

XMAS 2001 AT CHEZ WOMBAT

BY GARRY AND VERONICA

Well, after Garry's ill health last year with his recovery from glandular fever and a subsequent bout of pneumonia he was looking forward to a better year health wise. Little did we know that 2000 was just a warm up before the main event.

The New Year opened with us visiting Veronica's brother's family in Canberra for the Christmas-New Year break but finished with us beating a hasty retreat to Newcastle when Garry starting suffering severe shoulder pain. A visit to the doctor diagnosed a recurrence of pneumonia and she prescribed further antibiotics. Unfortunately they did no good and while he visited various specialists through January and February (with no clearer diagnosis) Garry got sicker and sicker, until finally in late February, Veronica insisted one night he visit the hospital. He was admitted with pleurisy for what turned into a 3 week stay. There they tried various antibiotics, none of which worked, while they were still unable to determine what the infection was. Further specialists from the Uni medical school were called in with no success. Around this time Garry's immune system kicked in big time and he started suffering even worse problems from the immune response. After numerous tests and operations, some too gruesome to describe, they still didn't know and they concluded he might have TB, which often doesn't show up positive in tests. So for 8 weeks, until the cultures and DNA tests came back negative they poisoned him with the TB treatment (5 different drugs, 14 pills a day) which really sapped his energy. When they stopped the TB drugs Garry felt 100% better overnight. The whole thing was quite frightening because the doctors didn't know why Garry was sick and consequently how his illness would proceed or what the prospect of recovery was. His specialist put a brave face on it but also couldn't hide his dismay.

The crisis had its occasional humourous moments. After all the tests in hospital his specialist said "Well apart from the fact you're sick you're in perfect health". And then there was the TB nurse, who came every day to the house to check he was taking his drugs and to monitor him for side effects, saying "You're doing pretty well ... at your age we'd expect much worse side effects than you're having". Garry wondered how it could be worse. In the end Garry was off work for nearly 4 months and the whole thing has been quite morale sapping for him. Thank goodness for friends and family who helped him through it.

The good news is that Garry is on the mend and is back at work sort of full time. The infection (whatever it was) was defeated but he has pericarditis from the immune response. He is over the worst, during the first few months of pericarditis there is a significant risk of heart attack. When the immune system has settled down in a year or so he should recover with no ill effects. In the meantime he has to slow down and not be the crazy lunatic he normally is ... but

of this you will read more below.

Needless to say this was a stressful time for Veronica who this year has continued being the 2IC at Muswellbrook Court House, about 130 km away. At the height of Garry's crisis she was commuting daily. Good thing she doesn't need much sleep. On a happier note she has finally got a permanent promotion (all previous ones have been temporary and when they were done she was back to where she was before). Its in Quirindi (that's even further away unfortunately, about 3 hours drive from Chez Wombat) but she is yet to start because the person currently at Quirindi is there because other staff members at Tamworth Court (in the local regional city) dislike her and refuse to have her back there. They've only had five years to solve the problem ... and Garry thought the University had problems.

And on that matter for a while now Garry has been looking around at alternative career options. The Australian Uni sector is just about knackered after 10 years of funding cuts, and the abuse heaped on the "elites" (code for university educated) by the reelected government during the recent election bodes poorly for the future. The increasing stresses of making ends meet have also no doubt contributed to his ill health of the last few years. Late in 2000 he was head hunted for a Chair in Computational Geography at Leeds Uni in England. We were due to fly out for interview the day Garry was admitted to hospital. They were patient and Garry was finally well enough to interview in July. We interviewed, we assessed Leeds (which looks to be booming along so Veronica shouldn't have problems getting a job), they offered, we negotiated and in October Garry finally accepted their offer. With a major move like this we can't be absolutely certain that we are doing the right thing but they addressed all Garry's problems with institutional research support, as well as promising a lighter teaching load so he should have a more balanced lifestyle. Unlike approaches he's had from US Unis Veronica can also get a decent job. Finally we are both half in love with the Yorkshire Dales from our previous visits. Just a pity about the weather. The irony that we are returning to the region near where both our ancestors came from last century hasn't escaped us. Garry starts January, 2003 and Veronica will join him a year or so later after he's had six months sabbatical in Australia after his first semester, which he negotiated to allow him to wind up research projects in Australia. This gives us plenty of time to plan the move, finish things up here and get organised in Leeds. He will be finishing at Newcastle in July

and taking 6 months leave to do some extra-curricular things he always wanted to do but never previously had the time and/or money. So to all of our US friends that promised to visit us in Australia ... you missed the Olympics so get cracking, the clock is ticking. Of course once we've settled in Leeds



Xmas in the outback near Brewarrina.

