

# Erichton Chronicle — Standish Standard

August 2004  
13<sup>th</sup> Edition

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## The Circle of Life



*Gwen with Hal*

As we start to write this 13<sup>th</sup> edition of our “aperiodical”, we realise it has been a full two years since the last edition. How time flies! Perhaps the biggest event in this time, sadly, was the loss of Kim’s mum Gwen, who died a year ago. She lived a long life, and touched many people’s lives. Many of those whom we managed to contact in time, came to celebrate her life<sup>1</sup> at her funeral.

Kim wrote and read the *eulogy*<sup>2</sup>, a difficult thing to do, Blair and Channah spoke together in tandem, talking about their relationship with their grandmother, and Hal at the ripe old age of 5 and a quarter, got up on his own and sang a song about family for “everybody but especially for his *Lalla*”: “We come from many different lands...”. I suspect there wasn’t a dry eye in the church as he sang. But I am sure that Gwen would have been proud of her offspring — children and grandchildren — on this occasion. Her funeral was followed by a wake for her here back at our home in Gordon Av-

<sup>1</sup><http://parallel.hpc.unsw.edu.au/rks/gilchrist/obituary.txt>

<sup>2</sup><http://parallel.hpc.unsw.edu.au/rks/gilchrist/gwen-eulogy.txt>

enue, Coogee. We were able to project her “this is your life” video onto the large screen (which Russ had put together for her birthday party in 2001). We marveled at the many memories that flashed across the screen — a long life full of many happy memories. She would have loved to have been there at the party. Many of us could picture her there, glass in hand, holding court in conversation with one person after another. Our final tribute to her, Hal’s idea, was to release a helium balloon from our balcony. It floated high into the heavens with the words “I love you Lalla” written by Hal on its surface before its release.

The last six to twelve months of Gwen’s life in particular had been very difficult for her. She had lost most of her sight and most of her hearing and her heart condition saw to it that she had little mobility. Nevertheless she was still mentally agile (at times downright stubborn to boot) but it did mean that she required almost constant attention predominantly from Kim and in the last 4 weeks from the full time “personal carers” that Kim had organised to live in after Gwen was discharged after spending 6 weeks in hospital in May/June. Despite all this we were comforted to know that she did what she always wanted to do — to die at home, with her loved ones around.

It took us about four months before we were able emotionally to begin going through Gwen’s things, and then perhaps another six months to sift through her lifetime of treasures, great and small, stuffed into every conceivable cranny of her capacious wardrobe. Every now and then, we’d come across a real gem, such as a diary written to her by Kim’s father Ric, during the horrors of World War II in New Guinea. The sifting through process has been long and laborious, at times overwhelming, always daunting. As we write we are only just beginning to get on top of the things which filled the life that was hers, a life less ordinary.

In the meantime, parts of the rest of the house are getting much needed attention. Much of the house had been unchanged since the 1960’s. Gwen would not allow it to be changed. It was always a challenge for Kim to do any changes around the house (even though

Kim was paying for it). So we have now made some changes to make living conditions a little more comfortable. Most of these have been fairly minor but the biggest change to date has been the lifting of the 40 year old carpets, revealing beautiful jarrah floorboards downstairs and New Zealand Kauri in the kitchen and on the stairs. We have had these polished and they look quite magnificent. In coordinating tradespeople, Kim has added *Project Manager* to her list of job titles — there is still much to do. The kitchen reached the end of its usable life quite a while ago, and a lot of the rest of the house needs “nips and tucks” here and there.

## Education supplement

One would expect after a couple of years that Hal has grown up a lot. He's now a school boy! He started school (Kindergarten<sup>3</sup> year) last year at Clovelly Public School (our closest school), and is now in year 1. This year, with a teacher he loves, his reading has accelerated dramatically. Russell has been reading him “The Secret Seven” by Enid Blyton, and was rather shocked to discover that he'd read nine chapters by himself one Saturday morning. As we write this at Port Douglas the three of us sit on *chaises longues* beside the pool all of us independently reading a large chapter book! Nothing for Russ and I but not bad for a boy who is six and a quarter!

