

Christmas 2017



"What are you staring at? Just read the letter!"

Power to the People – Good quality work on casual jobs for a small engineering consultancy in the latter half of last year paid off, with Nam being awarded a full-time contract with the firm this year. Distribution Power Design Pty Ltd is located only a few kilometres from where we live and Nam cycles there most days. He is back doing the work he loves, as a Senior Electrical Engineer in Transmission Line Design and Verification. Nam has been getting good feedback from clients, and the company sent him interstate for a course in public lighting design, so we are hopeful that the contract will be renewed.

Sixty-One Years, Without Parole – On 18th February, my sister, Judith, Nam and I celebrated with my parents their 61st wedding anniversary, reprising the major celebration of the year before with dinner at La Tombola Restaurant, one of the family's favourite eateries. (Do the math – I am only figuratively and not literally a bastard!)

Twenty-five Years, and No Slowing Down – Our friends Rod and Gary, who now live in Ipswich in Queensland, celebrated their 25th anniversary in style. They rented a mansion in the hinterland of the Gold Coast for a few days and invited their oldest friends to stay. I had known them for about the length of time they had known each other, and so Nam and I flew up for the reunion and celebration.

I was concerned beforehand at how I'd cope with plane travel, since my incapacity had deteriorated considerably since the last time I had done any travel of much consequence. We booked flights through Qantas and I telephoned them to advise them of my disability. Qantas were marvellous: I was met at each end of both flights by wheelchairs (and staff to push) and our luggage was specially marked to ensure it was looked after until we could get to it from the flight.

We had a wonderful few days, with the house guests free to do their own thing or to join up with others. On the actual anniversary date, there was the obligatory barbecue lunch and much joy and celebration. I, of course, just had to give a speech ... unaccustomed as I am to public speaking ... hahaha!



Rod and Gary's 25th Anniversary

Nine Years, and Waiting – Nam and I have been together for nine years now and finally it looks like Australia will enact much overdue social reform by way of amending the Marriage Act 1961 to deliver Marriage Equality. I shall not reprise my arguments in regard to Marriage Equality, save to direct interested parties to my essay in the blog post ...

[Blokos, Sheilas and Perverts – Marriage Equality in Australia](#)

The Commonwealth Government felt it necessary to spend over \$100million to commission The Australian Bureau of Statistics to conduct a voluntary, non-binding survey on the issue. With a response rate of ~80% and a "Yes" response of ~62%, surely the Commonwealth Parliament can now just get on and do its job.

I thought I would share this recent exchange of messages between me and our two, late-teenage nieces, Uyên and My, then in Hà Nội, and now in Moscow.

Vietnamese Nieces: Have you two got married ??

Alan: We are what is called "de facto" married. That is how I was able to sponsor him for permanent Australian residency, which then led on to his taking out Australian citizenship.

Being "de facto" married also affects the way we do our taxation and related financial affairs.

We are not yet "de jure" married, which means that we cannot get a certificate that legally says we are married. It's all a bit silly, since we already have all the same rights, just not the legal certificate. Anyway, there is a big debate going on in the Parliament at the moment about whether people in our situation can be legally (de jure) as well as practically (de facto) married. For us to get the legal certificate there needs to be a change to the marriage law. So, I hope all that made sense to you! 😊

Bye for now!

Love from your Uncle Alan!

Vietnamese Nieces: Oh thank you. We are so happy to call you our UNCLE.

P/S : We hope they will change the law as soon as possible 😊



Uyên and My in Moscow

On Saturday, 18th November 2017, the ninth anniversary of our meeting, a marriage proposal was made and accepted. Guess who proposed to whom!



Marriage proposed and accepted!

Decline and Fall – Idiopathic Peripheral Axonal Sensorimotor Neuropathy. You may have read in last year’s letter that the above mouthful is the official name of my medical incapacity. This is the disease that first started manifesting towards the end of 2014, and by mid-2015 had stopped me working. By the end of last year, all parties, including crucially my Superannuation Insurance, agreed that I was now Totally and Permanently Disabled. So, I have been off work since I was 56 years old and officially retired at 58 years old. Now 59 years old, I am about two-and-a-half years into my “retirement”.

