

Tropical

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

news

AUGUST 2007



Editorial Ramblings



The rainy season is now upon us and we have already had over two feet of water in the road outside our home - one of the higher areas of Sta. Monica. Thankfully, our home was just above the high water mark - but it was very close to coming in - another inch or so and we'd have been inundated. We had some water enter through the kitchen door from the overflowing drain, but were able to staunch most of that, so no problem.

We spent a lot of time lifting our things into high cupboards and other places that we hoped would be above high water should it come inside the house. The folks across the road were less fortunate, having about 18 inches of water enter their house. It is also very difficult to do any photography at all - let alone get good photographs, for about 3 months or so while the rain just keeps on coming down. The photograph below (in one of the low lying areas of Sta. Monica) shows that the flood water has almost gone now - in this area, it was at least 3 feet higher than this at its peak.

We are delighted to have received some stunning photographs of Bosnia this month, from our friend Sawsan and her husband. Being a caravanning fan, it was particularly pleasing to see they are into caravanning in Bosnia. I wish they had caravans in the Philippines. We would love to receive more contributions like this from any of you who care to send them to us. Please send fairly large files - I prefer files of at least 2MB (.jpg) in size, so we can publish good quality images. Some of you may be surprised to know that the original newsletter for July was a document of almost 900MB in size, before being compressed and e-mailed as a .pdf file of about 4MB.



As I've been putting this newsletter together it has been put in my mind to express to you all how fortunate we are to have such useful tools as cameras and computer equipment. I don't say this at all glibly, but because one of the projects I'm currently working on is to document as much as possible about our family history, and to pass on to my children as much information as I can about the photographs and other documents belonging to our family as I possibly can, and to obtain other documents/records - before I too, pass on to new adventures. When my mother passed away, I inherited her collection of photographs, many of which were without captions. My first job was to digitise them using my scanner. This was important for a number of reasons: Photographic prints and negatives can be lost or damaged and are also likely to fade and change colour. By digitising them, I can then assemble the collection into an electronic book form that can be printed, stored on CD/DVD, e-mailed around the world and thereby can be of much greater use to the family, now and for future generations, than can a slowly deteriorating box of curly edged prints or fading scratched negatives. In fact this record of our history will become a book containing hundreds of pages.

This project has also got me trying to put together a family tree - actually several family trees that interlink with each other. What a task I have set myself! Without that other great tool we have available; the internet, much of this would have been very difficult, especially as I live outside my home country and therefore have very limited access to the official records - and as the postal service here barely works at all, let alone reliably. So far, I've managed to assemble some information about eight generations of Cook's, going back to a date of birth of 1795. It's a long way from being complete as I'm also making the tree branches extremely wide reaching, covering many families and offshoots. I just wish the facilities we have now were available to generations that passed this way before us. What a fantastic record of our family we would have had! Saying that, it also brings home how important it is to caption our photographs (and other documents) for future generations - who would never be able to identify people they had never known - as I'm now finding out! For our future generations, it is likely to be an even more difficult task than I have found it to be. This is because people in general move around more and travel greater distances than ever before. I urge you all to help your future kin to remember you (and your parents and grandparents etc) by passing on your **captioned** photographs and your autobiographies - and maybe even write your own

Alan

Front Cover photograph: Subic Bay taken from Baloy Beach, a short walk from our home in the Philippines.

Inside back cover photograph: Grace and John outside our home in Sta. Monica.

Back cover photograph: The sun going down along Baloy Beach.

Your prayers are needed...

for David and Ruth:

Dear Family and Friends,

I have been to the hospital this morning. The diagnosis is as follows:

I have stage 3b. Non-Hodgkinsons Lymphoma SLL. It is low grade and may remain dormant for a long period. I will begin treatment with Rituximab (Mabthera) and CVP Chemo, 6 cycles at 3 week intervals. I hope the side effects will not prevent me from working most of the time. I am fortunate to have Medical Insurance. Kuwaiti citizens are treated free, others have to pay £2,000 per injection, so it is not good for the poor labourers working here.

He also added, later: I am now on Chemotherapy and have spent 3 days on it since returning to Kuwait. I have been on the drip for 8 hours today.

for Leopoldo (Grace's father):

Grace and her father (*right*) went to Manila yesterday (24 August), to see the consultant about Leopoldo's prostate cancer test results and to discuss options. The cancer has not spread outside the prostate gland and the best option, as we see it at present, is to have an operation to remove this gland entirely. The family is still discussing the different possibilities and we will let you know in due course. We would, of course, appreciate the prayers of all of you during this difficult time.



for Joseph and his friend:

We have received another e-mail from our dear friend, Joseph who is under a great deal of stress at present, as he is looking after a friend who is seriously ill. We ask you to pray for both of them.

for Paul (Alan's son):

We believe that Paul (a Royal Marine Commando) is on active service in a hostile area, so we would value your prayers for his safety. We have read today (25 August) that, yet again, 3 more British soldiers have been killed by the incompetent Americans (in Afghanistan), so there is often more than one enemy to deal with in these situations. Not easy. People who are supposedly on our own side, should be the last thing we need to worry about when in a battle zone.

