

## Some Good and Bad things about being 60

The Good	The Bad
You can walk round Safeway carrying a shopping bag	you WANT to walk round Safeway carrying a shopping bag.
You get free prescriptions	you couldn't actually afford the prescriptions you now need.
Nobody expects you to remember peoples names.	you can't remember peoples names
Nobody expects you to remember anything	you can't remember anything
You no longer have to go to work	everything now takes so much longer you don't actually get any more done.
You don't have to get up in the morning	you need to be in bed by 10:00.
You can chat up young ladies and nobody worries	you start thinking you might actually get somewhere.
You can take holidays at cheaper times	the additional cost of travel insurance more than makes up for it.
You can go up to the pub any time of day	you can't hold it like you used to, and you are up half the night in the loo.
You can get into Alton Towers cheap in the week	you can't go on any rides because they all say "No bad backs and no potential heart attack victims"
You get a £200 Government Guinness - oops sorry - heating - allowance.	Errrrr.....

## Difficult Question of the

We went out to the pub with a very fashionable lady, the friend of someone staying in the flat.

We were discussing wardrobes, and I was explaining my theory of clothes buying. Namely, everything either is, or must go with, blue, and that items are bought in bulk in the January sales, (or wherever a bargain presents itself). These are then stored away until an item of clothing wears out, at which time it is replaced from the store cupboard. Simple enough?

She thought for a bit and then asked "What do you do if they go out of fashion?"

Now, how do you answer that?

## One for the Ladies

It's official! From the Sunday Times 14th November 2004:- "According to Italian researchers, women who eat chocolate regularly have a better sex life than those who deny themselves the treat. Those consuming the sugary snack had the highest levels of desire, arousal and satisfaction from sex".

Pass the After Eights!

## Insult of the year

Liz's Christmas puddings are legendary. She had made them for friends and family to "Granny's secret recipe" for many years now. But always with a small change. Never the same change, mind, and not always intentional, but the one for Christmas 2004 was not her best. In fact we had some left over which we threw out for the chickens. And as we stood and watched, one of them came up to it, picked it up, tasted it, and spat it out again. If that had been my Christmas pud, she would have been in the pot in

## This is how it's done

"Life is not a journey to the grave with the intention of arriving safely in a pretty and well preserved body, but rather to skid in broadside, thoroughly used up, totally worn out, and loudly proclaiming -- WOW-- What A RIDE!!!!"

## Technocrats of the year Award

Andy's elder daughter was 7 this year, and decided that she wanted to celebrate her birthday with some friends at the local swimming pool. This is something that the pool offers, and it's a great deal healthier than a visit to Ronald McDonald. We were invited to watch the swimming, and the party, but not, to my chagrin, to take part.

Be that as it may, Andy's wife, Jo, had brought their new, highly whizzo, digital camera along, but unfortunately, she was down in the pool supervising, while the rest of us were up on the glass enclosed balcony. When it came to taking pictures, then, Andy switched it on, but not a lot happened. A light flashed and then everything went out.

We had a technical conference,

and I decided that the batteries were flat, and shot out to the nearest garage to get another set (at an exorbitant price, of course). This, unhappily, had little or no effect. The lights still came on and went out.

At this point, Andy handed it over to his technology advisor, AKA me. I tried everything I could think of, short of putting it on the floor and jumping on it (although that did occur to me), but to no avail. "Broken" was the final conclusion, probably as a result of the hot damp atmosphere.

Finally, the swimming was all over, and all the girls, and Jo, trooped upstairs, where we explain to Jo that the lack of photos is due to the broken camera. "Nonsense" she says -

## What's That?

What does that advert say? "When was the last time you did something for the first time"?

Well, I did something for the first time this year. I had put on my wellington boots, and was striding up the yard when I became aware that I had something in the right boot.

Investigation showed that for the very first time, I was sharing my right wellington boot with a dead mouse, no doubt deposited there by one of the cats.

With any luck at all, I shan't do

just like that - and turns it on and proceeds to take photos.

Embarrassing or what? My role as technology advisor is now under review, and all tech-cred

Christmas 2004

## Warning!!

Not much appears to have happened this year. (or else, of course, I just can't remember it - see page 4).

