

Northern

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

news

December 2016
Part II

Editorial Ramblings



I thought I'd resurrect our newsletter once more after a very long break. Some readers will remember that I published our monthly news for more than four years and only gave it up when I started work on the programming of a new church website. Sadly, that website 'crashed' a few years ago and the project came to an untimely end. Anyway, the coming new year brings about a new start to our little magazine. Grace, JP and I only hope that it brings about a change for the better in our lives after the succession of tragedies and misfortunes that have dogged our lives since we returned to England in August 2014. This doesn't mean that we can forget, let alone recover from, the past - hence the black border around the cover of our magazine, a reminder of our dear little Annelise - see our new family portrait (*above left*), taken on Christmas Day.



On 19 December, Grace celebrated her birthday. This was a very low key affair with only the three of us in our home to say **HAPPY BIRTHDAY** (*see photograph, left*). This was also the day that JP 'went missing' after school, but turned up none the worse for wear about an hour later - after both Grace and I had suffered nervous breakdowns! Poor JP has been suffering a great deal of pain, mainly headaches but also abdominal pain since he started high school. We even had to take him to A&E one night as he was screaming in pain. He is currently being monitored by a consultant at the Royal Preston Hospital, but the only diagnosis likely is that his pain is brought about by stress. We were so relieved that the MRI scan results indicated that there was nothing untoward inside his head - such as a brain tumour that had brought about Annelise's demise. Other family news: Grace's youngest brother, Michael, is now working in Saudi Arabia as a company nurse. He has to stay there for a year before getting any leave to go home to visit his family in the Philippines. We hope that he will soon pass his IELTS English language examination so that he can get a job here and come to live in England with his family.



During the next few months I hope to add more content to our website. We already have about 100 videos uploaded to it. Building Annelise's website took me many hours - usually sitting next to her bed in the hospital in the small hours of the morning. One of the factors I have to consider is the now common use of mobile devices for surfing the internet. This has meant that I've had to change some of the code for every web page on our site. Apple devices, in particular, cause me pain as they don't conform to any of the usual standards. If you look at Annelise's '*Happy and Smiling Gallery*', you will see that it has changed - I had to re-program the whole page. I have to give credit to JP for discovering this for me. We were recently forced into buying him a genuine iPad for his school work (not impressed with the school - and JP hates it!). When he visited Annelise's photograph gallery to show his friends the photographs of his little sister, nothing showed on the screen except a message stating that *Flash* wouldn't play! The new (java script) gallery works for him now!

above: A very lucky boy! JP with some of the wonderful Christmas gifts he received.

We would like to thank all of you who sent Christmas cards or other greetings and presents during the festive season. We do appreciate your kindness and the kind thoughts, hopes and prayers that accompanied them. We hope that life will be kind to you in 2017. We hope that life will be somewhat kinder to us too.

Cover Photograph: Late afternoon mist rising from the golf course just across the road from our home.

Photograph next page: We often get an interesting sky to look at in the early morning - this is one - taken from JP's bedroom. How super it would be to be on one of those aeroplanes flying off to the sunshine!





Christmas Past 8 years ago - 2008

Can you remember where you were and what you were doing all those years ago?

Lots of events took place in our lives during 2008. In this month, December, I decided to give Grace and JP (age 3) a lovely surprise for our first Christmas since moving to England - a trip to Scotland.