Hal has a number of after school activities, (which upon looking back at the last issue haven't changed) — Ballet, Swimming and Gymnastics. That boy can dance! This is not the rant of some obsessed parent, but the candid assessment of anyone who watches him dance, including his ballet teacher. He is still as an enthused as ever about ballet (although he



*Hal's first day at School*



*Hal dancing as a Russian doll*

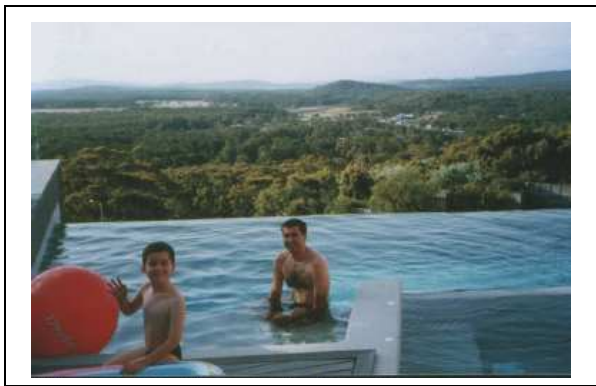
had a brief lack of interest at the end of last year), and his dancing style has matured dramatically — not just from his ballet lessons mind you, as he is often seen attempting moves he has seen on such ballet videos as “Swan Lake” or “Coppelia”. After his first year at ballet school, he was involved in a full length ballet called “A Magical Christmas Tale”. The star of the show that Hal was in was Alexander, who at 16 had just won the MacDonald's dance scholarship, was a finalist in the international Gené awards and is now studying at the London Ballet school, so Hal was in good company! Hal had two roles in his end of year performance— he danced with the remaining boys in the school (8 in total, with a few hundred girls), and he also danced with his own class where he is the only boy. He wore a grin and an “I've arrived!” look the whole time he was on stage!

On the education front, Kim has involved herself in the *Parents and Citizens* (P&C) of Hal's school. Most of you won't be surprised to learn that, in her first year as a parent at the school, she was elected on the executive of the P&C, the only Kindergarten parent to be elected. Kim is also involved in the School's environment management committee, after being one of the instigators for its formation. For one reason or another, she seems to have a meeting at school every second or third week. Much to her chagrin this tends to fall on a Tuesday night which conflicts with one of the two to three nights a week that she does aquarobics. This year at school Kim volunteered to be the co-ordinator (the boss as Hal called it) of the second hand book stall at the School's fête, held only once every two years. It also was a fairly intensive period. Russell helped out on the day and was exhausted, as were we all, by the end of it. Being lovers of books, we were gobsmacked at how the world's publishing industry has virtually made second hand paperbacks valueless (not worthless, as the worth to a child with a love of reading is immense, but not commanding much of a price). We were selling books anywhere between 50c to \$2, depending on condition. We sold only approximately half the books given our supply outstripped demand but still made nearly \$2500, a respectable sum of money, for the fête. I can predict that in a few years, much the same fate will befall the massive number of DVDs being churned out by Hollywood.

## Other occupiers of Kim's time

In addition to the above, Kim's other ‘work’ has been many and varied. These days she is predominantly involved in property management and development. In particular she is involved in managing the managers involved in managing a host of family company interests. There seems to be an never end source of details to attend to, both small and large.

<sup>3</sup>In NSW, Kindergarten refers to the first year of school, not a preschool year like in some other states. For example, Victoria's equivalent is called *Prep*.



*Lounging in the pool at our new holiday house*

The past few years, along with Greg and business partner Ross, have seen involvement in the development of a long term property development at Port Stephens. Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the development saw the subdivision of the 22 acres of land that the trio had bought many years ago. Stage 3 resulted in the building of 24 luxury, architect designed apartments and townhouses overlooking beautiful One Mile Beach. The situation and the apartments are so stunning, that each side of the partnership decided to keep an apartment for themselves. So we are now the proud owners of a fabulous whole floor 3 bedroom apartment in the Port Stephens area! We love it there! I've even toyed with the idea (albeit briefly) of enrolling Hal in the local school!!

But I think we'll stay in Sydney for a while!