Vicki and Nash didn't get married again, I didn't drive my tractor into anything solid, Liz's phone has remained free of water all year, a few sheep died (but no orange ones), we went on holiday, and we both had another birthday.

In fact, the biggest story (in the news section) is the arrival of the ducks.

I guess we have become BOFs. Example - I found myself walking round Safeway in a flat hat carrying a shopping bag. What can I say? That shook me up a bit I can tell you!

In an attempt to combat this, in deference to J. R. Tolkein, and following in the tradition set by Gandalf the White, I searched round for a suitable moniker - Terry the Handsome? Chis the Whiz? Then I had it - from now on I wish to be known as **Chisman the Grubby**. (Liz, of course dissociates herself from this entirely.)

So, it was just that kind of

## Flock Marks

One of my (Liz's) midnight jobs during lambing, is to make a note of all Andy's ewes who have lambed that day. So I need to know which ewes belong to him and which to Ian. In theory, every ewe has a flock mark which is used to indicate her owner. This year it was really simple. Andy's flock mark is a red line across the middle of the ewe's back, and Ian's is a blue blob on the shoulder. Except that some of Andy's young ewes (shearlings) had a red blob so he could keep track of them, and then he bought 100 ewe lambs (hogs) which didn't have a flock mark but which had been raddled to show when they would lamb (see below). Ian's mule hogs (ewe

# The New Compact Sheep Dip Times

## New Arrivals Cause Consternation

This year we have added eight ducks to our menagerie. They were hatched out in an incubator and arrived in a cardboard box less than 24 hours later. We tucked them under a broody hen and kept going out to look at them and going 'Ahh!'

The hen was convinced they were hers until they started to drink. Now, faced with a water drinker, a chick will daintily dip its beak in the water and then lift its head and swallow. Not the ducklings. They stuffed their beaks in the water and blew bubbles, they scooped up a beakfull and threw it over their shoulders, they jumped in it, went for a swim, and splashed it everywhere.

As a result, every day I had to change the bedding at least once and fill the drinker three times. Poor mummy hen was scandalised! She thought her offspring were delinquent!

Baby ducks grow at an alarming rate and they were soon bigger than the broody hen, who we had



to remove so that she could have her nervous breakdown in peace.

Now, when a mummy duck hatches out ducklings, they are covered in down, which by itself isn't waterproof, so the mummy duck uses her own preen gland to provide the necessary oil to stop them getting all soggy and sinking!

But of course, if you rear ducklings under a hen, she doesn't know she is supposed to do this, and doesn't have the

wherewithal either. This meant we couldn't put them on the pond until they were fully feathered, at six weeks old - I had been longing for the moment.

The day arrived, we opened the coop and sure enough they went straight for the water and within minutes were splashing about and diving to the bottom. All totally instinctive. A wonderful sight.

We have had a bit of trouble  
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lambs) had no mark, but I could distinguish them, because they didn't have shaved tails and some of his shearlings also hadn't been marked but did have shaved tails.

When the ewes are scanned they are also marked to say how many lambs they are having. Andy puts a red blob on the rump for a single lamb, nothing for two and green for three - except when he ran out of green and used orange. The tup with his hogs (ewe lambs) had been raddled, so they had a variety of colours on their bottoms ranging from turquoise to blue to terracotta depending on when they were

tupped. Those who had put themselves about a bit had all three colours! Those who were having two lambs also had blue marks on their backs.

Before they lambed, the ewes were divided in to separate pens with the singles (i.e. having a single lamb) in one, Andy's twos in another, Ian's twos in a third and all the triples in a fourth. Except that one or two singles got in with Andy's twos by mistake, and some of the doubles were with the threes for extra corn. Are you beginning to get the picture?

Then come the tricky questions -

after they have lambed, is a ewe with a red blob on her back and one lamb, one of Ian's shearlings due to have 2 lambs or one of Andy's? You can't always tell from the number of lambs in the pen as she could have lost one or have had one adopted on. In dim light orange looks like red so could she be a mother of three who has lost two lambs?

