

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to you all! Like many of you, we suspect, this year has not turned out to be anything like we thought it would, especially here in the Lockdown Capital of the Universe. Like last year, it seems we have weathered the worst of the lockdowns, but with case numbers surging again, it is hard to predict how things will work out. About all we can say for sure is to expect the unexpected, and no matter what you expect, things will probably turn out to be different to that! Our biggest news is that after another period of intense (but relatively short) work with landscapers all over the back yard, we have now finally finished the process started over two years ago, with a new lawn, garden beds, paths and pergolas. We kept 4 mature trees, and moved several plants (including some prized *Strelezias* and some smaller things) but otherwise basically started again from scratch. This involved much preparatory work, such as cutting down mature trees, digging out stumps and taking down a shed we built many years ago (what goes around comes around, you could say). The results a newly sowed lawn, some great-looking paths, raised vegetable beds, three pergolas (to be covered with new growth soon) and automatic watering system (fed by the underground water tank). It is fair to say that we don't know ourselves with this set up! Just we finished up with all that, a storm kindly blew down most of our front fence, which we took as a sign that we will have to do the same treatment to the front yard before too long!

This year has probably been most similar to last year for our two furry friends **Rosie** and **Beau**. Both have clearly enjoyed having us mostly at home for work this year, rather than mostly having the house to themselves. Rosie in particular likes to be wherever the people are, which has often meant being on mat in the study next to James's desk, ready to over-enthusiastically greet any in-person visitors. Beau tends to be less vigilant, at least until someone enters the kitchen, which then has his full attention in the small chance that there may be any food scraps coming his way.

Jeremy started his Performing Arts course at Federation University in Ballarat in March, which meant he moved up there in mid-February. His best mate Josh and he ended up renting a house together not far from Jeremy's aunt and uncle. However Josh found that the course wasn't really for him, and ended up moving back to Melbourne. Jeremy, though, has gone from strength to strength, getting work locally, and has found a couple of classmates willing to share the house with him. He also seems to have become very closely acquainted with the road between Ballarat and Melbourne, seemingly moving often between the two (lockdowns willing) for all sorts of reasons. We have learned not to expect the place to be too tidy when we visit (the bedroom door gets shut very soon after our arrival!), and it seems he is gradually learning the art of regular lawn mowing ...

Emily has settled into her new household a suburb or so away in Oakleigh South (not far from Huntingdale golf course). She resumed her History degree in first semester, but found it hard to combine that with working, especially as the limited electives on offer were not particularly inviting. So she has withdrawn from that for now and is looking at options for 2022. She is now working at Bonds, having also spent some time at Ted Baker, which, if nothing else, rather sharpened up her sense of fashion. She and two of her housemates get along really well, and with an incoming fourth housemate, things are looking good. It all got off to a strange start given that the day before she moved out, she was contacted as a Tier 1 contact of a COVID case and had to self-isolate for a couple of days before the negative result came through. Somehow that sums up much of the year for most of us!

Timothy and **Joshua** keep us company at home, but we are still having to downsize our shopping – who would have thought bread could go stale! Joshua is getting close to the end of an Arts degree whilst continuing to work at Pancake Parlour and Timothy has spent some time this year completing what became an online cyber security course. Unfortunately, the course made Timothy realise it may not be a pathway he wishes to follow. He is looking for work, but as yet, no luck – the companies that support job seekers suck! Both boys are yet to get their driver's license so Linda is pushing the topic when she gets the chance. Having them at home does provide opportunities for Linda to send text messages with shopping lists and recipes for dinner. Timothy, in particular, is quick to take a hint!

Linda is about to start her 20th year at Haileybury. It was a good year for results for both the school, the Methods cohort (Linda is the head of subject) and Linda's classes (with one Yr 11 girl getting a 50 and half of the boys' class being over 40). The year at school has consisted of a lot of hard work – all classes ran as per the timetable, VCAA audits were required for our Vietnamese partner and locally for both boys and girl colleges. VCAA love their paperwork! Behind the scenes it took a lot of ingenuity to get SACs done – some in person and others online with some innovations that will continue into the future. At the end of the year Linda finally relinquished her last Chinese school as mentor – time to step back and take the foot off "a bit". She has retained the Vietnamese school as the teacher there is very enthusiastic, and the partnership is working well. The plan for 2022 is to ride to school more frequently and try to carve out a bit more "me" time. Running two subjects will make this a challenge but we will see how it goes...

James has had a few challenges this year, having been asked to set up the STEM Centre for Digital Innovation, aimed at

improving learning and teaching in STEM disciplines through novel applications of digital technology. This meant managing a small team of 3 for the first time, and learning a lot about meetings, reports and communication. So it seems that even when you think you know the industry you are in, there is a new challenge which comes along to put you out of your comfort zone! Most of the year was spent working from home, with a few on-campus times towards the end. Hence getting the digital part proved to be quite easy! RMIT has stated that it expects staff to be on campus 2-3 days a week in 2022. How exactly that works in practice remains to be seen, but with the team expanding to (at least) 4 in 2022, this should at least be simpler than in some larger teams.

*With best wishes from all of use for a refreshing Christmas and a prosperous New Year,
James, Linda, Joshua, Timothy, Emily & Jeremy Harland*

PS James promises not to mention at all the mighty Demons' famous all-conquering drought-breaking superb AFL Premiership victory after 57 long years in the bleak wilderness, which is the herald of a new era of red-and-blue prosperity ... no, not even once! 😊 (Go Dees!)