It brought back memories of things told me by my father about his military service during World War II in the Royal Air Force. He worked with a lot of R.A.F. bomber crews and he said that when they were returning to England after a bombing raid over Germany, they were always far more worried about being shot down by trigger happy Americans than they were by the Germans. Seems like nothing has changed during the last 60 plus years.

Bosnia - My Home

After a recent visit to her home country, our friend Sawsan sent us these photographs taken by her husband, Bilal Al-Omari.

Sawsan wrote:

"I had such a beautiful time in Bosnia that I wanted to share those special moments with all my friends.

All the photographs were taken in the Prokoshko area. The lake's name is Prokoshko jezero: 'The lake of Prokoshko', which is composed of the melting ice from the surrounding mountains during spring and summer. The small stream flows down from the main lake further up the mountain. If you would like to see the first European pyramids, look in a small city near Sarajevo called Visoko. Also in the pictures are my husband "the handsome" my daughter, my father and one of my cousins."





Alan's Reflections

Alan's Reflections

One of the interesting aspects of writing this column, and indeed putting our magazine together, is the feedback it generates. Of course, not everyone agrees with what I write and neither would I expect them to. One, very dear friend, castigated me very severely for what I wrote about the UK in the June edition. She even went as far as saying that she couldn't believe what I was writing about *her* country. When I said it was my country too, she said it was no longer my country. She went on to say that those who get out always come scurrying back when they want some free medical treatment and criticised me for (probably) doing likewise in the future - I had to inform her that I was still paying into the system (so it is far from free!) with my contributions to the National Insurance service (I've been paying for over 42 years - despite being out of the country and not benefitting from this service for a quarter of that time). I might add that I still pay tax on income received from interest generated in the UK too. When I mentioned that hundreds of thousands of people are leaving the UK every year, she asked where I got my figures from. Of course, the figures I quoted were not figures I'd invented in my imagination, but were obtained from UK government websites - and those sources were quoted in the text of my writing. Sadly, many people try to argue against FACT! It is impossible to argue against fact. A fact is a something true. Or, as the OED states: *Something that has really occurred or is actually the case.... a particular truth known by actual observation or authentic testimony....*

In many of my scribblings on this page I have offered my opinions, which I know are sometimes controversial, but to be castigated for presenting facts was not something I expected - particularly when I provided the sources of information. Of course, my friend lives in a very pleasant part of the up-market home counties commuter belt - and has done for about 45+ years. The quality of life there cannot be compared with the parts of the UK where people live in fear of their lives (and want to escape from), such as Moss Side in Manchester, where 15 year old schoolboy Jessie James was recently murdered because he wouldn't join one of the local gangs. And quality of life in the UK was what I was writing about - and I gave figures to support what I wrote about when I said that so many people were leaving - or migrating internally.

As Jessie's mother was reported as saying: *"Little did I know the gangs made Jessie's life a living hell. Jessie was cornered, pointed out and intimidated at every opportunity. He was coerced and compelled to join the gang. He refused to choose but they said 'If you don't take sides there is going to be nuf blood around here'. Three weeks*

later Jessie was a dead man. Jessie was brought up in the church, he knows right from wrong, he had a choice, he took that choice and now he's dead."

And it's not just teenagers in poor inner city areas - only today I read about a man of my age who died after being assaulted by a large group of teenagers in Warrington. Neighbours said he was attacked after he approached some youths causing criminal damage. What a reward for being public spirited! And, also today, I read of a man being shot while riding his motorcycle on the M40. Every day, we read of these crimes (tragedies) in the UK.

Many (hundreds of thousands) people are now choosing to leave the UK. What would be your choice if you lived in a place such as Moss Side?

Many of you who are concerned about the way our country is deteriorating, may find the writings of Melanie Phillips interesting and thought provoking. See for yourself at: <http://www.melaniephillips.com/>

The one encouraging word was that my friend was very pleased with the way she'd been treated by the NHS. If only more people could speak so highly of this service. If only my friend could have read what I'd written more objectively.