So I didn't always get my records straight! And one night I dropped the torch and it broke - as all flock marks look the same under neon lights I had to guess!

Andy's comment - "It's all so simple, I don't know why you

## Sartorial Elegance

I fell foul of my sartorial advisors during our trip across America on four separate items.

Firstly, I had been given a pair of real "Granddad" slippers for my 60<sup>th</sup> last year, and, as we were in a motorhome, I determined to drive across America in them. This I did.

Secondly, I was my hearts desire to go the entire trip in the same pair of jeans. In this I was thwarted. Somewhere between

the mid-west and Chicago Liz whipped them away and washed them. Unnecessary and unkind I thought. Very necessary Liz thought. Bryan offered no comment.

Thirdly, we were all prepared for the horse riding. We had all taken cowboy boots and cowboy hats, and I also had my cowboy jeans, my cowboy belt buckle, and my cowboy shirt. However, at around 4,000 feet it was a little chilly, so I completed the look with my cowboy cardigan!

Finally, we handed the RV in at around 08:00 on the last day, and loaded the bulging suitcases into a taxi for the New York hotel, where we arrived around 10:00. Unfortunately our rooms weren't ready, and, while we could leave the suitcases, they weren't happy about us leaving the hats. So we spent our first five or six hours in New York walking round in our cowboy hats.

## The Duck Pond

Below you see it. The twin duck ponds. Finally, after many months of digging by all sorts of people, it now holds water.

It still leaks slightly, but it manages to keep water in it, and the ducks love it, so, until it starts to empty again, we are happy.



(Continued from page 1)

teaching them to come in at night. We have a duck island in the middle of the pond, but we learned that foxes are quite capable of swimming and anyway, if the pond was frozen, a fox could just walk across to eat them.

Just before we went on holiday, I had them going into a coop at night by calling "Quacky Ducks!" in a high pitched voice. Terry's cousin Michael, an ex-policeman, was looking after the house while we were away, and refused to shout anything so girly, but did manage to coax them into the coop under the threat of arrest.

However, when we got back

weakness or fear to the onlookers. Andy had weeded out a couple of his old ewes who we could use as test

they were very badly behaved. So, we did the only sensible thing, we went away to see our friends Florence and Clive in Italy for a week and left Rachael in charge, with instructions to do some serious duck training. (She is in education after all.)

I'm not sure of her technique, but I think threats of spending nights in the Naughty Corner came into it (and we did find a dunce's hat hidden under the straw), but they now go to bed without problems.

So, we have four ducks and four drakes adorning our pond, and we are currently getting four eggs every day. Not brilliant as boiled eggs but excellent for any other method of cooking them and very good in cakes and Christmas Puddings.

of it. No messing about - no shilly-shallying - just on with the job.

After lunch, she had in fact dried to a fairly acceptable colour, but there was still just a hint of dusky pink to it. Appropriate to a young teenager I thought, but I kept that one to myself.

In the end, we decided that the colour we were actually looking for would be better achieved with darker dye - something for next year - but in the meantime Liz coined the phrase "Champagne Biscuit". A bit too girly for us bluff northern farmer types, but a pretty good description nonetheless.

That's one of the things I like about farming - the decisiveness

## Sheep Dip Time

It has been another quiet year with the sheep. We now just buy ewe lambs at six months old and let them run round the farm for a year, maturing. When they are 18 months old we sell them on for breeding, and make about £15 to £20 per head for our troubles. Relatively easy stuff.

But, as most of the world seems to know by now, when preparing them for market last year, we produced an orange sheep (or two). (Out of deference to

Andy's feelings I have refrained from reproducing the photo, but could put a copy on my web site if sufficient interest is shown).

So, this year, Andy was playing it cautious. "You can mix the stuff" he said to me as we embarked on the job. Ian just lurked behind the sheep race, making non-committal noises, and pretending he wasn't there - pretty much his reaction to the orange job last year. So, I was on my own.

We knew the quantities, so I mixed the stuff, and poured it in. In all this, I was strong and resolute, showing no signs of

cases, so in went the first. The air was tense. Breath was held. What colour would she be?

