

December 20, 1997

Hi everyone,

Well, as usual, we write this after reading most of your lovely Christmas cards. It's cheating a bit, but we didn't plan it that way! This letter was supposed to be written on December 1.

We began the year in a very relaxed fashion, with a four-week holiday in Hobart, Tasmania. After a family Christmas in Perth with Jeanette, Christopher and our extended family, we flew to Hobart for the New Year celebrations (including the arrival of the Sydney-to-Hobart yachts). We spent a lot of the time out tramping, with several days on the Western Authurs as the most strenuous (Peter Dombrovskis passed away there). Carrying everything on one's back certainly makes you ditch everything except the essentials! That was the only family holiday we have had this year, so it was a special opportunity to "get to know each other" before coming back to an action-packed year.

Looking back on 1997, it seems to have been a "watershed" year in many ways....

Tristan had his last year at school, and survived his TEE with great maturity. He was a little sad to leave the school cadet unit (which wins all the state cadets awards!), but otherwise has moved into his post-secondary period of his life very smoothly. During his mid-year break, Tristan was invited to play for the top hockey team in his club. He came home with a badly dislocated shoulder, which was operated on shortly afterwards by one of the surgeons who use Rob as their anaesthetist. The several months of inactivity which followed certainly tested his patience (and ours at times!), but were used as a chance to test his strength of character and resolve to complete this year well. He is now putting together his plans for 1998 (a non-contact year as far as education is concerned!), which include a trip to Nepal with Peter Hillary and a group of youngsters. He is currently "odd jobbing" to save the money for this.

Elwyn has passed the halfway mark in her course - combined degree in computer science and engineering. She now has a Bachelor of Computer Science, and has been invited to do honours next year. This has been a big decision, because she will have to defer the completion of her engineering degree for an extra year, making her time at university 6 years in total (the same as for medicine!). She has found an excellent project in imaging across the Web, and will carry out the honours year if she is accepted for this project.

Of course, the other passion for Elwyn is outdoor activities. Cricket is always at the top of this list. She has gained a lot of confidence with extra coaching during winter, and is really showing her true potential now. One of the Australian selectors has "noticed" her during the recent national competition, when she was playing for the WA women's cricket team, the Western Fury. We are all now waiting with baited breath to see if she gets into the national U-23 team! Hockey in winter is always fun for Elwyn - it is the non-cricket season, so she just enjoys it. The Outdoor Club at UWA has kept Elwyn busy this year. She is the treasurer, and also gets involved in the many trips and outings they have together (one of the photos of her is from the midyear trip). We wonder if she is so popular with the club because she often takes Rob's 4-wheel drive on their excursions!

Jeanette and Christopher both decided to leave their jobs at ERG, and moved to England in February. This was a great wrench for us, but it was lovely to see them go off to make their own lives and to find themselves. They left quite a lot of stuff here, so that we would remember them (including Jeanette's car, Kelvin, and her cat, Mittens)! Kelvin has since been sold to a young lady called Belinda (who assured us that she would continue to call the car Kelvin, and bring him to visit sometimes), but we still have Mittens. Christopher found work very quickly, as a software engineer for an excellent software development company in the high tech area of Newcastle. Jeanette did her own thing for a while, including some solo walking tours around Britain. The Cotswolds Way was one she will remember for a while - she went off in high spirits, and returned to Christopher few days later feeling very sad and sorry for herself. She had picked up a nasty case of food poisoning on the second night, which finished that trip!. However, she went for another several-day walk near Whitby some time later, which went exceptionally well. Then she took up a very challenging job near Christopher - project manager for the development of a very high tech piece of

equipment to carry out stress metal testing on railway carriages and tracks throughout Europe. She is loving the autonomy and the challenge – she has vast amounts of energy and ingenuity, and is thoroughly enjoying the opportunity to apply it in a positive environment.

As soon as they left Perth, I planned and booked my holiday to England in September!

Having climbed Mt Cook in New Zealand last year (a very long-term goal), Rob has focussed more on the family this year. He had promised Tristan some time ago that he would take him to climb Mt Aspiring in New Zealand (the first mountain in New Zealand that Rob climbed, in 1994) when Tristan finished school. So, the day after Tristan did his last exam, he and Rob boarded the plane to New Zealand for a good two-week trip. They climbed Mt Aspiring together the following Sunday, and spent the next two weeks climbing, waiting for good weather, jet boating, bungee jumping, and generally finding lots of fun and joy together. It was the most wonderful bonding experience for both of them, and they have come back the best of friends.

Rob also joined me in England, when I had spent a week with Jeanette and my Aunt Judy in Cornwall. One of my “projects” for this holiday was to visit as many of the trees photographed in the book “Meetings with Remarkable Trees” as we could find. Jeanette and I visited 2 very old Irish yews, which had grown into the doorframe around the door of St Edwards’s church in the Cotswolds. Judy and I visited the Monterey Cypress (from California) at Monterey House in Cornwall, and a beautiful walkway through the grove of Irish yews at Tregrehan also in Cornwall.

The Sunday after I arrived in England, Judy and I drove down to her house in Cornwall. That evening, she took a very upsetting call from one of her friends – Lady Diana and Dodi Fayed had been killed together in the early hours of that morning! We must have been the only people in Britain who did not already know about it. To be living in Britain during the following week was a sobering and moving experience. To live through such a short time when the power of the ordinary people totally controlled the country was something I shall never forget, right up to the funeral. Most of Britain was there for this event. They were all so quiet, yet so caring for each other – I felt very privileged to have been a part of it. In addition, Judy’s lovely little dog, Rosie, nearly died from some sort of auto-immune disease that week, and we spent quite some time nursing her, then visiting her at the Plymouth veterinary hospital.

Rob joined me at the end of that week, and we drove up to Newcastle to see Jeanette and Christopher. Being the lovely eccentrics they have made a very strong mark on their little home, with computers and various bits of technology scattered around! We really enjoyed catching up with them, and then went to the Lake District for a week of tramping and climbing. Then Jeanette joined us for a week in Skye, an island off Scotland. This was a very special time, when we could share this very special part of the earth with Jeanette as a friend and appreciate her for the unusual, intelligent and “bouncy” person that she is.

Within a week of returning to Perth and my business, I decided that it was time to actively develop our sales effort (which was just me at that time). Thus, since then, a lot of hard work and decision-making has seen us define our market in the computer training arena and appoint our sales team of 3 full-time staff and consultant sales director, ready to “hit the ground” running on January 5, 1998.

Well, we have all grown and thrived during this “watershed” year, and we join in wishing you joy, love and success in whatever 1998 brings to you and your loved ones.

A Very Merry Christmas and the Happiest of New Years,

from Rob, Wendy, Jeanette, Christopher, Elwyn and Tristan (not to mention Tiger and Mittens, our cats!)



*Tristan looks "way cool" on the top of Mount Aspiring
(was this our little baby boy?)*



*Tristan, Elwyn, Wendy and Rob on the top of Mount Ossa,
off the Overland Track, Tasmania*



Rob and Tristan hanging off the summit of Mount Aspiring



Rob and Tristan shake hands, as they reach the summit of Double Cone, New Zealand Alps



*Jeanette on the Isle of Skye jetty, just before she boarded
the ferry across to the mainland*



*Rob, Jeanette and Wendy on the Talisker Peninsula,
Isle of Skye*



Wendy all “roped up”, for scrambling in the Lake District



Elwyn dressed for the mid-year Outdoor Club Ball (the second dress she has bought in 5 years!)



Jeanette between the old yew trees, which have grown into the door frame of St Edwards church, Cotswolds



Mount Aspiring, New Zealand, at sunset