

*Christmas
2017*

2017 has been a good year for the Derbyshire branch of the Chisman family. It didn't start too well (see Skiing inside) but it got better as the year went on.

So a good year for us, and we hope for you too. We hope for a **Merry Christmas**, and a happy and prosperous New Year, for ourselves, and all our readers.

A Year of Big Events

This year saw three big events in our lives, and the first was Henrietta's 70th birthday in May. (The other two are covered later). In May 2016, I realised that Henrietta's 70th would fall on the May Bank Holiday and that if we wanted to book anywhere special, the earlier we got started the better. Her four children and I communicated over many months (using a Whatsapp group) planning a venue, a guest list, invitations, a band, and so on and so on.

The whole party was going to be a secret (or at least we hoped it would be), so we needed a cover story which was that Henrietta, her four children and I would get together for a meal on the Friday night. Later it was "leaked" that we would be joined by spouses and grandchildren on the Saturday for a picnic in the park. And the secret bit was a large party with friends and family on the Saturday night.

We decided on a hotel in Buckingham as the venue for two reasons. Firstly, it was near Brackley where Henrietta and her family spent many years, and had many friends, and secondly because it fitted well with the cover story as it was roughly central for the four children.

Once the hotel was booked, a band was booked, a menu was planned, and invitations were sent out. After the invitations



were out, there was much holding of breath and crossing of fingers lest anyone should inadvertently let something drop and give the game away. Amazingly, the secret held right up to the very last minute. But there were one or two sticky moments.

One morning as Henrietta and I sat down to breakfast, I turned on my phone and received six Whatsapp messages. All from the family group regarding the secret party. How to explain to Henrietta six messages that I couldn't show her? I mumbled something, and I'm sure she thought I had a secret girlfriend. A tricky moment.

One difficulty was persuading Henrietta to pack two dresses for what she thought was just one night, but we had a stroke of luck here. A few weeks before the day, Henrietta and her daughter were shopping in Leicester and happened across a sale rail with two lovely dresses, both of which fitted Henrietta perfectly. While she was trying to decide which to get, Joanne - seeing a perfect opportunity - was trying to persuade her to buy both without seeming desperate. It worked and

Henrietta bought both.

On the day, Henrietta was supposed to pack both dresses and choose one that evening, but as we left the house I asked whether she had indeed packed them to be told that, no, it was silly taking both, so she had only packed one. Panic. I couldn't phone Joanne without Henrietta hearing, but I did find 10 seconds to text.

On our way to the hotel, we were to pick up Henrietta's other daughter, Kathryn, so I texted Joanne to say don't contact me, hold all further conversations by text with her.

So, to cut a long story short,

after a couple of apparently innocent enquires from Kathryn in the back seat about dresses, followed by a text conversation with her sister, Joanne went round to Henrietta's house to collect the second one.

I had sneaked my dinner suit (yes - I do have one - a bargain from the Jaeger outlet shop in Belper at £50) round to Joanne and she took that down for me to avoid it being spotted.

The meal on the Friday went well except that one of the grandsons had broken both wrists that afternoon on a climbing wall so his dad - Aaron - was missing from the early part of the meal. But other than that it was a lovely meal with Henrietta and her four children, all together, something that rarely happens.

On the Saturday we all duly went to the park for a picnic and during that day Vicki, Naresh and my two granddaughters arrived, followed by the even bigger surprise of Henrietta's sister and niece from Ireland. But still no inkling of the evening.

Eventually, at about 5 o'clock we had to let on and surprise her with the second dress and my suit, but even then the size of the gathering - about 40 - still came as a wonderful surprise and a memorable party was had by all.





Meet My Fiancée

The second big event this year occurred actually at Henrietta's party. In one of the band breaks, I asked if I might make a short speech. It was indeed a short speech - verbatim my speech was "I would like to say a few words. Actually, exactly six words. Henrietta Hudswell, will you marry me".

As you might imagine this produced various reactions, mainly surprise, but the important one - from my point of view - was a "yes" from the lady in question. Actually, it would not have been fair to just drop that question on

someone entirely unannounced, and indeed I hadn't.