## Scientifically Speaking

Although it might look like we spend most of our time in transit, there is of course still other work going on in between (and sometimes during) our travel stints.

Russell is still in the same job as director of the High Performance Computing Support Unit. It has been a rather turbulent time at work. The faculty in which he is employed (Science and Technology) merged with the faculty of Life Sciences to form a larger *Faculty of Science*. The original Dean of Life Sciences took over as interim Dean of the new Faculty for a couple of months, before resigning to pursue a career in the private sector. We then had a period of acting deans until a dean was appointed in February 2002. This Dean resigned in June 2003, so again Russell had an acting dean until the appointment as the new Dean in February this year of Mike Archer, previously of the Australian Museum, and vocal proponent of the Thylacine cloning project as Dean. All in all, over the last 3 years, Russell has had 7 bosses, most of whom were acting in a caretaker role! Added to this, UNSW has had a sudden change of Vice Chancellor, with the resignation of Rory Hume in April 2004.

The *Australian Centre for Advanced Computing and Communications* (ac3) which now hosts our supercomputers has had its operations extended, but under changed conditions. The subscription fees paid by the universities are more tightly tied to the provision of facilities management, and provision of some user support to the university partners. It also provides facilities management for assorted State Government departments — not of supercomputers, but of the more prosaic web and file servers. Russell's group is now shrinking back to supporting mainly UNSW users, and is but part of a larger ac3 user support team.

In the meantime, the *Australian Partnership for Advanced Computing* (APAC) has renewed its operational charter. Most of Russell's funding comes from APAC, and his group is working on assorted high performance computing software tools, as well as a growing involvement in *the Grid*.

The Grid is notion of connecting up computing and data resources around the world so that high performance computing users no longer need to know where the computers and data is located, nor deal with idiosyncratic systems for using the facilities. The Grid will provide software services that discover where data might reside (eg the human genome database, or images taken with the Hubble space telescope), negotiate with supercomputing centres to obtain enough computing time to perform the analysis, arrange for the data to be copied to the supercomputer centre(s), submit processing jobs to the computers batch processing queue, and finally arrange for the results to be transmitted back to the scientist's workstation. The scientist need not care about the details of any of this — it just works like the electricity grid providing power to your power point — you don't need to be aware of the details of the power plant(s), the numerous transformers and distribution devices along the way.

That is the hype. The reality today is much different. People still haven't figured out how to get the Grid to work properly, however there are a number of high profile Grid projects being developed internationally, with large amounts of money being poured into them. APAC is spending about half of its activities developing an Australian Grid. Whilst I have been keeping an eye on the Grid as interesting sideline until now, waiting for the technology to mature before taking it too seriously, now is the time to take the plunge. With so much money being poured into this, UNSW must take part, or face being left behind.

On the science front, probably the biggest event in the last two years was Russell being the organiser of the 8<sup>th</sup> (International) Artificial Life conference<sup>4</sup> in Sydney. This conference had only been held outside of America once before — in 1996 in Nara, Japan (see issue 7). The conference was a great success: delegates

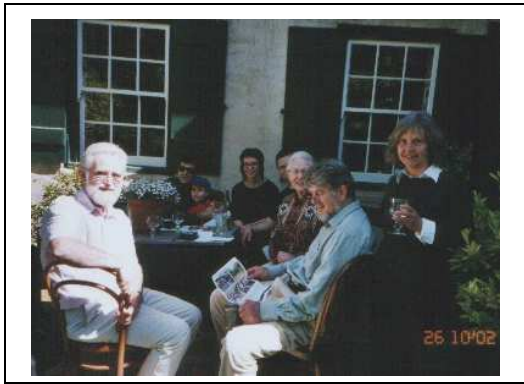
<sup>4</sup><http://alife8.alife.org>

enjoyed themselves, the conference went very smoothly and even made a profit! You can imagine how hard it is to do that, as you need to predict attendance numbers more than a year out from the conference itself. The conference dinner was held at Zenbu, a Japanese inspired restaurant at Darling Harbour. Kim joined Russell for the conference dinner, and also attended one of the keynote lectures by Rodney Brooks, an ex-Adelaide man, now head of a world renowned robotics lab at MIT, and organiser of the 4<sup>th</sup> Artificial Life conference in Boston (Russell didn't go to that one!).