The pain from the sensory neuropathy has been getting worse, and so I am taking maximum (and above) doses of medications. The price to pay for the medications is that I am constantly very fatigued and also cognitively impaired (I know, “How could anyone tell the difference?”).

The motor neuropathy has also been getting worse. I can only stand for a short while or walk a short distance with a walking stick (say from the house out to the front letterbox). Even then, I am unsteady. For around home and environs, I now have a pendant alarm monitored by the Ambulance Service (in case of

a fall when no-one else is around). The acts of standing up and sitting down are very difficult from a typical chair. These mobility problems are now producing knock-on effects: I am getting actual trauma to my leg joints.

My feet are often swollen from a side-effect of the main neuropathic pain drug and the sensory neuropathy induces strange feelings in my feet as well. My hands, the left one in particular, are losing sensation. Don’t serve me tea in your Royal Doulton tea set with the hand-painted periwinkles! Sigh.

I now have a mobility scooter (“gopher”) – red of course. So, when Nam is at work, I can go down to the local shops and the like. I am still licensed to drive, but I prefer to drive as little as possible. My gardener arranged for a paved path to be cut through the garden directly to the gate to the side yard, so that I can drive my gopher in. Residents of Brighton beware! Even the footpaths are not safe from hooning drivers!



Pumping Iron, with a Side Show of Acrobatics – For over 18 years, I have been a member of the Marion Leather and Fetish Centre (oops, I mean the Marion Leisure and Fitness Centre). I used to go there to pump iron (who am I kidding?). The Centre was refitted about a year ago and now has a circuit room with resistance machines designed for occupational therapy. This has proved rather serendipitous timing. I now go there about twice a week to use these machines and to do some gentle cycling on an exercise bike. Twice now I have managed spectacular falls there. The first resulted from a trip on the corner of a rowing machine. I fell onto the rowing machine and my chin hit the sliding seat. Perversely, the sliding of the seat (with my head on it) broke my fall. The injuries were modest, and the incident report forms were fun. The second fall happened before I even got into the Centre. I had parked the car in the disability permit park immediately in front of the Centre’s entrance. I had opened the door, and as I put my weight on my legs, they responded by collapsing beneath me. I went like a sack of potatoes into the gutter. Fortunately, I had my mobile telephone in my pocket, so I called the Reception Desk and asked them to send out a strong young man (Alan is ever the opportunist! ☺) to pick me up out of the gutter.

The Mad Professor's Musings – This is the name I have given to my serious yet whimsical blog. Writing essays to post on my blog has been one of the activities I have adopted in my enforced retirement. The posts are on a variety of topics, but mainly on mathematics in a popular style and mathematical history (alanbranford.blogspot.com). I also write poetry (never a good idea) and Masonic essays (if I gave you access to them, I'd probably have to kill you), and I have even started to teach myself how to design databases using Microsoft Access (a sure sign of madness). The lack of recent activity in any of these areas of endeavour alas simply reflects the recent deterioration in respect of my neurological incapacity.

Real Men Wear Aprons –



The onset of my neurological disease coincided with my year as Master of my Mother Lodge, Prince Alfred Collegians' Lodge No. 51 SA & NT (2014-15). I was also at the time Senior Warden of Saint Andrews Lodge No. 19 SA & NT. The dilemma of whether to serve a second term as Master of the former (historically unusual) or to become the Master of the latter (a typical next step from Senior Warden) evaporated, as I was not well enough to do either. In fact, I have been unable to hold any Office in either Lodge or perform any ceremonial duties since that time, and indeed the difficulties in attending either Lodge meant that I ceased going to either of them at all!



