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Hello everyone

It's hard to believe that it is a year since I penned my 2024 Christmas letter. But that is indeed the case so it's time to put fingers to keyboard and reflect on another year that has flashed past.

From a world perspective, the year has been even worse than usual, with the dreadful Gaza situation continuing, the awful Ukraine war still raging and Trump doing his best to ruin America and bring the rest of the world cowering on our knees before his throne. Thank goodness our relative isolation here in Australia protects us from the extremes of world politics

It's over 5 years since Lois's passing but she remains front and centre in our thoughts and we remember her in all our various functions.

I continue my active retirement (17 years now), finding the time to do lots of bike riding, along with reading, racewalk officiating, the occasional social outing and lots of gardening on the home, church and other fronts. But overall, I try to be that bit less busy each year as I approach my dotage!

This year, I did not travel to Europe to ride with Harold as I felt that my form was not good enough. Perhaps next year – I am working on it! On a very sad note here, I lost my long term riding partner Brian Delaney who died suddenly in May. It took us all by surprise and was very distressing. I miss Brian every time I head out on the bike. Luckily, our little riding group had swelled with the added companionship of Brian (the other Brian!) and Richard so we continue. And I even get to test myself out against Andrew when I get to Canberra or he gets to Melbourne. So I am blessed with an abundance of good friends / riding partners.

'Hotel Erickson' is definitely not as busy as it used to be, with just the occasional visitors nowadays. But it's a big house with lots of spare rooms and the doors are always open for guests.

I did manage to get away on few occasions this year – Canberra in January and March, Canberra again in May and Christchurch (New Zealand) in October. The visits were for a mixture of walking admin and cycling. And here I must add a special note wherein I travelled to Echuca in June to help my old racewalking mate Mike Porter celebrate his 100th birthday. I am pleased to report that Mike was in great health and is still active and as sharp as ever – a true advertisement for the benefits of walking!

I continue to keep myself busy at the St Linus Anglican Church and on the Parents Advisory Committee of the St Linus Kindergarten, two activities which Lois undertook for many years and which I continue in her absence. There is always something to be done, whether it be odd jobs or gardening or such like, but it is enjoyable and satisfying work.

I coordinate the kinder fund raising and this year saw us putting on a Bunnings BBQ, an Easter Raffle, a Voting Day Cake Stall, a Movie Night, a Trivia Night and a Halloween Disco, alongside other more modest endeavours. There is always something on the horizon to keep us focused! It is wonderful to be involved with the young families and the children and the kinder teachers – I feel blessed to have this opportunity.

On the church front, St Linus celebrated its 100th birthday this year – the first service was held in a private house in the newly opened suburb of Merlynston in early 1925 – and we were keen to celebrate the occasion in style. I took on the role of centenary planning coordinator and our little congregation rolled up our sleeves and went to work. It culminated in a very successful service and luncheon at the church in September, with many former parishioners joining us to celebrate. We even put together and published a centenary history which I co-write and then got published. It was a most enjoyable task but I did breathe a huge sigh of relief when it was all done and dusted.

The house goes well but my endeavours at decluttering are spasmodic and half hearted, so say the least. I did notice when gardening recently that the weatherboards on the western side are in need of a paint so that will be my next

job. It's a timber house and this is an ongoing maintenance task. When we bought the place in 1989, my plan was to refresh one wall each year, thus competing a circuit every 6 years. The first 4 walls got done on schedule but then life got in the way and it was 10 years before wall number 5 was attacked. That time has come again!

Early in the year, my cousin Peter Cuffley completed his family history book 'The Sweeneys of Culla Hill, Eltham' and we finally got it published. A bit of family history - my grandfather was a Carrucan (from Irish stock) and I was part of the editorial group that published the Carrucan family history book in 2011. My grandmother was a Sweeney, coming from another of the Irish families that formed part of the great diaspora (although her grandfather Thomas Sweeney was actually sent here as a convict rather than a free settler). Peter had been researching Thomas and his life in Australia for many years now and, with me lending support, finally put it all together for posterity. I got it ready for publication, formatting, adding photos, etc, and it was officially published in March. For Peter, who has been publishing books for some 50 years now, I think this was perhaps the most satisfying of the lot. This was definitely my biggest task for the year but one that was hugely satisfying. I also setup a Sweeney Family website in which we could put all the additional information that came out of his researches. Check it out at <http://www.sweeneyfamily.au/index.shtml>.

And now onto news of the family.

David is now into his 13th year working with the State Revenue Office, the Victorian government's main taxation agency. He continues in his IT role, coordinating new project designs and keeping the developers and testers on the straight and narrow. He had been renting an apartment in Coburg for some years now but had been keen for some time to buy his own home. Alas, house prices in Melbourne are so high that it is well nigh impossible to get into the market as a first home owner. Thus he has bought a house in Ballarat, about 1 hour NW of Melbourne. Why Ballarat, you may ask? Well, the SRO has a regional office there so he can tick off his 'in office' days locally and won't have to travel down to the Head Office in the Melbourne CBD. He moved in early November and is now settling in to his new abode. That is fantastic news as it means I can perhaps get rid of some of the many boxes marked with a D and stored here! However, I expect it to be a vigorous discussion with some pushback before I finally win out!

