

Christmas 2014

2014 was a difficult year for the Derbyshire branch of the Chisman family as you can imagine with a good number of ups, but also a lot of downs. I hope 2015 will prove easier.

However, I hope you had a good year and that you get a *Merry Christmas*, and a happy and prosperous New Year.

2014

Looking back, it's been a year of three parts really, a journey, and there is probably more to come, but I did some memorable trips and was very grateful for the amazing help and support I received from friends, neighbours, and family.

Part 1 - The Beginning.

As I suppose you would expect, it's been another year of ups and downs. Fortunately, more ups this year than the last two, but it started badly with Christmas coming barely a month after Liz's funeral. Happily, Julia, Tago, Alice and Emma invited me to share their Christmas. Emma gave up her bedroom, and the two girls shared, for all of which I was extremely grateful. On the day after boxing day I headed south, stopping in to see Vicki, Naresh, and the twins. Only a flying visit was possible as they have a three bedroomed house, two girls, and now three widowed parents. A pint pot into which a quart just won't go. So after a meal there I headed further



south to my brother and sister in law on the south coast and they helped me though New Year which was a particularly bad time.

New Year is a time for hopes and plans and not only did I not have either, but the previous year had been full of them. Liz had had her treatment, it had worked, she was getting over the spinal surgery and walking. The future had looked bright and we were looking forward to a few more years together. So New Years Eve 2013 was a very sad time.

But it passed, and with a lot of love and help from friends and family, and a bit of assistance

from alcohol, I got into 2014 in a bit of a daze.

Part 2 - The Middle.

Before I go any further, I don't want anyone to read any form of criticism into any of this. Our friends have been a huge support and I really, really, couldn't have got through the last few months without them. But I went to Lanzarote in March, and Earl and I spent many hours reading dozing, sleeping and in my case, doing a lot of thinking. When I came back I had reached a few conclusions. The previous 5 months had been spent on make-work busyness. I was standing still, filling days, just marking time - until what? I died or got a new partner. Liz and I agreed that I wouldn't do well on my own and I'm wasn't. Our friends looked after me brilliantly, I couldn't have wanted better, but I was finding that I sat at home waiting for an invitation - they come thank heavens - but I wasn't in control of my life. So after a lot of toing and froing in my head, I joined an internet dating agency for wrinklies. Head said find someone, heart said

don't abandon Liz. Head said not abandoning Liz, just finding a different companion. Heart said too soon. Head said, I could wait six months but would it change anything? Heart said, don't know but it's too soon. Head said I'm 70 I can't afford to wait. Heart said you're being unfaithful. Head said Liz wouldn't want me to wait around being lonely. Heart said you're turning your back on Liz. I went through a lot of emotional turmoil, but in the end head won (this is me we're talking about here - of course head won!), and without any great hopes of success given the reports you hear about the people friends have met on such sites, I joined a senior dating website.

The first one was populated almost entirely by Americans, and I have been winked at by ladies of various ages from most of the states in the Union. Not much use there, so I switched to another site, and that was much better - 41 women in the Duffield area, and over 100 in Belper. From there, to cut a long story short, I met Wendy, who lives in Belper, and from the first
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Apologies

I have not been good at communications. I used to be Director of Farming, Accounts, and Holiday Planning and Liz had her similar tasks. Alas, all these responsibilities are now mine, and it is a huge workload. I am now also Director of Washing, Vice President for General Cleanliness, Executive in charge

of Food, and most important, Chairman of Communications. I have struggled to keep up with all this new work and some of it has suffered as a result. In an attempt to overcome this, I outsourced some responsibilities, which has helped, but you will be pleased to hear that I have kept the jobs in the UK with no off-shoring, and, in line with current corporate governance, no child labour and no slave labour.

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cup of coffee, we both agreed that something had clicked. We started to see each other regularly.

I haven't dated for 55 years. I wasn't good at it back then, and it seems I have got worse since. We got quite involved, but it didn't work out as either of us wanted and I hurt Wendy quite badly. Despite this though we have managed to remain friends - perhaps what the relationship should have been from the start - and it seems to be working for both of us. We do things together, we have coffee together, we compare notes on life, and she came to France with me in late October when I house-sat Liz's brother's place just north of Bordeaux.

Part 3 - The last few months.

In June I joined a Cruse bereavement counselling group, along with about 8 other newly bereaved people and we all found that comparing notes was very useful. Who knew, for example, that short term memory loss occurs in bereavement - many of us were worried about it. I found the group quite useful, but it only lasted 6 sessions and I didn't seem to be grieving in the same way that everyone else was, so in September I started individual counselling which, I think, I have found much more useful. I say "I think" because what happened about the same time was that I started to miss Liz terribly.