My plan was to spend Christmas in a remote, idyllic country cottage (*photograph above*) at the southern tip of the Mull of Galloway. Never have we experienced such a cold and miserable Christmas! Despite having every possible heating appliance running on the maximum setting for 24 hours/day AND having an open fire roaring away, we could not get the place warm! The heat losses from this cottage must have been colossal. In addition, JP and I both became very unwell. In fact, I really thought I was dying. I've never felt so unwell in my whole life. The only room in the cottage that we could get tolerably warm was one bedroom that was in an extension on the back of the cottage, and we lived there for most of the 8 days we stayed. We were supposed to be there for two weeks but as soon as I was just about well enough to drive (Grace hadn't passed her UK driving test at that time) we made our escape and went home to Wolverhampton. We would have gone home sooner, but there was no way I could have driven safely before the time we left, so we had to stay where we were. Before I became ill, I did manage to take a few photographs which I have reproduced here. It has certainly put us off going away for Christmas.



above: JP in bed, by the fire and well wrapped up, on the evening of Christmas Day 2008.

above left: the light house at the tip of the Mull of Galloway at sunrise.

left: JP (+ with Alan) on Christmas Day 2008.

right: JP as a shepherd in the nativity play at his school - before we travelled to Scotland.





Late afternoon at Port Logan on the Mull of Galloway - Boxing Day 2008.

Christmas Past 10 years ago - 2006

Photograph taken on Christmas Day
2006, in Alaminos, Philippines.
JP at 19 months of age.





Christmas Present - 2016
JD with his new metal detector

Christmas Day Birthday Party with our family in Bani, Philippines

The birthday of Grace's father, Leopoldo.



L to R - Grace's father, Leopoldo, Grace's mother, Carlina, Grace's nephew, Alexander, Grace's aunt, Florida



L to R - Grace's sister, Michelle, Grace's nephew, Alexander, Grace's mother, Carlina, Grace's nephew Daryll.

Christmas with our family in Toronto, Canada



L to R - Steve, Nelly, Leonie, Joash (behind), Grandma (age 93), Vee, Cindy, Rodelito, Cecille.



L to R - Grandma, Nelly, Cecille, Cherie Vee, Rodelito, Vee, Marivic, Mark?

A Tale of Two Computers

For those who are interested in technical matters about computers.

I was informed in early December 2016 that my main computer couldn't be repaired. This laptop computer was an HP Pavilion with a 17" screen, so I was rather disappointed, to say the least.

Whilst we were in the hospital looking after Annelise, I had bought a second-hand Fujitsu Lifebook E Series laptop computer which was somewhat inferior to the HP in many ways. That has now changed as I've upgraded this using some of the parts from the HP computer. I might also add at this stage that the Fujitsu is a much better built computer than the HP, and it has some useful features that aid upgrading. In fact, the owner of the computer business where I took the HP to be repaired said that he had more failures from HP computers than any other make. Of course, it could also be that there are more of them around but that was his take on them. He also said that Fujitsu computers were very well made.

The first thing to upgrade, and here I got really lucky, was the memory (RAM). The Fujitsu only had 4 GB of RAM, whereas the HP had 8 GB. I took the chips out of the HP and installed them in the Fujitsu and, hey presto, they were accepted by the motherboard and BIOS, so that was the first good news. I might add that laptop motherboards are very fussy about what will work and what won't - usually they won't! I was very fortunate that the chips from the HP worked in the Fujitsu.

Another item to upgrade was the hard drive (HDD). This was a straightforward job as far as swapping them over physically, however, that wouldn't make the drive work on the Fujitsu because the system drivers etc. wouldn't be on the 'new' drive. Of course, the best way is to copy all the drivers then reboot and reinstall them, together with Windows and all your software. That way you can get rid of all the rubbish that accumulates in Windows and elsewhere on the system.

Doing that usually involves several days work, which I didn't fancy, so I cloned the original disk onto the drive from the HP (which I'd installed in an external caddy), then, once the cloning had been completed, took the drive out of the caddy and installed it into the Fujitsu. Much to my relief it booted up and worked. Doing it this way, the computer was only out of action for a few minutes. The next job was to re-size the disk partition (cloning

maintains the original size of the disk partition) which was also done easily enough using some appropriate software. This gave me what I really needed which was a massive increase in drive capacity - which is why I needed to do the job in the first place. The drive in the Fujitsu was only 140 GB whereas that in the HP was 1 TB, so that was a huge upgrade.