Then, out she came. And what colour was she? Well, actually, pale pink probably comes closest.

There was a lot of walking about, and "She'll get darker as she dries", but not much sign of the lovely light biscuit colour we had been hoping for. In the end a major decision was reached - we would go and have lunch and see what she looked like afterwards.

That's one of the things I like about farming - the decisiveness

## The Big Trip

This was the one we had been planning for the last three or four years. Liz, Bryan, and I would drive another of those vast American motorhomes right across the United States. From coast to coast. From San Francisco to New York. A major undertaking involving some 4,000 miles.

Since Bryan's wife, Jacqui, won't fly under any circumstances, she would not be going, but very graciously gave us four weeks to do it in. That's home to home, so by the time we had flown to San Francisco, stayed a couple of nights with Bob and Gerri, and stayed a couple of nights in New York the other end, along with the flight home etc, we had around 22 days to cover the distance.

A great deal of planning went into this. What did we want to see? Well, Yosemite, Lake Tahoe, Teton National Park, Yellowstone, and on the other side of the country Niagara Falls. Liz very much wanted to hear the Mormon Tabernacle Choir practice in Salt Lake City, and we established that this happened every Thursday night, so this gave us our timetable. We all wanted to do some trail riding, so we booked into a place in the Black Hills (South Dakota) for a couple of nights, and I wanted to visit Cedar Point, Ohio (www.cedarpoint.com) as this is the home to some of the world's

## Umbria

Our friends Florence and Clive have a villa near the little town of Umbertide, in Umbria, quite close to the Tuscan border and shortly after we returned from America we had agreed to go and join them for a few days.

It is a beautiful place and a lovely villa with its own pool and vineyard. We hadn't realised how tired we were after our American Adventure, so it was wonderful to blob out for the week, read books, and dip into the pool when it got too hot! We did try a day trip to Assisi - but

# The Sheep Dip

## A Birthday Surprise

I had been told we were going away for my birthday present, and, as Terry had got the caravan out the week before, I assumed it would be in that. When asked about clothes, Terry replied "Think Bournemouth" and that was the only clue I had.

On the day, I had just started to pack the caravan when Terry told me we weren't going in it. So I packed a case, and off we set down the M1 with me still "Thinking Bournemouth". But we went to see Vicki and Nash in Chesham, and that evening Terry produced a birthday present for me which he insisted I open. This was very unusual as Terry is stickler for not opening presents early, but it turned out to contain an Italian dictionary, a European menu reader, two air tickets and a map of Venice.

Stupidly, I didn't heed the advice to 'Think Bournemouth'. "Venice", I thought, "Mediterranean" I thought,

"warm" I thought, and so removed two of my jumpers from the suitcase. Wrong. I was freezing! (T. - I had looked up the weather in Venice, and then looked for a misleading place in the UK with the same sort of temperatures. Cunning eh?)

Terry had found a hotel near the Rialto bridge, with typical period decorated rooms. And there was no traffic! It was lovely.

Venice is a very beautiful city, and we loved it, although we found we preferred the quieter streets away from the main tourist areas. We had a bus pass (just like Terry at home - he! he!), and we rode the water buses and walked for miles. Terry found the canals and their construction fascinating, and all in all, it was a wonderful break.

The highlight for me was undoubtedly standing three inches away from a Michaelangelo drawing in the Guggenheim gallery.

For Terry it was the water taxi ride to the airport at 40+ knots across the lagoon - he belongs firmly in the "Seen one

Italians rather than geriatric ex-Volvo drivers. A six speed close ratio gearbox meant lots of wiggling the thing in the middle of the floor (why doesn't everybody get an automatic?), and the brakes were fine until you got to below 5mph, when they went ON. We drove round Italy leaving 10" rubber marks on the road where we had screeched to a halt as the brakes locked at the last minute.

Thank you, Florence and Clive, for a wonderful break. The only down side was the fattening food. I managed to lose a pound after four weeks in the States, but a week in Umbria and I had put on six!



it was full, we couldn't even get into a car park, so we had lunch and went home!

The Italian driving is - creative, shall we say, and the car we hired was designed for speedy