

JANUARY 2011

GREGOR FAMILY NEWS LETTER 2010

Today is the 1st January 2011. It is Theo's birthday and he informs me he will no longer celebrate his annual year increase on this day, but the champagne and presents can continue. Happy New 2011 to you all. 2 years ago Fiona said to me that she loved the fact that every year on the 1st January we got a new year with a new beginning and a clean slate. Something I had never thought about but how comforting and liberating to be able to put all the bad things behind you and just go forward with the nice ones. So to those of you who have had a major challenges or sadness in 2010 may 2011 truly bring you peace and happiness. In particular to our dear friends the Foster family from Stellenbosch who so devastatingly lost Andrew in a freak accident —we wish you a better 2011.

2010 started with our annual trip to Campitello , Italy for the ENT ski meeting. Fiona joined us and on our way we stopped off in Milan and I realised a lifelong ambition of mine to go to an opera at La Scala. We were fortunate to see *Don Giovanni* and *Rigolletto*, but the latter stood out. The opera house is just as one would imagine —exquisite art work, elegant patrons and the best singers in the world. One thing completely out of place was the groups of large Italian firemen dressed in full fire fighting uniform who were stationed on each floor. The explanation is the building is so old that it does not conform to modern fire standards and therefore at every performance fire fighters are in attendance.

Theo and I continue to work the same long hours which is ridiculous considering our age and that a lot of our friends have semi retired. We have managed to for the first time in 30 years co ordinate our call roster so we do it at the same time. We have also taken every 2nd Friday afternoon off so we can go to our bach in Taupo. Our bach remains a wonderful getaway even if the mountain in winter remains a fickle mistress with high winds and bad weather preventing us from skiing as much as we would like to.

In September we went to Tessa Hilgers' wedding to Dion in Amsterdam and had a lovely week with Frans and Agnes in Haarlem with one night spent in Antwerp. We also went on an 8 day cruise from Venice with stop-overs in Italy, Greece and Dubrovnic. Dubrovnic is the most interesting walled city we have been to and well worth the effort of getting there.

In 2009 my brother Simon informed me that he had contacted his birth family and that they were "minor royalty" from Belgium. This brought soul searching hours for me because I had promised Mattie (my mother) that while she was

alive I would not try and find my birth parents. It's like having a wrapped box next to your bed and you are not allowed to open it, the suspense is killing but once you open it you have to deal with the contents.

After long discussion with Theo and the kids the hunt began. My birth mother, Marthe, was from Antwerp, her father was the Belgian High Commissioner in the Belgium Congo and she went to England for 6 months to study where she met my birth father, John who was $\frac{1}{2}$ Scottish and $\frac{1}{2}$ Greek . [Once Theo heard I was $\frac{1}{4}$ Greek everything fell into place as to where I got my fiery Mediterranean temperament, which was always a mystery to him.] John made promises of marriage and Marthe at the age of 20 returned to Congo to discover that she was pregnant. She was sent to Johannesburg by her Mum to have the baby and give it up for adoption.

Her father was never told and her Mum sent her as much money as she could without raising comment. What is so fascinating is that I was sent documentation from the social worker and doctor full of personal comment and observation that has made Marthe very real to me. I cannot imagine how lonely and miserable she must have been so far from home and without any support; having a baby, giving it up and then returning home pretending you have been on an extended holiday.

Unlike Simon I have not been able to find her, I'm not sure what I would do if I did. But the information that I have has given me a feeling of peace about myself but I will always remain Mattie's daughter. On a lighter note , John, my $\frac{1}{2}$ Greek father, lived in Athens and died in 2009 — his family own a shipping company. When hearing about me I was told via a lawyer that if I laid claim to an inheritance they would keep it snarled up in court and I would land up owing them money. I suppose if I found out that I was Aristotle Onassis' daughter it would be worth the fight just to annoy them! So our trip to Belgium and Greece was through different eyes and a sort of pilgrimage for me. Life does throw up curved balls —some easier to deal with than others.

Kelly now works for the NZ Herald as a business reporter with many front page articles. She was a finalist for the Qantas Media awards in the senior business section and although she did not win it, being a finalist meant that she was one of the top 4 business reporters in the country. This is made even more special by the fact that she was the youngest by many years. She flats with her friends from university and loves Auckland.

Fiona is still at Starship Children's hospital in the Cardiac ward where she has completed her training in the High Dependency Unit. The 12-hour shifts including a night shift once a week makes her feel like she is permanently jet-lagged. Fiona has good friends in both Auckland and Hamilton and on days off

spends time between the two cities, which is good for us because we get to see more of her.

Reinie did not go to Australia to do medicine. He was offered a place in Auckland and at first was reluctant to go. [Adelaide has a 4-year course and Auckland 5.] But with a little persuasion from Mum he choose Auckland which still offers cadaver dissection and is ranked 35 in the world medical schools. He has made many friends, has loved his year and still cannot get over that he is living his dream of becoming a doctor. The added bonus is that his sisters are nearby and they have a family get-together once a week, which I find very sweet.

In November I was invited to go to Fiji with the New Zealand Heart Foundation to do 20 heart valve replacements at Lautoka hospital. We took 5 tonnes of equipment with us. (The local facilities were basic.) It took us 6 days working 12-hour days to complete the 20 cases. For me the best part of it was how the team worked together as one, no egos or politics; just everyone pulling together. We stayed in a resort which put on a party every night for us, so we all managed on little sleep. Theo joined me and the hospital got him to sort out a patient. It was a very inspiring week.

On 11th December we celebrated 10 years in New Zealand. We had a huge party at our house and everyone came dressed as some iconic Kiwi. It was great fun. For us it was an opportunity to thank all the people who have supported us, loved us and made it possible for us to be a successful family.

So often in life you mean to say thank you and never get round to it and then the opportunity is missed. What has enriched and defined our lives as a family are all the people in all the places that we have lived who have given us their friendship and support. We never could be what we are without you, a big thank you — every one of you have left a mark. We are richer for knowing you even if we do not get to see you very often. In honour of that I leave you with this year's quote:

“To know someone here or there

with whom you feel there is understanding

In spite of distance or thoughts expressed —

That can make life a garden.”

—Goethe



Love from us all, Chris, Theo, Kelly, Fiona and Reinie.