For some time, we had been discussing, on and off, the idea of where we might live.

Henrietta likes to walk a lot - to the shops, to restaurants, to coffee with friends and so on, which she can do easily in Ashby, but while there are plenty of country walks in Hazelwood, with the noble exception of the Puss in Boots, you have to get the car out to go anywhere.

So Henrietta likes to live in (or near) a town, and, while I like the idea of walking to shops and pubs, and local restaurants are very handy, living in an urban environment just won't work for me. On top of this, we both have friends locally who we would like to see regularly.

a more romantic proposal at some indeterminate point in the future. Little did she know that I was planning to do it at her party.

Meanwhile, back at the proposal, the second reaction it produced was "can I see the ring"?

Ring? RING? I hadn't thought about a ring. Aren't engagement rings for starry eyed teenagers in love for the first time? Apparently not, and even though a number of my male friends (who, unsurprisingly, wish to remain anonymous) privately agreed with me - they wouldn't have thought of it either - no one supported me in public. So acclaim and disgrace in the same moment. (We did subsequently buy a ring though).

Skiing off to a Rocky Start



So - a knotty problem, and one we decided to put in the "too difficult" box. But, we did agree - in general principle anyway - that we wanted to get married. Nothing specific, but it was a statement that we wanted to make to each other, and it was definitely much easier than moving. Having discussed it in a factual sort of way, I promised to make

Stop Press

We had arranged the wedding for next May, but unhappily, my divorce from Ronnie 40 years ago means that we can't get married in a Catholic church. Fortunately, this can be rectified, but it will take many months and, alas, cost several hundred pounds. So the wedding plans are on hold, but we have our fingers crossed for the Autumn. Wish us luck.

The usual three of us set off for the Rockies in January, but unfortunately, it wasn't the best of holidays. We flew over on the Thursday, and had a days skiing on Friday, but on the Saturday we heard that Mike's wife Gil, had been taken into hospital. Mike was told not to come home as nothing much was known at that point, but it is very difficult to enjoy yourself, knowing that your wife is poorly in hospital 5,000 miles away. However, on the next day, she was out and home and we all relaxed. This was not to last though as the very next day, she was back in and we bundled Mike back on a plane that evening (full marks to Delta Airlines for the way they handled the emergency - no charge for changing an unchangeable ticket). So Mike had a short holiday.

On the first night, we had gone to buy Mike his holiday bottle of whisky, and in Utah, that means going to the state liquor store. I dropped Mike and Sally at the door and went off to park the car. I got back to the store to see them chatting to a security guard, and as I approached, he asked if I had any form of ID with me. WHAT? Three geriatrics (well two - it's ungentlemanly to call Sally geriatric) and they want ID? Yes they did, and fortunately Mike and Sally both had their passports. I didn't, so I said that I would go back to the car and wait. The guard said that wouldn't do - because he had identified me as a member of the group he had to see IDs for all of us. So - we, two 70+ year olds and a lady of - well, let's just say our combined age was 212 - had to drive back to the house to get my passport and drive back again before Mike could buy his scotch. That has to be a first.

A Style Icon

One other good thing came out of the ski holiday. I have for years skied in a one piece ski suit. These are a great idea because, being one piece, in the very unlikely event that I should fall, the snow can't get in. But mine was getting on a bit and when you put "one piece ski suit" into ebay, everything that comes up is in the vintage section. So, a bit disappointing. But, this year, as we came out of one of the smarter cafes up the mountain in fashionable Park City, there, sunning themselves to a stylish tan, were three men in - yes - one piece ski suits.

As it is with ski suits, so it is too with cardigans. Have you noticed that my trend

cardigan-wise is now being followed by the younger generation?

I have always maintained that I am a style icon, and there you have proof beyond argument.

Your writer is ahead of the curve fashion wise. Live with it!