*My Craft Masonry Jewels:
Past Master's Jewel
P.A.C. Lodge Centenary Jewel*

Late last year I joined Lodge Thespian No. 195 Inc. SA & NT. I had been looking for a lodge close enough to home and with sufficient disability access for me to actually be able to attend meetings. I knew a number of brethren from Lodge Thespian and they met at a suitable venue. The Lodge was originally the "Entertainers' and Musicians' Lodge". I argued that as a University Lecturer with over 30 years' experience, I surely could be classed as an "entertainer"!

I am still able to present lectures to lodges silly enough to invite me. In May, I tortured my new lodge, Lodge Thespian, with a lecture in the Entered Apprentice Degree. A transcript is available on my website under the link "Masonic Posts / Entered Apprentice"; of course it is password protected to Freemasons.

I also delivered a public lecture to the Middle Chamber Society in June entitled "Charity In Its Most Ample Sense – An Exploration of the Meaning of Charity". As part of the same evening's program, I also convened a discussion (I called it a "Morality Challenge") based on a public discussion paper I delivered entitled "Eros – What's Love Got To Do With It?". Transcripts of these are available to anyone, under the link "Masonic Posts / Public".

Rhett Hardie and Daniel Galanos have been friends since their school days, and I have known both of them for many years. I was Rhett's proposer when he joined Freemasonry some years ago. He has finally convinced Daniel to join the Craft, and in April this year it was my pleasure to visit Eudunda Lodge No. 85 SA & NT, where Rhett was Senior Warden at the time, to witness Daniel's Initiation. Then in November, I again visited Eudunda Lodge No. 85 SA & NT, this time to witness Rhett's Installation as the Worshipful Master. Since I had been Rhett's original proposer into Freemasonry, this was an emotion-charged evening!



The Old Master and the Entered Apprentice



The Old Master and the New Master

I am also still a Companion in the United Collegians' Chapter No. 8 SA & NT of the Holy Royal Arch of Jerusalem, a higher Masonic Degree. Alas, though, it has been a struggle for me to attend this year.



*My Royal Arch Masonry Jewels:
Excellent Master Mason's Jewel
Companion's Jewel*

Things to Sing About – My operatic adventures have necessarily been restricted to Adelaide of late, for the obvious reasons. Nam and I again signed up for the subscription season of the State Opera of South Australia, as well as taking in some “extras”.

The operatic season, appropriately enough, began with some artistic insanity, of both the production and the title character! The acclaimed director Barrie Kosky had created a production of “Saul” by George Handel for the Glyndebourne Festival Opera in England; Glyndebourne is famous for its adventurous productions. This production was brought to Adelaide as a centrepiece of the Adelaide Festival of Arts. Nam and I were overwhelmed in March by the slide into madness of the despotic King Saul!

The State Opera, perhaps to counterbalance “Saul”, offered four *verismo* (“realism”) operas during the year. The *verismo* genre of opera is post-Romantic and principally Italian. Its defining characteristic is that, rather than tell the stories of gods, kings, countries and worldly chaos, instead it tells of the brutal reality of the ordinary folk. The movement began in c. 1890 with “Cavalleria rusticana” by Pietro Mascagni, and lasted until roughly the 1920s.

Indeed, in April, the one-act opera “Cavalleria rusticana” was performed as a double bill with “Pagliacci” by Ruggero Leoncavallo, another one-act opera, also in the *verismo* genre. The combination of these two operas as a double-bill is quite standard, and is known affectionately as Cav-Pag!

In August, there was another double-bill of two *verismo* operas: “La vida breve” a short opera by Manuel de Falla sung in the Andalusian dialect of Spanish, and the one-act opera “Gianni Schicchi” (the third in a trilogy, “Il trittico”, of one-act operas by Giacomo Puccini). “Gianni Schicchi” is best known for its aria ‘O mio babbino caro’, one of the most sublime arias in the operatic canon. I have always thought it odd that it appears in the middle of an otherwise outrageously funny, slap-stick comedy. Douglas McNicol directed “Gianni Schicchi” and played the title role, and he was clearly having a wonderful time as the deliciously cunning and manipulative Gianni Schicchi. ‘O mio babbino caro’ is one of Nam’s favourite arias – he has played every YouTube version countless times – but alas Nam was interstate for this performance and I went instead with another friend. Poor Nam is still yet to hear it performed live!

