

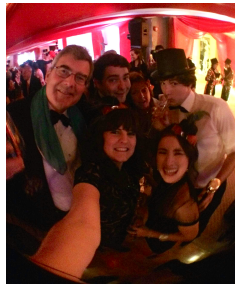
Addis Christmas Letter 2014

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Cripes. Where did that year go? I signed off last year's missive with our plans to party big and we certainly did that. Last Christmas Eve, Corky threatened to dampen the festivities by sternly informing Kate that staying out until the early hours of Christmas Day was not what was required, what with guests coming round for pre-lunch cocktails etc. etc. That she was still sternly pursuing this line at 4am in Amazonia in Wanchai is indication enough of how things started to go off the rails. Anyway, we survived. We are off to South Africa this year. Amazonia to the Kruger, that's the life.



Christmas on the roof



Partying big at the HK Country Club

Believe it or not, South Africa will bring my total of new countries visited this year to 6. I tell you, this being retired thing is completely exhausting. I'm not sure how I filled my days when I was working. Meetings and conference calls judging by my old diaries. Actually, I still do a few of those. I now have a couple of directorships that slip me a bob or two every now and again and fly me to various places. Also the old folks at the China Coast Community add to the jollity. I had occasion to visit the Research Centre for Ageing at Hong Kong University the other day. I'm pleased to say that I did manage to get out again, only slightly older, and they didn't make me run through tunnels in search of cheese. I was rather surprised to find there were still some students actually studying. The "Occupy" movement has turned Central into a sort of 21st Century Woodstock with a sea of tents flooding Connaught Road. Even the cat's eyes have been dug up to make tiny gardens. It being Hong Kong, the plant life introduced is scenic rather than smokeable I'm sad to say.

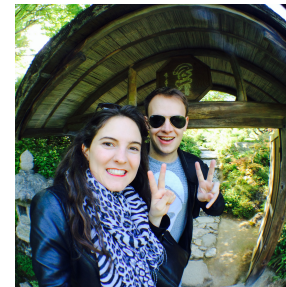
Corky meanwhile is turning increasingly hispanophilic. While there is less to do with her business in Gibraltar now the café is launched and the service apartments are running themselves, she is definitely hooked on the equestrian life of Andalucia. She has even starred in a number of the "ferias" that infest the area. This requires her, and Kate on occasion, to dress like gauchos and seize garters from the horns of raging bulls (or at least hit things with sticks) while clinging desperately to their charging steeds. There is also sherry and giggling involved I believe. She has started house hunting with the aim of increasing the addresses at the top of the page by one castle in Spain. As a consequence I have downloaded the free app, Duolingo, and taken up Spanish here in Hong Kong. So far I have mastered a variety of phrases including the socially liberal "I am her wife" and the ever useful "My elephants eat fish and read the newspaper". By early next year we may well be the proud owners of some Spanish hillside and all I will have to do is source a couple of omnivorous and unusually gifted elephants and I will be able to hold up my end of the conversation in the local taberna. I believe that Corky is learning more formally and may have broader conversational ambitions.



Feria fit



Esme, Daniel and the beard



Kate and Charlie in Tokyo

One of the advantages of having two sons in education in some way, at opposite ends of the world, is that there always seems to be someone who can come out to play when summoned. Sam, the sole Addis Australis, hasn't been thrown out of Adelaide yet and has a super long winter holiday. Last year he stayed in HK and we managed to escape to Niseko for a bit of skiing with Mark and Charlie Whitehead. The boys were very good and didn't try and escape the parental clutches too often, though Mark and I did spend a good bit of time observing the backs of their heads as they disappeared down the slopes.

Unfortunately the plan for us all to meet up in England in July for Tom and Andrew's wedding and an exploration of central Europe was disrupted by Sam chesting some unfortunate chap in the rugby boot and emerging with a slightly holed lung. While not as serious as it sounds it did mean he was unable to fly, so I had to nip down to Adelaide and take him on a tour of the McLaren Vale wine country. I know. There's selfless I am. It did mean that he and I missed the Tolleysbury belly-dancing troupe and the best hat and cake competitions, amongst a cornucopia of delights at the wedding.