The next upgrade gave me another huge improvement in performance. Neither of my two computers were equipped with USB 3.0 ports. However, the Fujitsu was equipped with a PCMCIA card slot and I found this could be fitted with a card that would give me 3x USB 3.0 ports. Now, as USB 3.0 shifts data many times faster than USB 2.0 (by a factor of up to 10x), this was well worth obtaining. The cost of this upgrade was only a few pounds and worth every penny. Data that once took hours to transfer now takes only minutes. As I keep all my data on external HDDs that is a big bonus - especially when I'm transferring massive amounts of data from one HDD to another. Of course, the drives themselves need to be USB 3.0 rated to obtain the maximum speed but I've been buying USB 3.0 HDDs for some years so that wasn't an issue.

Now I've carried out all these upgrades, the Fujitsu computer is every bit as good as, if not better than, the HP (I'd made sure the Fujitsu had a good computer chip in it before I bought it (it's an Intel Core i5-2520M CPU @ 2.50GHz, 2 Cores, 4 Logical Processors) except in one respect - that gorgeous 17" screen. I've only got the standard (and not very good quality) 15" screen on the Fujitsu but even that problem isn't insurmountable as there is a DP (Display Port) connection on the Fujitsu so I can connect it to another monitor or, by using an adaptor, connect it to the HDMI socket of our Full HD television - and this works brilliantly - unless someone else wants to watch TV! I did think about putting this 47 inch TV on my desk in my office and using it as a monitor, but Grace and JP were rather less than impressed with that idea.

The Fujitsu has certainly proved itself to be a worthy machine since I bought it, as this was the laptop computer I took with me on our bicycle ride along the River Rhine path (Eurovelo 15). You can read our story at URL: <https://cyclingtherhine2016.blogspot.co.uk/>.

I just hope it continues to work well for a long time to come as high spec. laptop computers don't come cheap.

Alan's Reflections

Alan's Reflections

A few nights ago, just before Christmas, I had put JP to bed and was working in my home office. A short time later he called out to me. He asked me to go and be with him. As I lay on his bed with him, he told me that he was lonely. He said (not verbatim) that he'd always been lonely as he'd always wanted a brother or sister and, just as he'd been granted his wish, his little sister had been taken away from him. He said losing her was probably even worse for him than it had been for Grace and I as she'd been a child like he is and they loved each other so much - as children with a special bond, and now she was gone and he was lonely again. He said that even on holiday he was lonely as she should have been paddling in the shallow water with him when they were on the beach together. How heart breaking is that? Whilst one cannot fully know what is going on in another's heart and mind, for JP, losing Annelise has been extremely tough. Perhaps far more than we can really know or even fully appreciate. One fact we do know is that she is always on his mind and he constantly talks about her - and to her. Wherever we are or whatever we're doing, JP talks about his beloved sister, often just as though she's there with him (which, for all we know, she may well be).

Our Christmas this year has been rather more subdued than it might otherwise have been. Grace and I aren't fond of having lavish Christmas celebrations anyway so we didn't do anything special apart from erecting an artificial tree with a few lights and baubles on it for JP. On Christmas Day, we attended Preston City Mission for the Christmas Day service, then drove to Warton to visit the grave of Annelise. Grace was asked to work on Boxing Day! Some kind friends near Bromley had invited us to spend Christmas with them but we declined their kindness as we weren't really in a celebratory frame of mind and wouldn't want to be 'damp squibs' at their party. We were so touched by their kindness. How wonderful it is to have such kind and thoughtful friends. It was much the same when Annelise was taken ill and spent all that time in hospital. Our dear friends were so kind, helpful and supportive and many travelled very considerable distances to come and see us and comfort us during those long dark days when we were often suffering great distress. Some even took JP under their protective 'wings' and looked after him as though he was their own son. Our wonderful medical team at the Manchester Royal Children's Hospital and those from Derian House and other charities also gave us their full support - and many of those people continue to do so even though it is now some months since we