On November 1st - the first anniversary of Liz's death - I was in France with Wendy. Some

other friends had joined us, as had Liz's younger sister Jo, and Jo and I had resolved to sit together and think about Liz for a hour or so that day. I had taken with me some of our holiday videos, and a photo book I made for Liz's 60th which ended up as the book of condolence at her funeral, and in the days leading up to the 1st I made myself read some of the blog I kept for Liz throughout her illness - something I have been unable to do. It made for a very, very tearful few hours and has left me in a dark place. Even now, late November, I am still down, and I looked out of my bathroom window recently on a cold miserable November morning at the bleak, leafless, forlorn looking trees and I thought "that's exactly how my heart feels". My counsellor has said that all

this is completely normal, that I will have up and down moments but that slowly the up moments will increase while the down moments will decrease. She has said that the first Christmas is the worst, that it will take at least two years to notice any improvement and that I mustn't give up hope.

So at the end of the first year I have periods when I can function normally, my friends have been fantastic and their company has made things immeasurably better and will, I hope, continue to do so, but sadly, by the end of the year, my head noted that Liz was starting to be part of the past, rather than the present. Head observed it, but heart didn't like it. Constant battles between head and heart. Bereavement is bewildering.

A Family Trip

Julia and Tago had decided to take their two daughters Alice (16) and Emma (14) to Orlando for their summer holiday, and very kindly asked me if I would like to go along (silly questions department!). I suggested that we could see most of what Orlando had to offer in less than a fortnight so why not fly out of Birmingham to New York, spend a few days there, and then go on to Orlando.

We stayed in the upper west side in New York (to the left of Central Park, about mid-way up it as you look at a map of Manhattan). We did the usual tourist things, walked to Central Park, went up the Rockefeller Centre, did Times Square, visited

Ellis Island, and the ladies did some shopping, but the thing that left a lasting impression on me was the Frick collection. Alice is studying art, so before we left, she and Julia went through the many art galleries in NY to see which ones we might visit and the Frick collection won. I was amazed. Never has a collection of pictures and sculptures had the effect on me that the Frick collection did - Google it, it is amazing.

After 5 days, we flew down to Orlando where we had rented a house via AirBnb (a site I would recommend). The house had 4 bedrooms, air conditioning, and a private pool. I reckoned that, after a few days in sticky NY (this was August remember), a 3 hour flight, and a queue for the hire car, the first thing people would do is jump in the pool - so I prepared. Tago and I thought it would be appropriate if our first

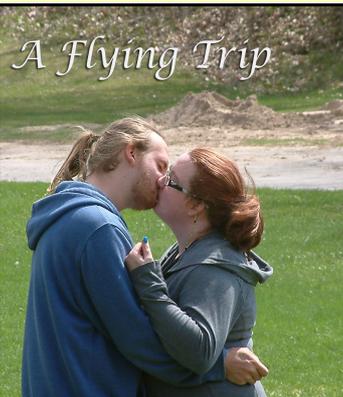
appearance was in mankinis - so I bought one each, luminous green and fluorescent pink. Did we look great or what? Well, we thought so and I will leave that image in your mind.

We visited a number of theme parks with water rides and got pleasantly wet. We spent two good days at Universal Studios, and we did Epcot, which was disappointing as it didn't seem to have changed a lot since the last time I was there several years ago. Busch Gardens, on the other hand, had improved greatly and was enjoyed by all. Aquatica, the water park, was good fun, but Sea World was, as always, the favourite, and the Kennedy Space Centre was fascinating. Until you see it, you simply would not



believe the size of the Saturn V rocket that started the trip to the moon - absolutely huge, and sitting on top of this leviathan, 363ft above the ground, at the top of a 36 story building, exactly the same height as St Paul's Cathedral, is the tiny capsule holding the astronauts. Now THAT is what you call a high adrenaline ride.

It was a great holiday, and one which I'm sure we will all remember.