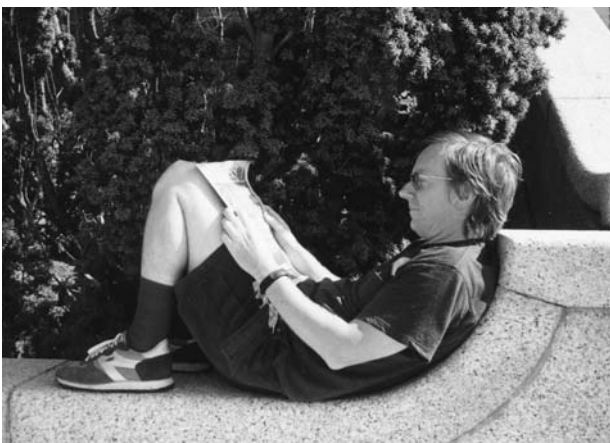
visitors from any part of the world will be most welcome so get your thinking caps on. One of Garry's brothers has already booked a visit.

While we interviewed in Leeds we took the opportunity to have a relaxed holiday there. A bit of gentle walking on canal tow paths (Garry wasn't up to much more than 30-60



The Shark in Oxford.

minutes walking at a time, however, he did manage to, gingerly, make it up the 199 steps to Whitby Youth Hostel with full backpack) and generally relaxing (Garry more so than Veronica). Many countryside footpaths were closed due to foot and mouth, but there were plenty of other interesting things to do such as ride on the Ravenglass and Esk Railway on the Cumbrian Coast and visit the dockyard museum at Barrow-in-Furness, the main shipbuilding site in the UK for the last 100 years. We always enjoy revisiting Lancaster, Arnside, Goathland (Aidensfield in "Heartbeat") and Whitby (the seaside fishing village setting of the Dracula stories). The end of our trip saw us visiting Oxford where Garry caught up with a former Parsons Lab colleague in the Geography Dept while Veronica enjoyed more walking along canal towpaths and riversides as well as finding the house with a fibreglass shark sticking out of the roof. The story goes the council would not



Garry relaxing at Ashton Memorial in Lancaster.

allow him to make some modifications to his house and it all got rather aggro. Looking at the planning regulations he concluded that they couldn't stop him putting a shark on his roof so ... just to get up the council's nose. Now it's a local tourist attraction. Garry's colleague organised for us to stay in the fellows guest room at Brasenose College, which was quite an experience with a discussion about probability and chaos theory over breakfast in the fellows dining room. All a bit much for Garry who is never at his best over breakfast ;-).

For Garry the trip also made a change from looking at the lounge room ceiling and midday TV for 4 months.

While in the UK we visited the Sheffield Archives and Lancaster Library and managed to find out more about both our ancestors. By Christmas Garry should have finished the 2nd edition of his Willgoose Family History, only 18 months after when he had expected it to be done for the wedding of one of his nieces. At the time of writing this Christmas letter he was doing the page numbering. We are only waiting on the final translation from German of some family letters from last century and then he is done. Veronica is now contemplating doing something similar for her family, though Garry wonders if she is crazy enough.

Other than the UK trip our travelling has been severely curtailed this year. Garry has obviously curtailed all non-essential work trips (i.e. everything) but we have managed to visit Veronica's brother and sister in Canberra twice this year. On the first trip we took Veronica's niece Sophie to the newly opened National Museum and while the part on the history of the aboriginal population was confronting, we thought it was nowhere near as controversial as the media had portrayed it. Sophie especially enjoyed the Aboriginal dance tunnel where the projected pictures of dancers interact with you dancing in front of them. There are detectors at floor level and depending on how you dance the computer projectors change the image on the wall. It was a lot of fun for everybody.

Garry and Veronica



Veronica and niece Sophie at the National Museum.