only have one; that all nations and people may live in peace, happiness and prosperity. We particularly wish that for all our family and dear friends around the world, many of whom live in troubled or unstable areas.

One thing that Grace and I have learned in the six years we've been married, is that life is full of surprises! None of us knows what 2007 will bring and what will happen, or where we will travel before we start writing this newsletter at the start of 2008. Isn't life exciting? Imagine how boring it would be if we knew everything that would happen - or even, in some cases, how frightening it might be. Being out of work is, of course, somewhat unsettling - unless one can afford the luxury of retirement. Who knows where Grace and I will be in a month's time, let alone a year.

We spent the Christmas in the home of Grace's family on the farm. It is so peaceful there when compared to where we live in the town. It is even possible to get a good night's sleep - a luxury in what must be one of the noisiest countries on Earth. It was such a shock to return here to the noise after being in quiet, rural England for so long.

We hope that all of you enjoyed a wonderful Christmas with your families and friends. We also hope that 2007 will be a good year for you all.

A double Rainbow that we saw from Okehampton during our recent visit - a sign of God's promises.



Beautiful Dartmoor



'At Home' near Taunton



While in England recently, we had a great time with Alan's son, Paul and his partner, Julie. It was especially good to visit them in their new home and we hope that they will be very happy there.

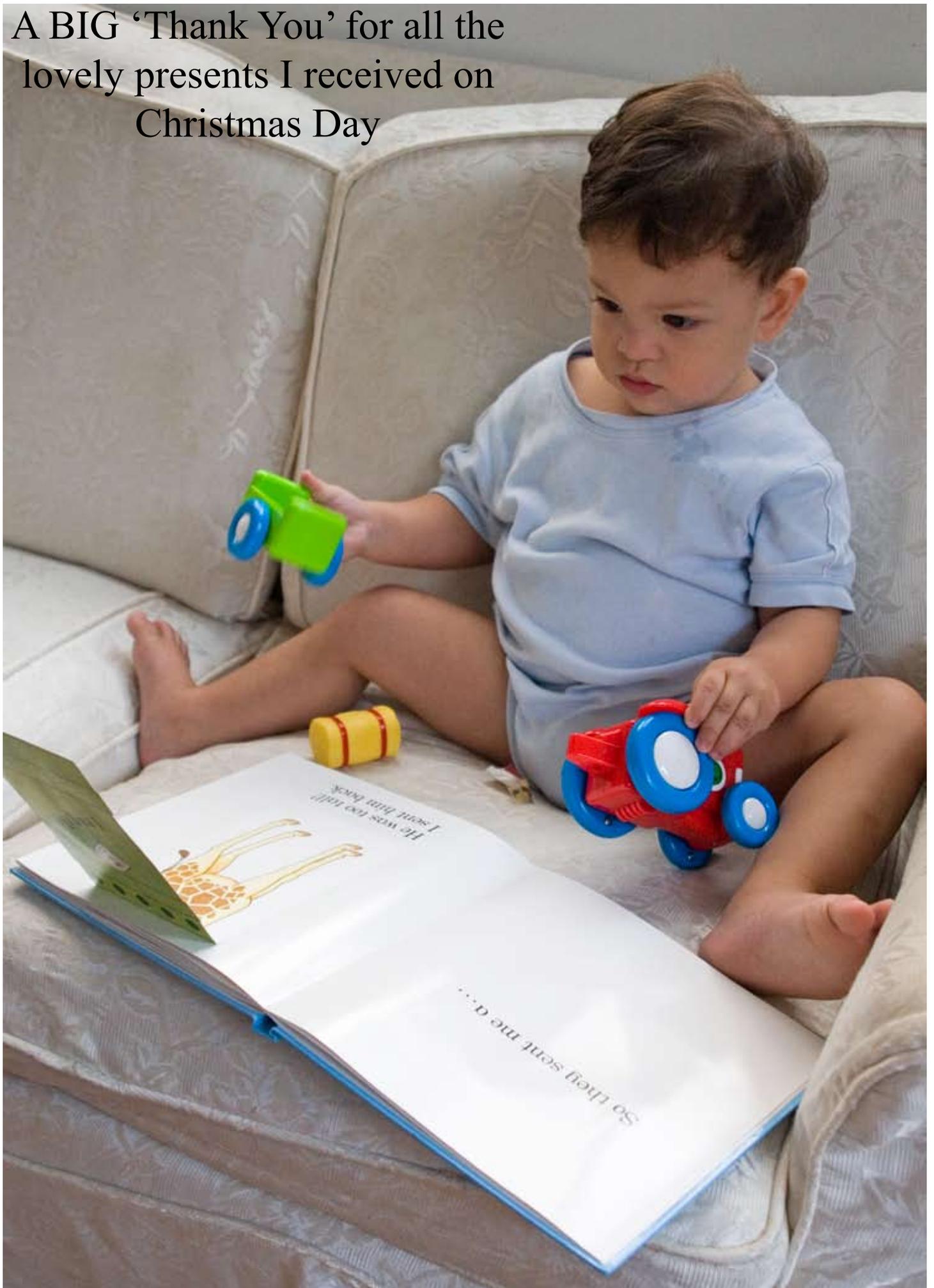
Relaxing in Paul & Julie's charming country cottage (top).