A Flying Trip

My nephew James got married in May this year to Nicole, an American who lives in Wisconsin. Outside of James's immediate family, I was the only person able to get there, so a quick trip to Wisconsin was booked. I couldn't get to the actual wedding, but there was a party on the following Saturday for the extended family starting at 1 o'clock (19:00 my body clock

time - BCT) which I felt I could manage. So the trip was booked. There was no point in extending it as I was travelling by myself so it was a quick over-and-back. Leaving home about 06:00 on the Friday, I flew from Manchester to Chicago where I rented a car, bought several pairs of jeans in a huge local Walmart, and stayed the night. I stayed awake until 8 o'clock local time (02:00 BCT)

but woke early, so I started with a good American breakfast and hit the road for the 3 hour drive north to the small town of St. Nazianz. Once north of the steel town of Milwaukee - about half way - the countryside was beautiful, and St. Nazianz is typical small town America - just look at the lovely little church in the photo (right). I spent the afternoon with

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A Cycling Trip

This story started in much the same way as the band did - indeed, as many such projects have started - in the Patten Makers Arms after rather more beer than was likely to produce common sense. Tago and Nigel were shortly to be 50, and decided that they had to do something to mark the occasion, something they would remember, and through the alcoholic haze, they decided that cycling to Monte Carlo would be a good idea. They were both experienced mountain bikers, but neither had any experience of, or indeed, a bike for, road work.

The idea survived the cold light of morning and started to grow. They were joined fairly quickly by Gerard who already had such an exploit to his name (he ran all the way from Duffield to his home town just outside Geneva a couple of years ago and raised £45,000 for charity). It became apparent early on that they could not do it on their own, they needed a support vehicle, and guess who offered his services? But - I made it clear from the beginning that support would exclude quite a long list of things, right at the top of which was anything involving creams and sore bits.

So the team of four was set, and we originally set a date in September last year, but because of Liz's illness (and the fact that on the date in question, Gerard was lying flat on the floor with back trouble) that was postponed until late June this year.

We decided that we would raise



money for Cancer Research as we had all been affected by cancer in one way or another and the back office team (wives, friends, and roped-in professionals) set about organising a fund raising campaign. A name was chosen - *Cycle Monte Carlo* - and a web site was set up, with all the background stuff needed to keep interest alive.

Meanwhile the cycle team started training. Monte Carlo is about 1,000 miles, and work commitments meant that they had to do it in just 9 days - over 100 miles a day for 9 days, which is a formidable challenge as any road cyclist will tell you. The team worked incredibly hard, on their bikes, and on the internet, planning a route that wasn't too long, yet avoided unnecessary hills - the Garmin website is incredibly useful for this. I too started training hard - 1,000 miles is a long drive in a large, air-conditioned Mercedes and I needed to be fit!

June arrived and panic set in. The Garmin software wasn't working properly and although the route could be planned in minute detail on the website, and the adverts say that it can then be downloaded to a tiny satnav mounted on the handlebars, the download process simply didn't

work. In fact it didn't work right up to 8 o'clock on the day before we went, and they set off with no huge confidence in the technology, and Plan B - printed maps - multiple A4 sheets at 1" to the mile all the way, created by me in a frenzy over the previous few days.

So off we went, the cyclists were nervous, the car was packed to the gunwales with food, bike parts, a bag for each of us, a table and chairs for picnic lunches, a powered coolbox for the champagne, a clothes line for drying yesterdays shorts (yes, we had thought of everything), and my sun lounger - without which I wasn't going! The local school, who were also supporting us, gave us a great send off and 1,000 miles of relentless sweat, tears, pedaling, exhaustion and sore bottoms awaited....

In fact, for the most part it went incredibly well. The Garmin did let them down on a couple of occasions - once resulting in them cycling 142 miles in pouring rain on one day. On another day, planned to be quite long as they were cycling down the Rhône valley, and which should therefore have been a downhill sort of day, turned out not to be because, although there was indeed a general loss of height, the road it-

self had many gentle undulations, each of which has an uphill part. Most of these setbacks were overcome with appropriate amounts of food and beer in the evening however, and, sore bits aside (the word "chafing" was not used in company for the duration of the trip), most days were enjoyed. A particular worry had been the day they cycled up the Massif Central - a long, daunting, climb. In the event they all stormed up it at around 12 mph, to arrive jubilantly at the ice cream shop I had located at the top.

I wasn't sure that they would all cycle the entire way, and I was prepared for the need to put a bike on the roof, and an exhausted cyclist in the passenger set for the day, but it wasn't necessary, they all duly pedaled their way though the 1,000 miles and arrived, absolutely triumphant, at the harbour in Monte Carlo. Then, because the Italian border is less than 10 miles away, they cycled to Italy. The sense of achievement was immense, and required several units of alcohol, and a beachside meal that night to satisfy it.

A hugely satisfying project for all involved, and to top it off we raised about £15,000 for Cancer Research UK. Well done all !

the newly weds and the two families, and finally retired to my B&B for a good night's rest. I woke early and sat drinking my first coffee watching the sun rise over Lake Michigan - how beautiful was that? Then the drive back to Chicago, on a plane at 18:30 local (00:30 BCT) and back into Manchester airport at 07:30 on the Monday. A lovely trip but utterly exhausting.