Our Erickson family year started off in the best way possible with Chris and Amie announcing their engagement on 1st January 2025 while holidaying in Tasmania. They will be married in February 2026 at Phillip Island (whoo not far off now), just east of Melbourne. That is so wonderful and will bring all the extended family together for a weekend of celebration.

Chris is coming to the end of his sixth year as a fireman with Fire Rescue Victoria and is currently based at the Derrimut Fire Station (in the west of Melbourne). As per the fireman's life, he works 2 day shifts, followed by 2 night shifts, then has 4 days off. Suffice to say he gets his share of fires and call outs. When I wrote my 2024 Christmas letter, he was just recovering from a big bike accident which necessitated 5 months off work. The good news is that his shoulder has fully healed and he is back at work and back on the bike and back into life in general. And I can report that I have also managed to stay upright this year on the bike. Fingers crossed!

Amie continues to work in the Pilates industry, with her job requiring frequent interstate or overseas trips. That means I am occasionally called on to look after Ollie and Annie if she is away and Chris is on shift. These are wonderful times and I feel so lucky to have an active part in their formative years - Ollie, who is now 14, is just finishing his second year (Year 8) at Northcote High School while Annie, who is now 12, is just finishing her first year (Year 7) at NHS. Exciting times!

Ollie and Annie are involved in many activities. On the school front, they were both in this year's school production (a very impressive rendering of the Broadway musical 'Anastasia') and are also in the school choir. Ollie also plays in the Junior Guitar Ensemble.

As if that's not enough, Ollie is also involved in an acting school, and plays field hockey in the winter and cricket in the summer. His cricket team won the U14 Grand Final last summer and he has now graduated to the U16 division where his team is off to a great start this summer. Annie has taken up the drums and is also enjoying herself with her netball, with matches most Saturday mornings. Talk about making the most of their time!

Paul and Dimity continue to live in Canberra with what can only be described as a very busy lifestyle. Paul continues in his role as the National Secretary of the Australian Labor Party while Dimity has recently signed on as a Senior Policy Adviser in the Office of the Prime Minister. It was a huge year for them on both work and family fronts. First to the family news - in April 2025, they were joined by new family member Elisabeth May (Essie). Lois would have loved to meet Essie who is just so sweet. Dimity took extended maternal leave for the first 7 months after Essie's birth and is about to return to work as I write. On a work front, it was also a momentous year for them both, with Labor being re-elected to government in the Australian Federal Election in May 2025. Paul was the Campaign Director and steered the party to the biggest landslide victory in history. There were many articles in the major newspapers, all highlighting Paul's role and influence on the Australian political scene, so it was not

surprising to me when he was voted Number 1 in *The 10 Most Covertly Powerful People in Australia in 2025*, as argued by the Financial Review. It was his 4th year in a row in the top 10 and a well deserved recognition. And to top it off, Essie was born just under 3 weeks before the election, just to pile the pressure a little higher!

Matt and Dave and Chris and Amie and I travelled to Canberra in late May to attend Paul's appearance at the National Press Club, where he discussed the recent election win, and it was a masterful performance (see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9BXQYW2CeRU>). It was his second such Press Club appearance, having previously done the job after the 2022 Federal Election win, for which he was also the Campaign Director.

And while on the baby theme, my nephew Eric and his partner Nikki in Darwin also welcomed their first child, Ruadh Brian, in April. It's raining babies. I am sure there must be a pop song in there somewhere.

Matt continues with his musical career, playing with a variety of artists, the mainstay being Ajak Kwai, along with music teaching with private students and at a couple of local schools, so it is pretty much full time when he adds up his total hours. All things taken together, it makes for a busy lifestyle. On a personal note, it is wonderful to have Matt still sharing the house with me but it may be coming to an end as he and partner Jess are currently looking to move out on their own. So I'm enjoying his company while I still can.

With three of the boys living locally, we often meet up for shared dinners – Dave, Chris, Amie, Ollie, Annie, Matt and Jess. We think of Paul and Dimity on such occasions as they work away in Canberra. On the occasions when we do have them down, they are opportunities for even greater celebration. And I seem to be out for dinner or entertaining here very regularly. I am becoming a social butterfly!

Our wider family is also going well.

My eldest brother Mick continues to live in his own little house on the farm of his son Andrew outside Cobram. That way, he can work as much or as little as he wants on the farm without the hassle of being chief cook and bottle washer. We have caught up quite a few times this year. Son Jack continues to live in Albury while daughter Sally lives just down the road from me in Moonee Ponds and we try to catch up as much as her busy lifestyle permits!

The family of my late brother Terry in Darwin is also doing well. Diana was down in Melbourne just a couple of weeks ago and stayed here with me. We also keep in close contact with our cousins Eric, Tom and Sue and their families. First Eric and Nikki welcomed Ruadh to the family in April in Darwin. And then we celebrated from afar as Tom and Arianna tied the knot in September in Darwin. And Sue and Tom are enjoying their life in Canberra, where they see lots of Paul and Dimity and have even babysat with Essie!

I have searched the computer and put together my usual Christmas webpage with a selection of family related photos (see <http://www.erickson.id.au/erickson/2025.shtml>). As you can see, we are still here and kicking against whatever life throws at us.

To all our friends, local and remote, we wish you a Christmas filled with peace and joy, and hope that 2026 will be a year where the world moves closer together in unity, tolerance and mutual love and acceptance.....

Tim