Paul under his best friend, Sebastian (left).

In their 'local', waiting for dinner



A BIG 'Thank You' for all the lovely presents I received on Christmas Day



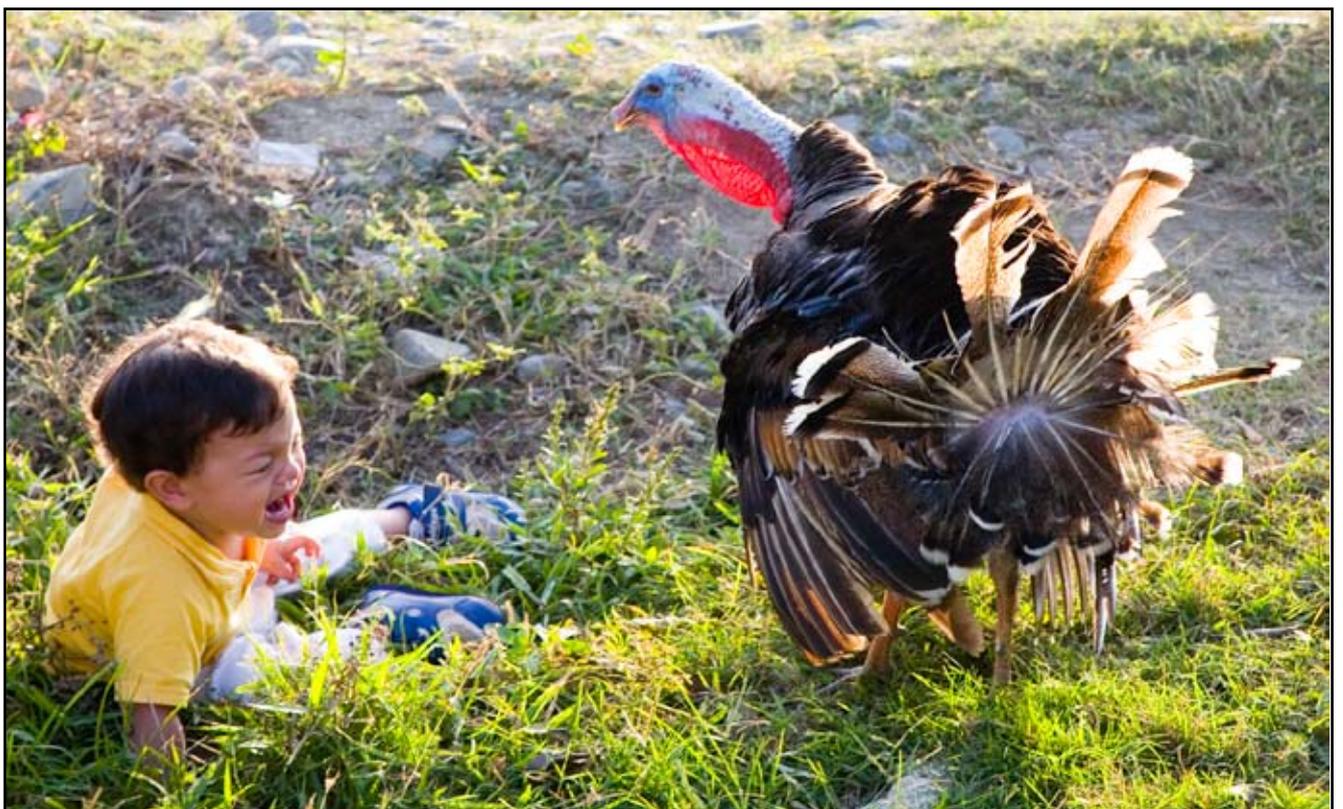
This is a super new book from my big brother, Paul, and Julie. The super Tractor and Trailer are from my 'Auntie' Valerie and 'Uncle' Keith



A bit self-conscious wearing some new clothes I received on Christmas Day

A Turkey's Revenge!