Something New for Christmas

Tago and I fancied a game of conkers at Christmas, but there aren't any conkers around at that time. What is there at Christmas that is about an inch across and round? Sprouts! So it was that we invented the new Christmas game of Spronkers.

Scottish Referendum

16/9/14. Jim Sillars a former SNP deputy leader who appeared with Alex Salmond vowed "*A day of reckoning with BP and the banks*" if Scotland voted yes. He said "*The heads of these companies are rich men, in cahoots with a rich English Tory prime minister, to keep Scotland's poor poorer through lies and distortions. The power they have now to subvert our democracy will come to an end with a "yes"*".

BP, in an independent Scotland, will need to learn the meaning of nationalisation, in part or in whole, as it has in other countries who have not been as soft as we have been forced to be. As for the bankers: your casino days, rescued by socialization of your liabilities while you waltz off with the profits, will be over".

Guaranteed to preserve jobs in Scotland that.....

Letters to the Times 13th September.

The split in the attitude of academics to independence is not altogether surprising. Academics from science, maths and engineering disciplines ("no" voters) are more likely to apply evidence based reasoning and rational thinking to their deliberations rather than the emotive, irrational instincts of their arts and humanities colleagues ("yes" voters).
Dr George Philliskirk.

Choices

For my birthday and Christmas presents, my sister in law, Mary, an excellent cook, will often make me a suet pudding or two. Sometimes steak and kidney and sometimes fruit. Over the last three years I have put them in the freezer to await a suitable meal but, alas, I didn't remember to mark them.

Recently I decided to offer one occasionally to a friend who has been feeding me regularly but we faced the inevitable dilemma - which was which?

We have now settled on a plan - I take one round, unmarked. She lets it thaw, then sticks a knife in. If it comes out brown it's first course and she makes a pud, if not it's pudding and she does the main course.

Hasn't failed yet.....

What????

On the recent visit to New York, Julia and I spotted a shop offering a "growler refill counter".

Make what you will of that.....

Misheard

At one point Liz had to have a lumbar puncture, but my dictating system turned it into "Lumber Puncher"

Exciting Ride of the Year

I went skiing in January to La Plagne (in France) where they held the 1992 winter Olympics. And what remains? An Olympic bobsleigh run. And who went down it in a 4 man bob behind and Olympic driver? You guessed it.

It was very rough, with my (helmeted) head banging from side to side, but hugely exciting, and a once in a lifetime ride.

Sad Discovery of My Life

During Liz's illness, we did discuss the possibility of me getting a mistress and the idea was superficially attractive (well - to one of us it was). But - a mistress is traditionally associated with things like champagne, sexy underwear and weekends in Paris and we decided that nowadays I'm more of a Guinness, winceyette pyjamas and caravans sort of a chap, so that was that.
Sad really.

Unlikely things to Hear

For Xmas 2012, as Liz was getting better I found myself saying "we need to build you up". Never, in 36 years of marriage and Liz's growing wardrobe did I ever think I would utter the words.....

Name Wanted

What do you call a cocktail of coffee and lactulose?
Coffee-lactic or crappuccino.

Questions that bother old people

Why, when you open a box of pills, is it ALWAYS the end with the paper insert, so you can't get one set of pills out?

Blessing of the Year

I have realised that I am blessed with many good friends, almost all of whom lead me astray.

Letter in The Times. 12th April.

Today, driving over the Pennines in the outside lane of the M62, I was passed on the centre lane by a hearse. Was this genuine undertaking?"

Health and Safety

As you may know, I have a "carer" (Sam) who comes in most evenings to do my evening meal (I just kept the agency on when Liz died. I started off thinking it was a luxury, but it does ensure that I eat well, and it's cheaper than going to the pub.)

Anyway - given the way things are, it was inevitable that Sam should have to fill in a Health and Safety Questionnaire with regard to me. When it came to the question "What should I do to help you in an emergency" we were stuck. "Put the fire out"? "Leg it - I'm fit and healthy"? In the end Sam settled for "Grab a bottle of wine on the way out". Just so - although two might be better.

Grand-daughter 1

Sophia, who is deeply into her ballet, was heard to refer to the ballerina "Grassy Bussel".

Grand-daughter 2

Asha, who is the more technical, had been on a trip to London, and at dinner afterwards asked me "Grandpa Terry, how does an escalator work"? A not-quite-five year old had looked at an escalator and, rather than just getting on, had wondered how it worked. It looks like a fourth generation of engineers is in the making.