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*December 2014*

*The Christmas season is evident once again with the arrival of the festive goods in the shops, the well known music being played and the lights adorning the streets. I am writing this in the picturesque town on Zwolle, 50 kilometres east of Amsterdam. We are here for Ben to attend a work appointment with his employer’s IT suppliers and as it’s also his birthday we will go out this evening in search of a nice restaurant for a meal and take in the Christmas decorations ‘Dutch’ style.*

*We travelled here by Eurostar to Brussels and hired a car to drive up into the Netherlands visiting our Australian friends in their motorhome on the way .*

*We saw in 2014 on the banks of the Danube in Budapest. It was cold start to the year but enjoyable as always to visit a new place and spend time with our friends who came with us. This year we will celebrate the New Year and indeed the Christmas season with our friends from Australia. We fetched Rob, Shelley and their three boys (Ben’s godsons) from Manchester Airport in August and hosted them while they bought a motorhome and fitted it out for their European adventure. They will spend 18 months travelling Europe and return to their home in Tasmania in January 2016. We anticipate many laughs and adventures with them along the way.*

*Throughout most of February and March our home was in a state of upheaval as we had building alterations to accommodate a new kitchen, downstairs toilet and re vamped utility area. We weren’t finally complete until early May but the result was worth the hassle. Ben was able to return to his extensive menus in a much improved environment. I even got a new roof and revamp to my workshop so I too can pursue my interests in more congenial and warmer surroundings.*

*This year we celebrated the second anniversary of our Civil Partnership in Rome where we had a delightful hotel only yards from the Vatican. We both like the chance to explore when on holiday and Rome does not disappoint. Italy is a particular favourite of ours and so we enjoyed the sights, cafes, bars and places to relax where we were able to soak up the atmosphere.*

*Ben bought a new bike in June so we have been able to enjoy the summer out on the bikes. Unfortunately, Ben’s collar bone broken in his accident last year has not healed as expected and he will have to undergo an operation to re set it early in the new year. Naturally, we hope that all will progress well so we can continue to enjoy biking together and look forward to a bike tour in Normandy.*

*We both wish you a very Happy Christmas and all you wish for in 2015.*