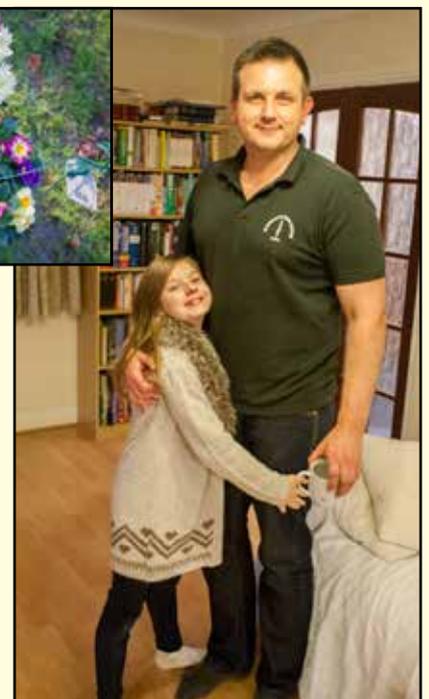
above: Almost one year ago - 10 January 2016 - Just how much these two really loved each other we can never fully comprehend, but this photograph tells its own wonderful story. By this time, Annelise had endured eight brain operations plus numerous other procedures and infections as well as massive amounts of chemotherapy (hence the lack of hair) and other medicines, and yet she was still able to manage a smile for JP. We believe her last smile was on 28 January 2016.

lost Annelise. We are so fortunate, and grateful, to have all these caring friends and specialists looking after us. Not only that, but we've received many messages of support and encouragement from folks all over the world. Without all these friends we would be very much alone. You mean so much to us and we thank you all for your love, friendship and support.



above: Christmas flowers in the churchyard for Annelise.

right: We were delighted to receive a visit from my son, Paul, and his daughter, Emily on Christmas Eve.



During the early part of this month, I shared my love of travel with a dear friend and said that I'd love us to be able to just go off with our caravan and 'disappear' from the normal way of living and tour around wherever we wanted to go. I was surprised, and delighted, with his reply: *I agree with you, the gypsy life is the way to go. A true Soulmate!*

I replied: *The thought of having to stay in one place until JP completes his education fills me with horror in many ways. By the time he's through I'll be nearer 80 than 70 and that is only on the basis that I've not gone to join Annelise by then. I really don't know what the answer is or what to do about it. At the very earliest, it's another 5 years and then only if he could travel with us (and if Grace was willing to go travelling, which is unlikely). By then, I'll be 72 and I just hope my health stays good. In the meantime, all I have to look forward to are short holidays - and then only if we have money.*

As I used to say to Grace many years ago: *No job, no money; No money, no honey.* I might add that I've always had this wanderlust and it really is incurable. Unfortunately, there was little opportunity to travel when I was a young man and I now have a lot of years to catch up - and few years in which to do so. I'd be off like a shot if I could - with Grace and JP, of course.

In 1990, I met a couple who drove their rig onto the Henley-on-Thames caravan site on which I was staying. I got chatting to the man and he told me they'd sold their house 12 years earlier and set off on their life of touring in their caravan. He said it was the best thing they'd ever done and how wonderful it was to wake up in the morning and say, for example, *'Let's go to Italy today'* - and GO! He said that as the weather started to deteriorate during the late autumn, they would gradually make their way to south-west Spain where they would meet up with other folks doing the same thing - many of whom they had met in previous years. They'd spend the winter in a mild climate swapping stories about their adventures and planning new ones. In early spring, they'd head out to discover new places and have new adventures once again. How wonderful. What a fantastic way to live. If only I was writing this from my caravan parked alongside the Mediterranean Sea instead of freezing in Lancashire. Dream on.....