Round the world in 40 days

The third big event in our lives this year was a huge, round-the-world journey that we had been planning for 18 months - a sort of pre-honeymoon as it turned out. When we first discussed the idea Henrietta said that she would like to visit places that Liz and I hadn't been to, but this wasn't easy. However we did manage to find Tahiti and New Zealand which I hadn't seen before.

The final trip included flying to San Francisco where we spent a few days, followed by a four day road trip down the California coast - the famous Highway 1 - to Los Angeles. From here we flew to Tahiti and stayed a few days in a fabulous over-water bungalow looking out over the Pacific Ocean. From Tahiti we flew to Auckland in New Zealand with a connecting flight down to Queenstown. After a day there, we picked up a motorhome and spent the next week slowly making our way up the west coast of South Island, finally crossing to Christchurch in the east where we turned in the motorhome and flew up to Rotorua in North Island. (Rotorua is New Zealand's most active thermal region with boiling mud and lots of nasty smells.) From there we drove back to Auckland for a flight to Sydney, where we saw the sights for a day, then it was on to Bali for a few days R&R in one of the most beautiful places I know. Finally, to Singapore for a few days then India and the Taj Mahal. An amazing trip with a few highlights.

I have wanted to visit Queenstown for a long time as it is the home of the Shotover River Jet Boat - the grand-daddy of all jet boat rides. I knew I was going to ride it, but would Henrietta? A big question that hung over the whole trip and I think, privately, that there might have been quite a lot of money at home riding on the outcome. In the event she didn't do it, but I loved it.

When you enter a number of countries they are anxious that you don't bring in any fruit or vegetable pests, so they ask you

to dump any fruit and veg you may have before passing through customs. New Zealand is particularly zealous about this, with \$400 (£200) fines for flouting the law. We sailed past all these warnings because we had nothing of that nature, having had to throw away several lovely oranges as we entered Tahiti. So, having cleared customs, Henrietta was pleased to see a lovely little dog walking along beside her. She remained pleased until two things happened. Firstly the dog seemed to be sniffing her handbag, and secondly the dog was accompanied by a lady in a very official looking uniform. The dog was a sniffer and it had detected something.

When the handbag was turned out, there, neatly wrapped in a tissue, was an apple core. Henrietta had eaten the apple on the plane, but the attendants had not been round to collect the rubbish, so she wrapped it, put it in her handbag, and forgot about it. Until the sky - in the form of a sniffer dog and very official handler - fell in.

The long and the short of it was that, after an hour of tense worry, feeling like criminals (which I suppose we were) and thinking of the effect a disappearing £200 would make to our holiday, she was let off with a caution - presumably because it was such an innocent mistake (who ever heard of smuggling apple cores?). Much relief though.

What do we remember most? Firstly I suppose, the grandeur of the scenery in New Zealand's South Island. It has been described as Scotland on steroids, and I thought of the Lake District's big brother. Vast lakes, snow capped mountains, long roads winding through the hills, the helicopter ride up to the glacier, and always the Atlantic Ocean. Amazing.

Then it would have to be sitting in front of the Taj Mahal. Stunningly beautiful, and yet somehow - I can't find the right word here - arrogant? appalling? - in

contrast with the dirt, the overcrowding, the dreadful air, and the sheer grinding poverty all around it. Odd, but that's what I felt - awe and sorrow.

Our luxurious bungalow on Tahiti was a few days of tranquillity - but extremely expensive. Beer at £9 a pint. Too much.

Finally, the smell of Rotorua. It hits you in the plane as you approach the airfield and doesn't go away until you leave.

Note:- Between Tahiti and New Zealand, we crossed the date line. When I told my granddaughters (aged 8) this, the immediate question was, of course, "what's the date line"? A reasonable enough question, but an incredibly difficult one to answer. In the end I found the best way to explain it is with a globe and a torch for the sun. Trace a day starting on the early side of the date line through to the late side.