Speaking of Boston, this year's Artificial Life meeting is in Boston. Russell has a couple of papers to present, so we're all planning on visiting America in September. Details to be confirmed, but watch out all you Americans.

I guess that leads neatly into our usual travel section.....

## Travel



*Standishes at Hugo and Di's*

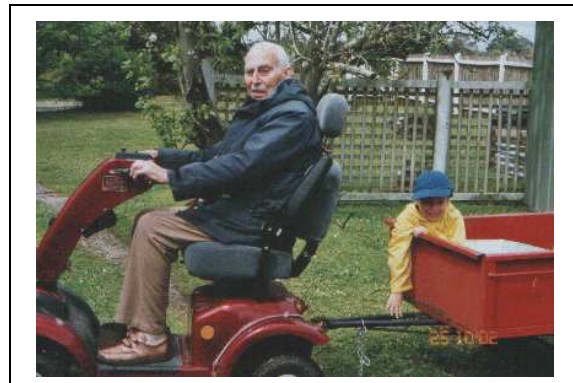
So it's time for our travelogue, when Kim tries to maximise the usage of Russell's recreation leave entitlements, and Russell wonders how he is going to find the time to do his research! As we write, this CCSS comes to you from Port Douglas, in sunny North Queensland. One of the highlights has been journeying by boat to the Great Barrier Reef for Hal's first experience of it. Like all children of his age, he is fascinated by the movie *Finding Nemo*, so we spent most of our snorkeling time with him looking for clownfish (Marlin & Nemo) and surgeon fish (Dory). We didn't spot any blue surgeon fish, but spied some clownfish and several turtles. Hal is a real water baby — he loved swimming around in the deep water — he was the first in the water from the boat and last to get out. This despite the fact that the water was not tepid (it is our winter after all).

But as usual we are getting ahead of ourselves and will have to take a step back in time to fill you in on the travels to date. The last issue of the CCSS, you may recall, came to you from Fiji. Over the past two years

we have traveled extensively domestically and overseas occasionally.

Melbourne was the city which took out line honours of being the most visited city in Australia by us. The first visit was prompted by Russell's attendance at an interdisciplinary workshop at Monash University, in October 2002. The conference was held in the same building where a fatal shooting had occurred a week earlier. Fortunately, while Russell was there it was trouble free. We traveled to Melbourne as a family, and took the opportunity to visit Russell's grandparents at Boolaboo. We stayed with our friends Christina and Antony whom we hadn't really caught up with since their wedding the previous year. Derek (Russell's uncle who has now moved back to Australia from Japan) accommodated us at his house in Pearcedale within sight of Boolaboo, and took us to see the *Pearcedale Moonlight Sanctuary*, a place similar in concept to the more famous Healesville Sanctuary, that specialises in native nocturnal animals.

In March 2003, we traveled again to Melbourne, this time staying firstly with Russell's uncle and aunt Hugo & Di at their house in South Yarra and then at their holiday farm at Forrest, just up the hill from Apollo Bay on the Great Ocean Road. For those who haven't driven the Great Ocean Road, it is one of those many natural wonders Australia offers, spectacular limestone cliffs, gorges and islands. We had a lovely few days at Forrest (thanks Hugo and Di) using it as our base to explore this scenic area. As it transpired that Lu, Russell's mother, was visiting Henry and Heath at Boolaboo, we decided to return to Melbourne via a rather longer route, taking the ferry across the entrance of Port Philip Bay (the Rip) to visit everyone at Boolaboo. With Melbourne's freeway system it would have been quicker to drive via Melbourne around the north end of Port Philip Bay, however, it was definitely the more scenic of the routes, and we enjoyed the stately calm of Queenscliff on the western side of the Rip. And it was nice to catch up with Lu, Henry and Heath again and all the clan.