You may remember the story of our Christmas Turkey recounted in the last 'Tropical News'. Here is one of the survivors extracting its revenge on our Little Lad. The turkey really did attack John and I had to intervene to rescue him before he got badly injured. The poor little guy was very frightened, as one can imagine. To one so small, a turkey must seem like a very big, savage bird. As I intervened, the turkey launched an all-out attack, actually landing on John's chest - no doubt this would have been followed by a good pecking had I not been there to prevent it.



Our Christmas in the Philippines





Christmas 2006 was the first Christmas we'd had together in the Philippines since we got married in November 2000. Grace managed Christmas in the Philippines in that year, just before she left to join me in Kuwait, which she did by New Year 2001. I might add, that this time in the Philippines is the first since I left on 15 November 2000 - two days after we married. During those six years, Grace has only returned for two short holidays, so this Christmas with the family was quite a reunion. The two groups on the left show only a few of those who showed up to see us during the two days of Christmas. Grace and the ladies never seemed to stop providing food and drink for everyone and worked so hard to entertain all the many visitors.





These are just a few of the more than 500 photographs that I took during the two days of Christmas with the family on the farm.



Left to Right:
Rommel (Grace's eldest brother); Allen Gabriel (hiding); Daryll and Jake (Rommel's sons); Grace; John Paul Alan (JP).

Sitting at table: various of Grace's more distant family and neighbours.
Standing: Leopoldo - Grace's father.

Left to Right:
Rommel (Grace's eldest brother); Allen Gabriel (AG), Daryll and Jake (Rommel's sons); Rowena (Rommel's partner).

Left to Right:
Rowena (Rommel's partner) with Allen Gabriel, Jake and Daryll.

Left to Right:
Various relatives.
Standing on right is Grace's mother (Carlina).

Key to photographs on previous page

Left to Right:
John Paul Alan; Nena; ?; Rowena.

At head of table: Grace's youngest brother, Michael.
Grace's mother is in white shirt with red trim, sitting at table (on right).