On a related topic; there may be some who say (in view of my complaining about the UK - and, previously, about the Philippines) that maybe I wouldn't be contented wherever I lived! There may be some truth in that - but not for the reason(s) that you might envisage. One of the reasons that mankind has developed from ancient times, is that he is constantly seeking to improve everything. This is particularly the case as far as Westerners are concerned, as we are, by nature, always striving to invent things, improve our productivity or efficiency - or whatever. As an engineer, I've also been brought up and trained to think this way and therefore I always notice when things could be improved, or run more efficiently, or changed for the better and I am willing to complain about poor service or poor quality products (etc.) that I've bought. I even complain about myself, to myself, when I feel I should have done better. This is how sportsmen (for example) develop their prowess. They are never satisfied with their own performance and strive to improve all the time. How do you think world champions become world champions? Talent, yes - but never being contented with their performance to the extent that they always want to improve it (and work at doing so), is what really counts.

This doesn't happen in all countries and is, probably, one of the main reasons why some countries fail to develop - or, at least, fail to develop and improve as much as some other countries. There are societies where people WILL

NOT COMPLAIN! They moan and groan and whine to each other, and blame the boss or the government etc. but they will not complain, or DO anything. The reason for this is that if someone complains, the person receiving the complaint takes offence and gets upset and angry with the complainer! So, NOTHING improves. And so, they all live in shit unhappily ever after!

If we didn't have this discontentment in our genes (and be prepared to do something about it!) we'd still be living in the stone age - as are some countries and societies around the world! Or, maybe we wouldn't bother to become educated and well qualified and seek out a better job or a better way of life - or a better home or a better car etc, or find a job in another part of the world than our own. Maybe we'd just sit on our bums and watch the world go by hoping we'd receive a handout from a passer-by or from a relative who was prepared to become educated and work for a living (as do so many here) - or even from the welfare state (where it exists). Stop complaining at your peril!

Unfortunately, mankind doesn't always get it right and can sometimes make things worse than they were to start with! But in the end (given enough time), improvement usually occurs and progress is made. Now where is my friend, Fred Flinstone?

In the July edition, I wrote about the way Grace and I flit about the globe as a way of life. I received some very thoughtful comments about this, which I quote in full:

Regarding the question you posed at the end of your newsletter, I'd hazard a guess that more and more people are living the 'global village' existence - but it's still the preserve of a privileged strata (not strictly correlating with wealth - it's a mindset and a lifestyle choice too) and on a global scale you cannot really describe it as usual.

I have thought about the two questions you posed. Living in America, I was one who usually agreed that most Americans do not travel abroad and, if they do, they go to resorts in Cancun, Jamaica, or Europe. This is still true and with the hassle of airport security many are still vacationing in the States. One of the main reasons for this is that most Americans get a two week vacation, (maybe three weeks) per year. They break it up usually taking one week at a time. Only the lucky are able to travel for any length of time.

It is also encouraging to know that so many of you appreciate our photography and writing. Here are some comments we've received about the last edition:

The pictures were just gorgeous. They are really beautiful. It makes me wonder how many long hours you spent on this

July newsletter. Alan, it was well worth it. I hope one of these days somebody takes good notice of your pictures and publish them.

Wonderful photographs. My compliments to Grace for her lens expertise.

It is so good to see the pictures and to read your text - which reads splendidly. Anyway, thought I should let you know that at least one guy is kind of retiring to the old country - though with heavy heart in some ways. In a couple of days I fly out for the last time, and will cease this existence as a world traveller, but with every intention of continuing to travel in Europe - places where I have never set foot. Your pictures confirm in my mind that you did well to marry into the Philippines! And I am very happy for you both, and of course for John Paul. God bless, and keep well.

Thanks for a bumper edition newsletter. Great photos of Hongkong.....especially the one taken at the top of a shopping mall.

Thanks for your brilliant photographs.

Thanks for your newsletter and all the wonderful photographs. I was particularly impressed by the Buddha snaps - well done Grace!

It looks as though you enjoyed yourselves in Hong Kong. Tell Grace her new camera is working fine. There are some cracking photo's there in the newsletter. You be careful mate, she will be putting you and your Canon out of work???

One perverted (*now former*) friend sent this comment:
Good set of pictures. It is amazing what you can find on the internet. I took great exception to this as, unless otherwise stated, all photographs are our own work. The only exception to this are photographs depicting our old family history pictures. These will usually have been taken by various members of the family. Those submitted by other folks (such as Sawsan - in this issue) are credited with their name somewhere in their submission. After all our efforts to get things just right, we can do without outrageous insults.

I also sent some pages of various newsletters to a professional photographer who travels the world taking photographs for his clients, as he'd dropped by the house a few days ago and had a play with my Canon camera (he uses Nikon). He sent these words of encouragement:

Some great shots there! Very impressed with your family magazine layout. If we ever get our magazine back on it's feet, we could certainly use your talents!

Keep up the excellent shooting! Praise indeed.

Alan