*Henry (Gramps) demonstrating his "red horse" to Hal*

In June 2003, Russell had a conference in the CBD of Melbourne. This time Kim and Hal didn't go with him. But we did all go as a family for 5 days to Noosa and Hervey Bay/ Fraser Island in Queensland shortly after Russell's return. Having been with the carers day and night, now with Gwen, since her discharge from hospital in May 2003, Kim felt confident that Gwen was being well cared for. We spoke with her every day while we were away. As we left Gwen looked Kim in the eyes and said: "I'm really glad that you are going away on this holiday". I told her we were only going to be away for 5 days and that we would be back on Monday night. No-one could have anticipated that this was the last time we would see Gwen. Gwen died on Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> of June, almost to the minute of us touching back down at Sydney airport. Kim's cousin Dean was at the airport to meet us and broke the news to us. In retrospect I think Gwen chose this as her time to go. She was always a little concerned about how it would be for Hal to be here in the last days or weeks. I think she did as she always did — she did it her way!

As you can imagine a great sadness seemed to descend over our household. Our house seemed empty without her. We were pleased therefore to accept the invitation of our good friends Graeme and Mark to fly (yet again) to Melbourne and join them in August 2003 at their holiday house at Venus Bay (thanks G&M).



*Graeme & Mark with a welcome cocktail*

We managed to fit in another brief visit to Boolaboo to celebrate Gramps's birthday on the way through to Venus Bay. And to ensure that Melbourne remained our most popular destination we called in yet again on our way back from Tasmania in April 2004, again visiting Boolaboo on the way to Venus Bay to see Graeme & Mark and the new extensions to their holiday house. (thanks again guys)

If our destination of choice was not Melbourne, then it seemed to be Canberra. In both December 2002 and December 2003, we kept up the tradition of visiting our friend, Liz Hoffman, on the first weekend of December to coincide with the start of Advent. Liz has moved from Auckland to Canberra, and now lives in a new housing estate with a swimming pool (greatly appreciated by Hal, who will go swimming irrespective

of the season!). The December 2003 trip to visit Liz in Canberra actually coincided with an Artificial Life conference conveniently held over that weekend at ADFA. So while Russell was away at his conference Kim, Hal and Liz were pleased to be able to meet up with Sue MacIntosh and Michele Foster over a long lunch at the Botanic Gardens restaurant.

In January 2003, we found ourselves at Liz's again, this time prompted by the occasion of our friend Denis Wright celebrating his 50<sup>th</sup> birthday. As it happened this was the weekend of the disastrous bushfires in Canberra, with over 400 houses lost to the fires. The numbers at Denis's party were understandably depleted. The party was attended predominantly by out-of-towners, as the Canberra residents were on heightened alert, ready to save their homes from the fires.

In April 2003 we enjoyed a visit to Pam & Alex's new property near Grafton. They had decided to downsize and so, now live on a nearly 1000 acre farm (instead of the one twice that size at Inverell where they were living before)! As always it was lovely catching up with them (Pam and Kim have been friends since we were 8 years old) and seeing them in their new home.



*Hal kissing the bride*

In May 2003 our friend Judy (Hal's god-mother) finally took the plunge and joined the ranks of married couples. She and Edward were married in Sydney in May. Judy took off for England (where she still owned a house) in July and Edward joined her in early September. There they "renewed" their marriage vows shortly after Edwards arrival before friends and family on that side of the world .

The big overseas trip for us came as a five week trip during September/October 2003 to Europe. The instigating factor was that Russell had another Artificial Life conference to attend, this time in Dortmund, Germany. After this conference and a brief catch up with a colleague in Belgium, Russell joined Kim and Hal who'd flown separately to Birmingham a couple of days before hand and were staying with our friends Joo Ee, Ed and family for a couple of days. It had been 11 years since we had last caught up in person so there was a lot of catching up to do. It was the first time that they had met Hal and that we had met their two boys, Andrew (11 years old — unbeknownst to us Joo Ee had been pregnant with him when we had last stayed with them!) and Richard (8 years old). The boys got on well. From Birmingham, we continued our

“Midlands” tour, traveling to Bury near Manchester to stay with friends Andrew, Valerie and their son, Calum (8 months older than Hal). Again the boys got on well as did the parents — catching up after 17 years!