In October, we had another good belly laugh at operatic mayhem in a chamber version of another comic opera, “Don Pasquale” by Gaetano Donizetti, performed in the rehearsal studio at the State Opera headquarters.

In November, Nam and I had front row seats at an evening of Giuseppe Verdi arias and choruses. We were about two metres from the State Opera chorus as they belted out the *Anvil Chorus* from “Il trovatore”!

“You are old, Father William,” the young man said’ – In July, we celebrated Nam’s 42nd birthday, this time dinner for just the two of us, at – you guessed it – La Tombola Restaurant.



Nam sometimes still gets asked for his age identification at licensed premises, but I frequently get charged the seniors’ or concession rate for things without asking for it and not being entitled to it! Oh well, I’ll swallow my shrinking pride and take the cheaper rate!



"Help! This genetically modified mouse has taken me prisoner!"

A Godson Gets Married Amidst a Scottish Invasion

– One of my twin godsons, Christopher Seidel, was married to the delightful Cara Haig in a garden wedding in the grounds of the Longview Winery in the Adelaide Hills. Cara's family is of Scottish background, and a number of relatives made the journey from Scotland. Now, a garden wedding in the Adelaide Hills in late August is a bit risky weather-wise. However, there were many men, talking with incomprehensible accents, standing there in sleeve-less vests and kilts seemingly oblivious to the icy wind of winter! Nam and I stayed a couple of nights at the winery. As we stole away from the reception at about 10 p.m. to head back to our cabin, the speakers started blaring *"I'm Gonna Be"* by The Proclaimers and the dance floor was filled with kilted madmen leaping around! No wonder the Emperor Hadrian had a wall built!

The Man of Property – John Galsworthy, English novelist and playwright and winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1932, shared the same birthday as I, 14th August, although he was 91 years my senior and died in 1933. He is best remembered for *"The Forsyte Saga"*, a series of three novels and two 'interludes' (i.e., short stories). The first novel, *"The Man of Property"* was published in 1906. (As a young teenager I had read *"The Forsyte Saga"* voraciously.) Well, Nam has now fulfilled one of his dreams: he is a man of property in Australia. I trust though that Nam is of somewhat better character than Galsworthy's 'Man of Property', Soames Forsyte! (The novel quotes Shakespeare's *"Merchant of Venice"* as a prologue: '... You will answer / The slaves are ours ...'.)

In late October we successfully bid for a house and land in the Adelaide suburb of Lockleys, completing settlement in late November. The land is about 567m² and the house was built in the 1950s. It is situated 7.5km (~15 minutes by car) west from the Adelaide

CBD, and 4km (~7 minutes by car) east from the beach.

We plan to let the house for five to ten years and to then demolish the existing house and build our own. Nam is already engrossed in designing the "Perfect House". The plan is attractive to me as I shall be able to have a bespoke house built that can be designed to suit where my medical incapacity leads me. As you drive around the surrounding streets, most of the houses are newly built or being built, or the land is cleared ready to build. Only a few of the original 1950s houses remain. The street itself is shielded from through traffic by the nature of the surrounding streets. The house is only 650m to the linear park bicycle and pedestrian (and "gopher") trail along the River Torrens; it will take but a few minutes to get there in my gopher!



The Last Word – The family is coming to Brighton for Christmas Day this year. We'll let Lily have the last word, of course ...



"In this hot weather, the shower alcove is nice and cool. I'm sure the daddies won't mind if I use their bath mat: it's nice and soft! Keep your cool this summer, and we'll chat again next year. I feel so sleepy now ... zzzzzzzz..."

Best wishes for 2018, with love from Lily, Alan & Nam