A few weeks ago I spotted an advertisement regarding an English teaching job in Cartagena in southern Spain. It only paid about £1000 / month (nett). As a matter of curiosity, I priced for staying in my caravan for 4 months on a nearby site and it worked out at about £10 / night - including water and electricity. The site had an indoor and outdoor swimming pool, gym, bar, restaurant, toilet and shower facilities etc. and walk out of the site and you are on a beautiful beach by the side of the Mediterranean Sea. I sure was tempted! Good place to go for the winter. ***"Let's Go, JP! Let's Go, Grace!"***

Of course, one could argue that my trip with JP last summer was a good start but even that was spoiled by

the pressure of a time limit in order to get JP back to England so he could attend school. Had we been able to ride for a longer time we would have completed the full distance. How I wish we could take him out of school! In fact, the weekend before he broke up for the Christmas holiday, I informed Grace that I was going to do just that! I'd looked into the legalities of doing so and found it was much easier than I'd expected. Grace eventually persuaded me from doing so, at least for the time being. We've arranged a meeting with his head teacher soon after the school holiday. If she (the head teacher) can resolve JP's issues at school (see *Editorial Ramblings*), he can continue attending. If not, I now know what to do. Doing this would mean that we could all (possibly) go off on our travels more frequently and for longer. What an education he would receive that way. Better than anything he would learn in school. What a thought! Don't tempt me too much! That said; travelling is usually expensive - money we don't have.

Continuing the 'travel' theme, I was delighted to read that there is an ongoing expedition to plan, develop, promote, and maintain the Transcaucasian Trail - a new hiking trail across the Caucasus region linking roughly two dozen existing and proposed national parks in the area. The network will consist of two intersecting trail corridors, each roughly 1500 km long. One corridor, oriented east to west, will connect the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, and the other, oriented north to south, will connect the Greater Caucasus and the Lesser Caucasus. This is a large wilderness area that is almost completely unexplored by western tourists. I really hope they make it into a trail that can be ridden on a bicycle. I've written to them today (Boxing Day) asking them not to forget us cyclists. You can read more about this venture at URL: <http://transcaucasiantrail.org/en/> and <http://transcaucasian.com/>. You can also view a short video at URL: <https://vimeo.com/192392143>. It would be marvellous if they could link it to two existing cycle routes; Eurovelo routes 6 (from the Atlantic to the Black Sea - <http://www.eurovelo.com/en/eurovelos/eurovelo-6>) and 13 (the Iron Curtain Trail - <http://www.eurovelo13.com/>). I hope I live long enough to see it completed and am still fit enough to be able to ride my bicycle along this route one day.

Many years ago, I had a thought that has stayed with me ever since. It was rather like a dream. Maybe that's where the thought came from originally. I don't remember exactly. That thought, or dream, was that I was travelling alone with my bicycle. I have no idea where I was in my travels, but that was how I lived. No home; just my bicycle; travelling. I've often thought of that and wondered if that is how I will end up. Life is full of surprises. Anything can happen. I just hope I have a laptop computer and camera with which to record my adventures. There again, who would read my stories or view my photographs? JP? Knowing JP, he would want to be travelling with me so no doubt he would come and find me wherever I happened to be - riding along on his own bicycle!

New Year Resolutions - or some plans for the future?

I've never been a fan of making New Year Resolutions. However, I have been thinking of what may or may not lie ahead for us in 2017. Of course, trying to find somewhere of our own to live is a priority. We seem to be fated not to make any progress on that score. Try as I do, nothing seems to work out. We have looked at numerous properties but with no result. Only this morning (30th Dec.) I went to see a property that I was really optimistic about. It was in a good area and the price was just about what we could afford. It has been on the market for a long time and the price has been dropping throughout that time. As I walked up the garden path looking at the structure, I could immediately see why it hasn't sold. Subsidence! The front of the house is falling into the ground. It felt like I'd been kicked where it hurts - yet again. Of course, it could be sorted out - but at what cost? More disappointment; more stress; no result. I feel I'm not coping very well with everything that has happened over the last three years. Three years is a long time when nothing seems to work out in life. Until we resolve our housing situation it feels like life is on hold and no progress can be made. I really am at my wits end - as is Grace.