*Robin Hood*

the location of Robin Hood’s marriage to Maid Marian, so of course we had to visit the Major Oak tree which features a small museum about the legend of Robin Hood. Judy had always talked about her origins from a humble coal mining village, so we had images of a grim and bleak environment. We were pleasantly surprised to find that “Robin Hood land” was full of castles, ruined abbeys and large open pastures that belonged to assorted nobility. This area is known as the *Dukeries*, as at some time in the past, the King sold off parts of Sherwood Forest to various dukes for their country estates. We enjoyed our time with Judy and Edward and soon it was time to fly across the channel to the heart of Europe — Paris.

We boarded an *EasyJet* flight direct to Paris, one of the budget airlines that have sprung up in recent years. Thus followed the only downside in our entire holiday. We had, through the internet, booked an apartment in the inner city suburb of *Neuilly sur Seine* an up-market residential suburb on the perimeter of Paris for the week we intended to stay there. Upon arriving at the apartment, there was no-one to meet us! After about an hour and a half of waiting, getting increasingly concerned, we met a neighbour who told us that the woman who owned the apartment (who incidentally lived in Japan), had had to make an emergency trip to America as her son was ill. Her attitude was that of the legendary *Parisienne* — in speaking with us (in perfect English) she peered down her nose at us and addressed us as “you Anglo-Saxons”! To be fair she was the only person like that that we met but it was not a good start to our time in Paris! What made matters frustrating was the fact that the neighbour even had a key to the apartment we had booked, but, despite the written copy of our booking to show her and our pleas for her or ourselves to be able to

From Bury we journeyed on to meet up with Judy and Edward, the main instigating reason for us being in the Midlands of England. Edwinstowe is the village Judy hails from, and she and Edward (who had only arrived a couple of weeks ahead of us) were beginning their year in England. Edwinstowe, in the heart of Sherwood Forest, is famous for being

make contact with the owner, the neighbour would not assist in any way. She would not let us in, nor even give us a phone number for us to call the owner. In short, the answer was a complete *non!*

So here we were standing outside the door of the apartment we had booked but hitting a brick wall in terms of accessibility. We were in a pickle. It was now late Sunday evening. We had our bags in hand and, just to make matters worse, one of these had to be carried as the wheels had collapsed. We even had food supplies that we had brought with us ready for our self catering stay. There wasn’t even a toilet



nearby. Leaving Hal and Russell sitting on the steps of the apartment building Kim had had to find one at the base of a pub in the Avenue Charles de Gaulle. Leaving Kim and Hal sitting on the steps of the apartment Russell went in search of a hotel for us to stay in for the night. We hoped we would be able to make contact with the owner the next day and set this situation right. However, the only contact we had for her was an email and that could take time. So a hotel was required. A quick survey of the local hotels indicated that finding a room was next to impossible. Russell was eventually helped by a hotel receptionist who was kind enough to ring around (her own hotel being full). The receptionist rang a dozen or so hotels. All of these were either not answering or if they did, told her that they were full. Finally the receptionist found a hotel for us but it was on the other side of Paris in what we later found was a fairly industrial suburb (Issy). We then had to lug all our bags through the Metro system, which is not designed for wheels (even if all of ours were working which they were not), arriving fairly late at this soulless business hotel. We found an internet cafe nearby, and discovered that the apartment owner had sent us an email a few days before, requesting that we reconfirm, but of course we were in Sherwood Forest at the time, without an internet cafe in sight! Given that everything had been reconfirmed only a couple of weeks back, prior to our departure from Sydney, we had not thought it would have been necessary to do this again. We sent a reply email, the first of one every day for the next four days, hoping to hear back from the owner and still be able to use the apartment. Despite numerous emails including one on our return to Sydney we never heard from the owner. After our horror experience of carrying bags through the metro for two hours the previous night, and the knowledge that getting an email response from the owner might

conceivably take a day or two, we decided to re-book the same hotel we had stayed in the night before for another night. To our horror we were told that this was not possible; the hotel was full that night. They rang around and found another hotel for us. You guessed it. On the other side of Paris! Again, another trip across town to yet another soulless hotel, this time in an ethnic quarter. We were knackered when we got there! It's funny in a Monty Pythonesque way when we look back on it but at the time it certainly didn't seem like we were having fun! Mind you in all of this, I should say that Hal (unlike his parents) never complained one bit. We put him through quite a lot but he just took it in his stride.

