

2011 Gregor Family News Letter.

It is the 23rd December 2011 and I have at last found time to write my annual newsletter. By the time you get this Christmas and New Year will be over. I hope your festivities were happy and that 2012 is a good year.

In 2011 Mother Nature had a major tantrum worldwide. New Zealand got its fair share of her wrath. Every 6 months she cast her eye on our little country. In Feb she rattled the ground causing 182 people to die and the whole central area of Christchurch having to be demolished. In July she sent the worst snowstorm in living history to the South Island and in December torrential rain to Nelson. All of these events have caused major damage to houses, landslips and brought untold misery and hardship to the people involved. While I have been writing this she again turned her eye to New Zealand and sent another two earthquakes to Christchurch. I am hoping that she is so exhausted from a busy year to have a rest in 2012.

We did start our year on a good note — the usual ski and conference trip to Italy. Time was spent in Milan and seeing two productions at La Scala. We did go up to Piztal in Austria where you can ski on the highest glacier in Europe. Theo is still having an issue getting older because he stated to me this year he could not get older because he had not finished being young. I thought that was cute. Those were all the trips we did this year other than spending many happy times at our little house in Taupo.

Theo still works far too hard in both public and private. Not sure if he knows how to slow down. He was invited by John Rutka to be their Wilderness Professor in Canada. This involved going on a canoe trip and giving a campfire lecture. The title of his talk was: *Memorable Men I Have Met in Medicine*. Having met many people that could fit this description, he spoke mainly about Philip Tobias, his undergraduate Professor of Anatomy and Paleoanthropology at Wits. This was partly stimulated by the recent discovery of four 2-million year old hominid fossils in the *Cradle of Mankind* area near Sterkfontein north of Johannesburg.

Kelly decided that being a poorly paid business journalist was not viable. Unfortunately the power of the newspaper is gone with everyone going on line. She now works for a large insurance company as communications manager, newsletter and all sorts of other writing related activities. The job is growing with her and she seems to enjoy it. She does miss the buzz of the newsroom before deadline. Kelly loves living in Auckland where she has made many friends. Kelly walked a 100 km with a team of four friends to raise money for Oxfam, this took 27 gruelling hours. After 18 months of dating Chris, she has made the big decision to move in with him and buy a house together. Kelly remains the only member of the family not involved in medicine for which we are truly grateful, as her sharp wit and keen eye for the ridiculous keeps us all a bit more interested and grounded.

Fiona has had a different year. In March she moved in with new flat mates and the one turned out to be the flatmate from hell. When we did a family intervention and went and packed up her belongings, Theo said to the ranting flatmate he did not talk to mad people and that puts it in a nutshell. This experience of constant verbal abuse must lead to some sort of learning experience. Luckily Fiona has a nursing qualification that can earn her a good whack in remote places and that is exactly what she did, go remote in Australia. She did this for 5 months has earned an impressive amount of money, which she plans to spend on a trip to Italy and America. Her Aussie money also benefitted me whereby Fiona shouted me a fun filled weekend in Sydney, which included a performance of *Lakme* at the Sydney opera house. Her plan for next year is to find a job in paediatrics at Waikato hospital.

Reinie has completed 3rd year medicine with A's. He got a job with Auckland Medical School as a tutorial lecturer to 2nd year students; this certainly helped with the finances and even paid for a holiday in New Caledonia. In the past few weeks he has been doing a research project for Theo on

skin cancer in the Head and Neck. He will present the findings in reading a paper at the ENT meeting next month in Campitello, Italy. What has impressed me most about Reinie this year is his love, compassion and support he has given Kath (his girlfriend) when her father lost his fight with cancer in October. He has been a tower of strength to all the family especially Will, Kath's 18 year old brother. I now know that he will be a wonderful doctor with huge empathy for his patients. He is looking forward to next year where he will be spending lots of time on the wards and not in the lecture hall.

As for me this year— no earth shattering discoveries about me or my family. The year has been very busy at work starting a Neurosurgery Service. But the last 6 weeks I can say, without doubt, have been the most bizarre and the most challenging time, not involving immediate family that I have ever had. By October I was congratulating myself that this would be the first year that no one I knew died and what a relief that was. Then the rot set in, first Kath's Dad from lung cancer, then Reinie's uni friend Ben from leukaemia (Reinie had shaved his head for Ben in September and raised over \$800 for leukaemia research). Then one of our colleagues from work drowned and Simon (my brother's) young son-in-law died unexpectedly. All of that has been coupled with problems suffered from staff at work and this has required me to be strong and supportive to all. This has been very exhausting both spiritually and physically. Next year is my last in my fifties and I am going to plan the big 60 event in a game park in South Africa for 2013.

As I look back on what was 2011, it has been a year that will go down as historically interesting because of earthquakes, Tsunamis, floods in Australia and elsewhere, the Greeks ("my family") rioting over been told to stop spending money they don't have, the Arab world rioting against oppressive leaders they have found the courage to overthrow, the Royal wedding and the All Blacks winning the Rugby World Cup. What a busy year — no wonder it has gone by so quickly.

It has also been a year that has made me realise how lucky the Gregor family is and how much we have to be grateful for. That has inspired this year's quote.

*"Gratitude can transform common days into thanksgivings,
turn routine jobs into joy
and change ordinary opportunities into blessings."* William Arthur Ward.

Our wish for you and your loved ones that 2012 bring you only peace, happiness, good health, many blessings and a huge dollop of luck.