Tasteful advice of the year 1

or *How to eat properly*. Giles Coren in The Times, Jan 21st)

Just don't eat anything out of a packet. Don't eat in front of a screen. Don't eat standing up, or on public transport, or in the street. Don't eat without cutlery or out of a box. Don't eat anything delivered to your door by a man on a motorbike or passed to you in your car through a hatch. Don't eat anything a fox would ignore. Don't eat anything because you "can't resist" or because "a little of what you fancy does you good" or because you saw it advertised on TV. Don't eat because you are bored. And don't eat anything that contains ingredients you cannot visualise.

Tasteful advice of the year 2

or *The Great British Breakfast*. (Matthew Syed in The Times, November 7th)

I love international cuisine but is there anything more glorious than a plate of bacon and eggs (and mushrooms if they are in the fridge)? I cook an English breakfast most Saturdays and doubt there has been a more perfect dish in the history of the world. Those who take a pop at British food really don't have a clue.

You walked into that award of the year.

Henrietta and I were at dinner with her daughter and son-in-law, Steve. We had recently been trying to tidy up a bit at the farm, and Henrietta was bemoaning the amount of "stuff" I have round the place and the fact that I don't seem to throw anything out. After a bit of thought, she came out with "The trouble is that Terry is devoted to old things". Oh dear. Steve was there like a shot. "What, like you?". Cruel.

Pedant of the Year Award

This must go to Hugh Dennis on Mock the Week:-

"Those who didn't get to grammar school say there should be less grammar schools, while those who DID go to grammar school will say there should be fewer grammar schools."

The Sayings of Henrietta 1

I've spent a lot of my life around optimists - Henrietta is one - and it always seems to me an odd way of looking at things. I'm a pessimist and it's a logical position. If you are an optimist, always expecting things to go well, life kicks you in the teeth now and then when they go wrong. Pessimists on the other hand are always getting lovely surprises when things go well. I was explaining this theory to Henrietta to which she simply said:- "only a pessimist would come up with that".

Achievement of the Year

This award must surely go to my old school friend Earl. Earl loves to build things and his back garden usually contains some construction project or other. An old MG restored, a series 2 Land Rover rebuilt. But this time he has excelled himself. He bought some plans and some planks of wood (not a kit) and he built this

Best Description of the Year Award

I'm not sure where I read it but—Donald Trump - petulance personified.

The Sayings of Henrietta 2

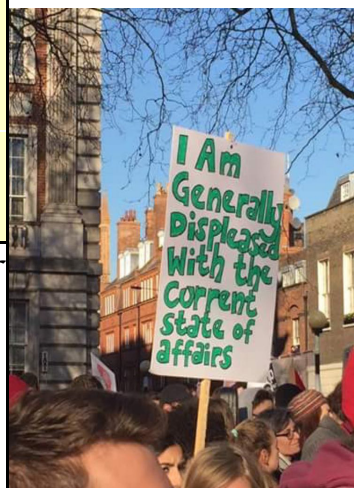
We were in Banbury, which used to be Henrietta's shopping town when she lived in Brackley, so a place she knows well.

We were away for the weekend, and I had just picked her up from church. We were heading off towards Brackley to meet an old friend of hers for coffee, and I asked which way we should we go? She looked around for a bit and said "It's the other side of here".

I still don't know quite what that means, but she insists it's perfectly clear.

Any ideas?

Poster of the Year



Nursery Rhymes brought up to date

Earlier this year, Times readers were invited to update nursery rhymes to reflect modern times. Here are a few examples:-

"Georgie Porgie every day, kissed the boys and said 'I'm gay'. When the girls were heard to sigh, he kissed them too, and said: 'I'm bi-'."

"Baa baa black sheep, have you any apps? Eweber, Zoopla, Google Maps. For dipping or shearing, Fleecebook is fine, and Ramder for the hottest lambs who live down the line."

"Little Jack Horner sat in the corner, eating his peas from the pod Obeying his pledge to eat five fruit and veg, he's become such a smug little sod."

Finally, a reworking of Twinkle, Twinkle written in the Rees-Mogg style

"Scintillate, scintillate globule vivific. Fain would I fathom thy nature specific. Nightly suspended in ether capacious. Strongly resembling a gem carbonaceous."