Given the effort we had taken to get to this hotel and the fact that, at least in the earlier part of the week we were still hoping that an email from the apartment owner would deliver us from this second soulless hotel, we never actually moved to any other location. We simply didn't have the energy to navigate the system any further.



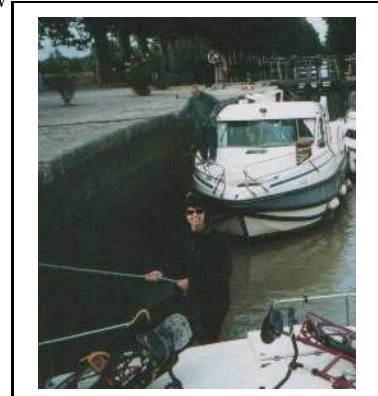
*French style lunch with Jean Phillipe and Régine at the Relais Normand*

With the business of getting a hotel behind us, we gradually recovered our spirits. Our recovery was assisted without a doubt by the company of our friends Régine and Jean Phillipe, who had been our next door neighbours here in Sydney until work had seen them placed in Paris. Of the week that we spent in Paris two of those days and two evening were spent with Régine and Jean Phillipe and their children Thomas and Margaux. Part of that time we spent with Régine who, after hearing of our torrid adventures traipsing all over Paris with broken luggage, kindly offered to take us shopping for a new suitcase. When we left Paris to journey on we left the broken suitcase behind in the room of the hotel where we had stayed — we were glad to be rid of it! On another day Régine and J-P drove us into the country side to visit Monet's garden. This had been a desire of Hal's (prompted by the book "Linnea and Monet's garden" which our friends Nils and Karolina had given him a year or two before). We all enjoyed the garden (Régine and J-P hadn't been there before) and then had the most wonderful meal in the town of nearby. An afternoon at Chateau Bizy

topped off a great day.

Given a bad start the rest of our week in Paris was infinitely better. Paris turned on spectacular weather for us. We had a superlative day visiting the top of the Eiffel tower — Europe was enjoying an "indian summer" after the heat waves it had experienced throughout July. We enjoyed visiting and revisiting the usual tourist attractions but for Hal, EuroDisney Paris was the absolute highlight. He didn't stop talking about it for months after we returned.

After Paris, we flew south, where we had hired a boat to travel down the *Canal du Midi* for 5 days. This is an experience to be recommended. We spent our time pottering along the canal stopping in at various bucolic villages along the way, sampling the local wine (which is ridiculously cheap) and food (not so cheap!). Navigating the locks was fun — although had we done more we probably might have found it tiresome. At one of these locks Kim made the classic mistake of letting go of the rope, then attempting to grab hold of the boat as it drifted away from the side of the lock. There is only one to go after doing this, and that is down into the water. In spectacular slow motion fashion of course! Having previously discussed what the contents of the canal water were there was no way Kim was going to go into the water above waist high so she clung onto the side of the boat, in grim determination that she wasn't going to go completely in. Russell had to tie the rope where he was at the stern of the boat. Hal was inside the cabin at the heel — looking distraught — thinking his mummy was going to die. Almost before Russell could get to Kim, suspended on the side of the boat, a Frenchman, from one of the other boats in the lock, leapt over onto our boat and grabbing Kim by the rear of her trousers, hauled her up out of the water, over the side of the boat and landed her like a fish on the deck! In fairness to Kim it should be said that we saw at least two other people meet similar fates that day and they went in completely. We wondered whether the *éclusiers* (lockkeepers) met at the end of a long day of staffing the lock, glass of merlot in hand, laughing at the number of tourist who'd fallen in that day! They probably kept bets on it!



*In a lock on the Canal du Midi*

The night before Kim's plunge into the canal we had met another group of Sydneysiders, traveling the same way up the canal. They had watched on in horror as Kim clung to the side of the boat, shoulders aching,

before her rescue. They kindly offered Kim the use of the shower on their boat, as (wouldn't you know it!) our fresh water had run out that very morning. Kim just had to have a shower to wash off the effluent water of the canal! We have since met up this group on a couple of occasions since returning to Sydney! Our fellow "boat people".



