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I hope, like us, 2022 has been a better year for you with the Covid restrictions behind us and the freedom to resume past activities now restored.

Having been fully vaccinated and managing to stay free from Covid for the last two years, Ben finally had a bad bout of the illness in July and took to his bed for a few days. We even got to the stage of calling 111 and the doctor but thankfully he recovered in full. It’s surprising I did not get it at all. Despite this set back we have enjoyed an eventful year.

This is our tenth Christmas letter which we realised whilst we were updating our website. They are in fact an interesting diary for ourselves highlighting as they do our travels and adventures.

It has been a year of big birthdays – Pete was 70 in February and Ben reached the milestone of 40 in December. In between, we celebrated our 10th Civil Partnership anniversary on July 7th and were both pleased to enjoy a happy evening with family and friends at The Gates Hangs Well Boathouse Room on July 16th. It was good to get both families together, as far as we were able, and meet up with many old friends. It was particularly pleasing to Pete to have what amounted to a ‘Boys Brigade reunion’.

Our ‘Australian Family’ commenced their journey to Sweden early in the year and we were both delighted to have them with us again during their brief stay in UK whilst on route to their new Swedish home. We spent time with them in Shropshire celebrating Scott’s 14th birthday and to our surprise and delight were able to visit them in June, in Vasteras Sweden, to mark Evan’s 18th birthday. We don’t, however, recommend travelling via Stansted. One very busy UK airport we are going to avoid in future – both for numbers of people and distance to get to from Leicester !

We celebrated our 10th Civil Partnership Anniversary in the Lake District. We had an awesome hotel on the shores of Lake Windemere and on the actual day sipped champagne, in the hot tub, on the open deck, overlooking the lake. On December 10th we reached the 17th year since we first met and reflecting back we have done a lot, seen a lot and experienced a lot in those years and hope we will have many more to come.

The travel gun has finally been fired post covid and at Easter, after a nice bike ride with our friends James and Jeanette, over a glass of wine on a sunny patio, we commenced to plan a trip to Norway. After extensive planning, we flew out of Birmingham, via Amsterdam to Oslo, for our Norwegian adventure. Even though Pete’s morning coffee and bun cost £20 each day and generally it was pricey, we all had a marvellous time amid fantastic scenery. We began at a lakeside cottage, which we had all to ourselves, with a lake of our own to row and canoe on and witnessed some amazing sunsets. We challenged ourselves daily as to how many tunnels we would drive through and in all it was about 150. The Norwegians are unrivalled tunnellers !

At home we continue to run – Ben more than me – and joined in our running club’s poppy run in November. We clocked up a few park runs in Bergen and Oslo while in Norway and have marshalled our local park run and the Leicester Half Marathon in October. Ben undertook a training regime and entered the Ashby 20, in March, completing his longest run over a 20 mile course.

In January, with retirement looming – though not completely there yet – Pete set about reorganising his study then decided it was time we made better use of the loft. A drop-down staircase was installed, sky light and electrics put in and then he boarded it throughout. It has given us a lot more space which is now inhabited by his 00 Gauge railway which has considerably expanded.

The proximity of Ben’s mum and dad at ‘Ambergate’ (about 600 yards from us) has kept us busy from time to time with jobs to do and occasional IT help ! but it has been an overall beneficial move and the trip to Sheffield to visit Ben’s sister and niece Pippa is now much easier. Sally has had a beautiful heated cabin built at the bottom of the garden and after much persuasion they finally had a log burner installed. We wouldn’t be without ours especially with the rising cost of energy. Pete has built further log stores in both gardens to accommodate a large stock of wood.

Work wise, Pete has slowed down considerably and during the early part of the year relinquished his small clients and engaged a firm in London to undertake all the statutory and tax work of his two remaining clients for whom he now only acts in a bookkeeping and advisory capacity. Ben has now clocked up his 16th year at James Coles Nurseries, managing the stocks and assisting in IT. He, of course, is now no longer the youngest in the office and has firmly established himself as a member of the management team.

We continue to own three motorcycles between us but we don’t seem to have clocked up much mileage this year. We have continued to visit our favourite spot - the Wymondham Windmill for coffee and a bacon roll as well as adding ‘The Barn’ at Rockingham and a few other venues to the list.

Ancestry hunting still remains a hobby for both of us. A year or so ago Ben ‘found’ some new cousins of his in Canada and we were delighted to visit Glasgow, in May, to meet them as they were visiting their son. We enjoyed the time together and hope to add Canada to our 2023/24 travels.

Now, like everyone else, we look ahead to next year. As we write this letter prospects generally are not exactly encouraging – with cost of living, potential strikes, war around the world but I’m sure we will all ‘keep calm and carry on’ ! As for us, we are flying to South Africa on Christmas Day concluding 2022 in the sunshine – we hope! – We fly via Dubai to Cape Town then drive along the Garden Route to the Eastern Cape where we will meet up and enjoy time again with our Australian friends, who are leaving the cold Swedish winter holidaying there on the coast.

We would be delighted to see any of our family and friends, at any time, at ours should you be nearby or like to visit us. We both hope you have a Merry Christmas and a Prosperous, Contented and Happy New Year.

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Two men sitting on motorcycles

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