



It seems that 2023 has been a very different year for us. The highlight was undoubtedly our “bucket list” trip overseas in April, May and June, which was amazing, and whetted our appetites for more of the same! We both had long-service leave before, but this was the first time that we had been able to synchronise it (showing that long-term planning can pay off!). Linda ended up having 11 months off, with a combination of double-time at half-pay and some unpaid leave, whereas James could only manage a paltry three months. We had long planned to have do a Mediterranean cruise for our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, so I guess almost twelve years too late is at least something! We started out by flying into Athens for a couple of nights before boarding our cruise ship for the next 15 days. It was amazing to wake up in a new port each day, and being able to take in the sights, head back to the ship in the late afternoon and enjoy some time in the pool or over a scrumptious afternoon tea! There was lots of walking to be done, particularly up and down hills, and much gazing at the incredible colours of the Aegean. There were many individual highlights, but of particular note were the visits to the site of Troy, Istanbul and Ephesus (the latter being notable that we saw more rain here than we did in our entire stay in Ireland!). It was hard to count the number of times we said “We must come back here someday!”. Once the cruise was done, it took us a little while to get used to not having everything laid on (“What? We have to organise our own dinner?”) when we spent a few days in Athens and then in Santorini. We managed to do a lot of walking around Athens, including the Acropolis, and plenty of time in the museums. Santorini was spectacular from every angle, although we had quite a lot of aerobic exercise just walking up and down to breakfast, let alone when walking along cliffs above the seafront (and almost getting run over by a pack of donkeys!). As if that wasn’t enough, we then headed for Egypt, which included some time in a grand hotel in Cairo, a cruise down the Nile, and of course a visit to the Pyramids (with the compulsory camel ride!). There is probably an entire newsletter in just describing what we saw, including the Valley of the Kings and the tomb of Tutankhamun. Then, just to change things up, we headed for Ireland, where we drove around basically counterclockwise from Dublin. Again, many items ticked off the list, including sighting the Harland and Wolff shipyards in Belfast, and walking around the Giant’s Causeway and Slieve League (where we had a close encounter with a dolphin), and a fantastic host, Irene, in Adara, with home-made porridge and fresh fruit!



All too soon it was time to be back home (after a marathon seven weeks away), and James headed back to work in July (with Linda reluctantly following suit in November). Much of the rest of the year seems pretty routine after that! With no further renovation and landscaping, the house looked pretty much the same, although the boys did let the weeds get away from them! We had a new addition to the household in July with arrival of **Sammy**, a cavoodle companion for **Rosie**. He is naturally playful, has lots of energy, and has perfected the art of not so much jumping onto someone’s lap as launching himself into their chest! He has grown a lot since he first arrived, and now is perhaps a shade bigger than Rosie. The two of them seem to love nothing more than chasing each other around the garden, or around the lounge room, much to our consternation at times. He seems to like sleeping behind Linda’s knees when we can. They seem to be inseparable, and when not running around with each other, they are usually to be found snuggled up together somewhere. They both are very keen on car rides, anticipating them greatly, although Sammy seems keener on investigating the front garden than getting in the car!

**Jeremy** has just completed his course at Federation University in Ballarat, and has now moved to Hawthorn to see what the next chapter holds. He continued to play for the Hawthorn Pipes & Drums, with a championship in the New Zealand nationals earlier in the year. You might see him working at the Australian Open next month! **Emily** is now in Murrumbidgee, within walking distance of our place, and has restarted at university, doing an online course in Editing and Creative Writing at Curtin University. **Timothy** has continued his independence by purchasing his own car, leading to some interesting driveway manoeuvres at times. **Joshua** continues his pattern of past years, working at the Pancake Parlour and also getting increasingly involved in games event organisation at events such as Pax and Comicon.

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