After a quick turnaround, I met up with Daniel in Prague where we tested the Czech economy's production capacity for beer and pig's knuckle. After a few days Corky and Kate joined us and we had to switch to finer dining and Moravian wines. I liked both versions of Prague a lot, though it is a bit Club 18-30 with vast stag and hen parties swirling round the central squares like flocks of starlings, supercharged on cheap booze and hormones. After Prague, I took a quick solo railway trip to Bratislava and Budapest, to notch up another couple of countries. Budapest is fabulous, reminding me of Paris with its magnificent public buildings and broad avenues. It also has some lovely bronze statues including one of Imre Nagy, leader of the 1956 revolution and shot by the Soviets, standing alone on a bronze bridge gazing down at the turbulent waters below, and the incredibly poignant abandoned bronze shoes along the banks of the Danube, commemorating one of many massacres of the Jewish innocents during the second war.



Selfie in Prague

The fun wasn't exclusively continental though. A good part of the summer was spent in the UK. That meant I could take in the rather special 3rd (between them) silver wedding anniversary of Mum and Barrie, as well as Barrie's 90th. I was also able to utilize my Oval membership, walk the London bridges, both ways, and renew my season ticket at the Cromwell hospital. They will shortly name a wing after me, I'm sure.



Less long distance
than usual

I should get you caught up with the kids. Sam as stated is still in Adelaide at least some of the time. Sternly warned against falling for the girl next door, a risk of college life, he has found himself a Brisbane girlfriend, Justine, which is taking our advice a bit too far. Lovely girl, though, so well worth the commute. Daniel remains teaching Classics at Haileybury but is beginning to think that a sequence of Dragon School, Rugby, Downing College and Haileybury might be a tad on the narrow side, life experience-wise. He has proved himself adept at teaching (PGCE passed), stand-up comedy (semi finalist in some competition or other) and beard-growing and has found himself a girlfriend, Esme, in Battersea. "Not Istanbul?" I queried, assuming the Addis penchant for long distance relationships would run true in both sons. Meanwhile Kate, having established herself with a good solid career at M&C Saatchi, thus endearing herself to her loving father, has thrown it all in and gone independent. Apparently she'd done 3 years at M&C, which is already a bit on the long side and needed new experiences. In fairness, she appears in great demand and is enjoying the flexibility to, for example, take off to South Africa and the HK 7s that comes with being self-employed. It does mean she is not working at the next-door desk to Charlie, a most un-Addis-like arrangement. I think he has the next 7s on the radar as well, so that's already looking as dangerous as this year's.....of which the less said the better.

While still being based mainly in Spain and Hong Kong respectively, Corky and I had a couple of little side trips during the year. The first in March took us to see a friend in East Timor, a country so poor that they don't even have a jetty to board a boat to take you from the capital to the offshore islands. When finally reached, though, the snorkeling and lying around in hammocks is fabulous. Then only last month we purchased 4 nights in Luang Prabang, Laos at a charity silent auction. This also takes some getting to but is well worth it when finally there. It is vaguely reminiscent of Thailand 30 years ago, full of hippies and temples and so laid back you are surprised that the plane ever leaves. They have a wonderfully unjudgemental mindset. I was slightly startled to read the description of some Buddhist mythological painting concerning the 10 wishes of Prince Wethasarat's mother. "Universal peace?" I thought. "An end to poverty?" Not a bit of it. She wanted black eyes, not to get fat when pregnant, her breasts to be arranged vertically and not to sag and no grey hair. No explanation of the vertical breasts, I'm afraid. Must be a bit like shotgun barrels. There are no doubt devotees of both arrangements.

What else? Oh, there is at least one extra animal in the menagerie. Talulah, a border terrier, is now living with Corky and no doubt driving Jess to distraction. I have slightly lost count of the number of horses but am fairly confident it is more than one and fewer than ten.

That's about it for this year. I will let you know about South Africa. I might be able to find those elephants I need there. Have a wonderful Christmas and all the very best for 2015.