*Our "boat people"*

After the canal, we rented a cottage from an expat English woman living nearby. This was also organised through the internet, but this time the experience was one of luxury. Perhaps the highlight of this stay was that the local town was holding its *Fête du Vendage* (vintage festival) the weekend of our stay. Now this town's fête was something people traveled a long way to come to — traditional *Occitaine* music, ceremonial crushing of the grapes, which had been hand picked by people wearing traditional costume and a folk dance on the Saturday night. Occitaine traditional dances weren't too different from Australian bush dances, with its roots in Scottish and Irish folk traditions, so we felt at home. We were a bit of a novelty with the villagers — I don't suppose they get many French speaking Australians passing through. We danced till well past midnight with them, Hal included.

For Christmas last year, we really didn't want to stay in Gordon Ave as we had done in previous years. With Gwen gone, it really wouldn't feel the same. We decided to spend Christmas at our brand new luxurious holiday house in the Port Stephens area about 3 hours north of Sydney. The complex boasts its own swimming pool, which Hal loves. The 3 bedroom whole floor apartment has views to die for — anyone who has visited us at Gordon Avenue will appreciate its magnificent ocean views. Our holiday house has sweeping views starting with at One Mile Beach, then scanning over the hinterland with glimpses of Port Stephens, around to views over Newcastle in the distance. In summer, we could sit in the outdoor spa, sipping gin & tonics watching the sun setting over the tankers waiting to enter Newcastle harbour. We should add that the complex of 24 houses and apartments is the end result of a long development project between Greg and Kim and business partner, Ross.

When we arrived at our new holiday house, the fur-

niture was sitting in the apartment as delivered — flat-packed and bubble-wrapped. We spent a few days assembling everything, starting with the beds we slept on. By Christmas morning we had 3 chairs ready to sit on. But we really enjoyed the time, and have been back another 3 times to date. We have, most recently, over the June long weekend, been able to return Liz's hospitality over the past few years and had her stay with us at our holiday house.

In our last issue, we reported on the sad loss of our nephew Lachlan in a tragic farm accident. This accident brought to head a number of factors on Rivendell, and in August 2002, Russell's family decided to put Rivendell on the market. Unfortunately, it is not the sort of business to sell easily, so in the meantime life continues on at Rivendell much as before. In January this year, it looked like there was a very serious offer on the place, so we took the opportunity of some cheap airfares to visit Rivendell in late January — perhaps for the last time. The offer has since vanished, but another has taken its place with an expected exchange around August of this year.

Australia's version of the budget airlines mentioned before include Virgin Blue, and a subsidiary of Qantas called JetStar. Kim is signed up on their email alerts so that whenever one of these airlines has a sale, Kim is checking the website for airfare deals. One of these led to a trip to Tasmania over Easter, a place both Hal and Russell had been keen to visit for some time, and one Kim had visited a long time ago, but was keen to do again. The highlight for all of us was visiting the historic penal settlement of Port Arthur, which has really been developed well as a tourist attraction. The week's drive took us through the middle of the wilderness area, along the west coast of Tasmania, walking around dove lake at Cradle mountain on a rare cloudless day and seeing Penguins come ashore at Bichimo on Tasmania's east coast.

Now, as we began this travelogue, we were writing to you in late June 2004, sitting beside the pool of the resort we were staying in at Port Douglas in Queensland. Once again we were able to take advantage of some cheap domestic flights and a further stroke of good fortune (7 nights free accommodation from our trip to Noosa the previous year). Now you simply can not travel when these are the conditions!



*Hal "clowning around" with his cousin Adam in Western Australia*

## In Conclusion

So that just about brings you up to date with our lives over the past two years! There have been some monumental sadnesses but it has also been marked by tremendous joy and a fullness of life. I do believe we are living life to its fullest! We are surrounded by love, good friends, good food, good wine and conversation — what more can one ask for?



*John Howard's response at being asked about troop deployments in Iraq*