What would be of great assistance at the moment would be finding a good job / contract, but again, everything seems to be going wrong with that too. I apply for several jobs a week but I don't even get called to an interview, much less receive a job offer. They must think I'm old and past it. This situation in itself is enough to make anyone feel old and depressed. On top of everything else, it just adds to the nightmare. I often wonder what almighty power is causing us all these problems and stopping us from having a 'normal' life. You cannot imagine the pressure I'm under at present.

Sometimes, it all seems too much and I just want us all to disappear into the unknown. Even my camera gear is on its last legs. It's well over ten years old and has probably taken close to 100 000 photographs, so it certainly doesn't owe me anything. In fact, it's been a remarkably good camera, especially given the abuse it's received over all those years. In technology terms, it's an antique. I also need a new set of lenses and new video equipment. I suppose £15 000 would just about get me started. No chance of that happening though.

If you think that £15 000 is a lot, think again. We've just been watching Gordon Buchanan: Elephant Family & Me on the TV (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0875vs8>). I'm sure you'll know his name as he is a renowned wildlife film maker of amazing talent and ability. Anyway, I noticed that one of the lenses he was using was the Canon 50 mm to 1000 mm cine lens which costs \$US78 000 - and that's without the camera and other lenses and bits and pieces. Refer to URL: <https://www.usa.canon.com/internet/portal/us/home/products/details/lenses/cinema/cine-servo/cine-servo->

50-1000mm-t5-0-8-9-pl. Of course, it's an essential piece of kit for him and well worth every penny of its enormous cost as that is nothing when included as part of the overall budget for the programmes he makes.

Make no mistake; whatever equipment Gordon uses, it would result in nothing good at all without his incredible photographic skills and dedication in getting such great results. He is of the same ilk as Alan and Joan Root, famous for their 1972 film, *The Flight of the Snow Geese* and other wonderful wildlife programmes. Much of the work they did was pioneering in the way they obtained such amazing footage.

Of course, I'm nowhere close to being in the same league as people like Alan Root and Gordon Buchanan and could never get close to their standards, regardless of how much money I spent on equipment. However, when I see how *technically* bad my photographs are in terms of image quality, I realise that even with my limited skills, I desperately need some new equipment.

One of the things I (and all other photographers) have to endure from time to time is the comment made after someone has viewed some of my, never brilliant, photographs. The comment is always along the lines of "*You must have a really good camera to take photographs as good as that*". What an insult! It's like saying to Picasso or Rembrandt "*You must have some really good brushes to paint as well as that*". Imagine what Michelangelo might have said had someone said that to him just after he'd completed painting the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. I don't think I'd want to be standing too close to him!

I was chatting with Grace the other day about something else close to my heart; writing. I have a number of small books, and one not so small, on the go that I'm writing (not that I'm particularly good at writing, I just enjoy doing it) and I told her that I needed to have more focus and discipline to get these books finished and published. Maybe that would help bring in some more funds. One of the day-dreams I had as a boy was to be able to publish my own work. I even tried producing a hand-written magazine which had to be labouriously hand copied every time I wanted to send someone the latest issue. How marvellous it would have been then to have the technology we have now to be able to fulfill my little dream so long ago. I marvel at this every day.

With Grace being out of the house so much nowadays, I find it hard to get motivated. Isn't that odd? When I write, I really do need peace and quiet, yet, when Grace is out, part of me seems to go out with her and I'm restless and demotivated all day until she returns home.

I've got to get my act together. This is my New Year Resolution - Oh! and buy a house! If only I could.....

Happy New Year.



The Lancaster Canal on an icy December morning - not exactly the Mediterranean Sea, let alone in the tropics.