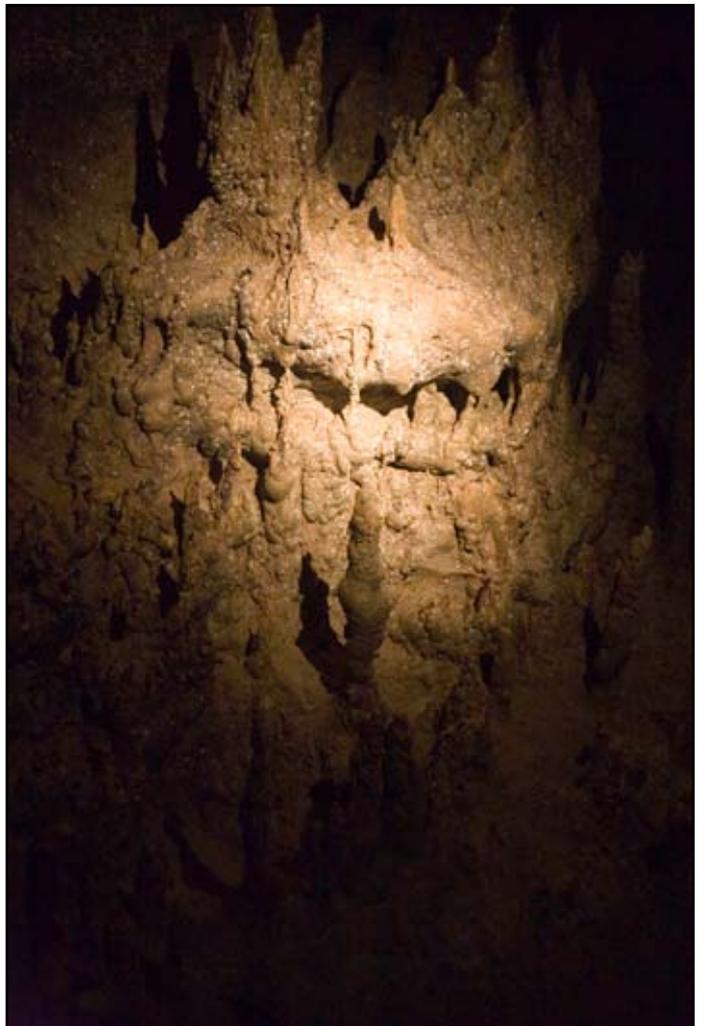
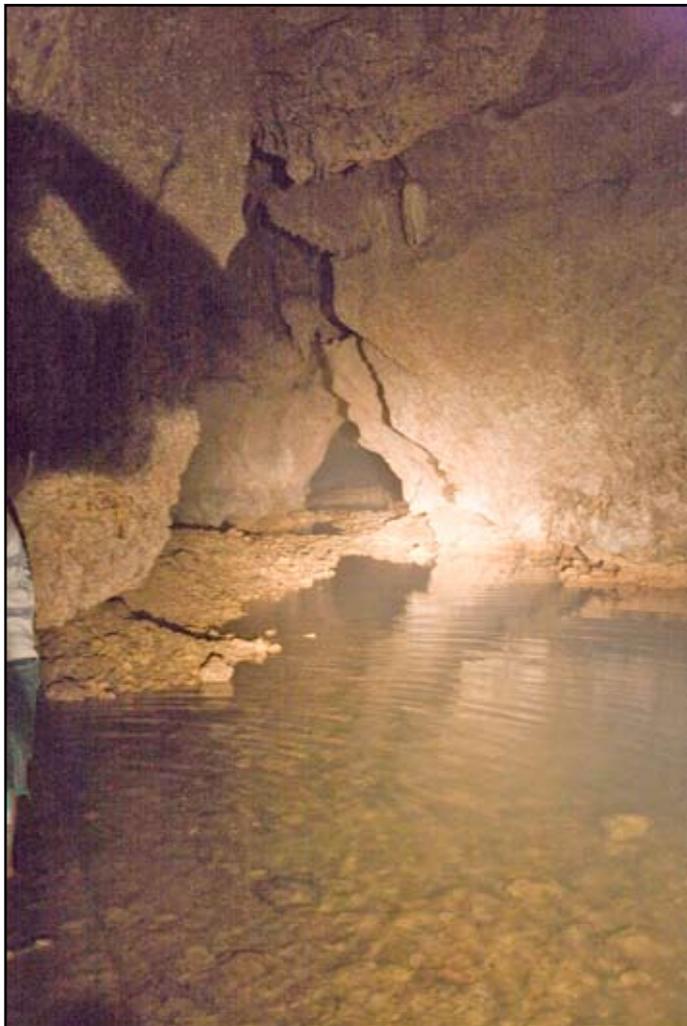
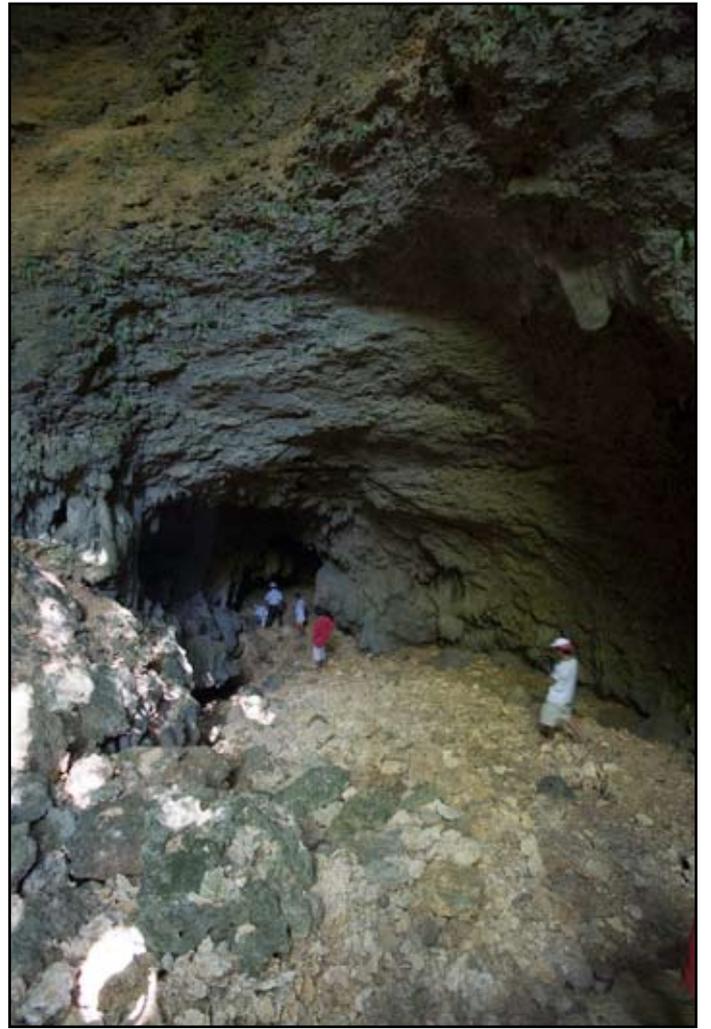
New Year's Day Safari

Whilst Grace and I are no David Attenborough when it comes to wildlife photography and programmes, we have been very surprised by our Little Lad's interest in such things.

When we first played one of David Attenborough's DVDs while JP was in the room, he immediately went and sat on the floor in front of the TV and watched avidly, totally focussed and concentrating, for about 20 minutes. I suggest that not many children of around 1 year old would do that for any TV programme, let alone a wildlife documentary where they can't even fully understand the language. However, it indicates to us that these programmes are so gripping that even a very young child will find them of great interest. I might add that this interest in these programmes has continued and whenever we play one of the David Attenborough DVDs he comes running from wherever he happens to be in the house, and climbs onto my lap to watch.

On New Years Day, Grace and I visited some caves nearby the family home. There we saw lots of bats and swifts, as well as a frog (top-right; we understand that it exudes a poison onto its back). Sadly, I am not sufficiently knowledgeable to be able to identify these creatures properly.





Alan's Reflections

Communication skills here are almost non-existent - people are so afraid of offending someone that they hardly speak beyond the superficial chit-chat level. This sometimes goes to extremes. Imagine, if you will, that you are working and living in the home of a family with whom you have contact throughout the day. Would you totally ignore a family member who was in obvious pain and suffering, and casually walk past them as though they didn't exist? Almost certainly not. Here is a true story to illustrate what I mean. Some time before we left to go to England, Grace and I had a few problems getting our little lad to sleep. I was on the bed with him while Grace went to have a shower. When he got to sleep, I got off the bed, well, I tried to. Something nasty had happened in my back and I could hardly move. The pain was excruciating. I called for Grace to help me. Eventually, after four attempts, our (now former) housekeeper deigned to pass on to Grace that I was calling for her (she didn't come to find out why I was calling for Grace despite the pained tone of my voice). Grace immediately came out of the bathroom and called to me. I asked her to "come here" and she immediately realised something wasn't right and shot up the stairs to help me. A little while later the housekeeper came up stairs and saw me propped up against the doorframe of our bedroom, with my head resting on it, tears of pain on my face and in obvious agony. What did she say or do? Nothing! Not a word was spoken except by Grace who said something about the children to which she made an acknowledgement. Not a word to me, or to Grace, such as would be normal anywhere else. Nothing. No "Are you OK?", or "Do you need any help?", or "Can I make you a cup of tea?" or "Shall I call a doctor?" NOTHING. She just walked into her room as though I wasn't even there. Not one fragment of human kindness, feeling or even curiosity about quite an extreme event taking place in front of her. This failure to communicate is very common here.

No one says or asks anything meaningful. Not even within families.

I well remember, when Grace travelled home to the Philippines, for the first time after we'd got married and had been living in Kuwait for a while. On her return, I asked her if her parents had asked her how she was getting on with her foreign husband and if I was treating her OK etc. Would you believe they had asked her NOTHING. Not one shred of even the most basic level of curiosity. It's as though they don't even *care*! And yet I know they do.

In our "*Editorial Ramblings*", Grace and I said that our wish for 2007 was that all nations and people may live in peace, happiness and prosperity. Looking back over history, one must wonder how many of the wars that man has had to endure have occurred because of a lack of communication. I suggest that many of them could have been avoided if people had spent time, quality time, communicating and thereby building relationships instead of merely going through political strategies aimed at causing antagonism and confrontation instead of peace and harmony. Is this just an ideal with no hope? Based on the stories I've told you above, it must be - let's face it, if people in the same house or in the same family can't communicate, what hope is there for politicians and world leaders to do so? Is it any wonder that people like Bush, who *refuse* to talk with the leaders of some countries - such as Iran and Syria, bring about so much unrest, pain and suffering? What a world we live in, where, despite all the technological means we have at our disposal, people are still unable to communicate. I pray that mankind's communication skills will improve in 2007 or we will face a very grim future indeed.

Alan

