

*Christmas  
2015*

2015 has been a much better year. There were several excellent holidays, much welcome support from my friends, and in July, I met Henrietta who has become part of my life.

So a good year for us, and we hope for a **Merry Christmas**, and a happy and prosperous **New Year** for ourselves, and for all our readers.

## *Comings and Goings.*

Not many comings this year, but a couple of significant goings. Adolf, our cockerel (you only had to see him strut round the yard to understand the name) was getting on in years. We acquired him some time ago when one of our hens went walkabout for several days, and came back with him in tow. (We never found out whether he followed her back and was a pest, or she brought him back to show off!) Where he came from we had no idea, I tried everyone I knew who kept chickens, but no-one knew anything about a missing cockerel.

Pat reckons that was 10 years ago, so he was at least that, which is seriously geriatric for a cockerel, and he was starting to look it. No strutting, no cock-a-doodle-do-ing, he still tried it on with the odd hen, but you could tell he couldn't really remember why he was doing it, and he just looked old.

Sadly when we came back from France, he was just standing there, head down, miserable, and obviously quite poorly, so we had to neck him to put him out of his misery. The end of an era.

The other going is that, since Henrietta came into my life, I spend some of my time at the farm, and some at her place. This

*(Continued on page 4)*

# *The Knowle Farm Newsletter*

## *My Year.*

This year has been rather better than the last two. Despite a number of holidays (see inside), and much other activity, I have been majoring on dating sites. To give up hope of finding someone and settle into a solitary existence would, for me, be to give up on life. I really can't do that, so a number of contacts from dating websites has kept me very busy.

I met three ladies in the first half of the year, the first of whom proved a little difficult. Owing to travel arrangements, one or other of us was out of the country from the time we first got in touch in mid-January right up until late March. So, by the time I actually went down to London to meet her, we had been emailing for about ten weeks. Unfortunately, within minutes, I realised that it wasn't going to work, but unlike a normal first date, where you just meet for a coffee, and can easily walk away with a "thank you, it's been nice to meet you", after ten weeks of regular contact, it was more difficult.

Then, in early May I met an American lady from California. She was extremely good looking and I remember looking at her picture on the web site and thinking "she's out of my league" several times before I eventually realised that nothing ventured nothing gained, and I pressed the button. She responded, which cheered my day no end, and we met up a few times before parting amicably with the realisation that neither of us could provide what the other one needed.

Then, on July 3<sup>rd</sup>, I met up with Henrietta, and over the following days, weeks, and months, we have



slowly become more important to one another. After 40+ years of very happy marriage, she is a widow too, so we have many shared experiences, good and sad, and we both find it easy to talk (and hear) about our late partners.

Our first day out was a bit unusual. Henrietta is Irish, but moved to England when she was 18 to train as a nurse, and has lived in the Midlands for most of her life. It is a fact about folk who live in the Midlands that they don't feel that they have had a day out, or a holiday, unless they have seen the sea. So we had to see the sea. The nearest bit of sea to here is the north Norfolk coast, but, beautiful though it is, it is an awful drive, so we went for the second best choice - the Lincolnshire coast - which is

much easier. So, for our first day out, I took her to Skegness and Mablethorpe where we walked on the beach and saw the sea (which was romantic), it rained all day and we ate fish and chips in a seaside chippy (which was less so).

For our second day together we decided to go for a walk (Henrietta is a keen walker and goes once or twice a week with her daughter, sometimes for just 6 miles, other days it's 14). There is a lovely walk by me that starts in a real gem of a local pub, goes along the Derwent Valley to Belper (which has a very interesting industrial history), then back across the other side of the river. Unfortunately the walk finished along the side of the Belper sewage works, which was in particularly fine form on

*(Continued on page 4)*



## Montana on Horseback.

When we were in Lanzarote in February, Earl and I decided we'd try a riding holiday in the states. Earl rode quiet a bit in his youth and I have done trail rides on various trips to America, so we felt we would enjoy it. It then turned out that Wendy was also a bit of a horsewoman in her younger days, so she came along as well.

With the help of a small company in Leicester, I sorted out a lovely ranch in deepest Montana, and we booked a week in September. Wendy had never been to the 'states before, so it seemed like a good idea to add a bit on each end and make a holiday out of it. So, we flew into Denver on September 2<sup>nd</sup>, and the next day (after a chase round Denver to find a doctor to look at Wendy's ear) drove north into Wyoming.

The next day we drove to Cody Wyoming, to find a western outfitter where we could buy cowboy hats, gloves, shirts etc. then visited Buffalo Bill's Centre of the West for some history on the plains Indians

Then we drove into Yellowstone National Park for two days, saw all the sights, and the next day, north again (past Big Sky - see

Skiing) and up to our ranch. We had a (mostly) great week trail riding with a great crowd. There were about 20 of us, with 6 wranglers (they take care of the horses and lead the rides) so every day you could pretty much do whatever sort of ride you wanted. There were all day rides, but we stuck to the 2 hour morning and afternoon rides, with lunch in between.

The scenery is beyond stunning.

I said "we had a (mostly) great week" because on the Thursday, Wendy came off. She was slowing from a canter to a trot (one of the more difficult transitions I understand) and just came off. In hindsight, she thinks that, as she was having ear problems, it was a balance issue as she is too experienced to fall so easily. Anyway, she seemed unhurt, but they took her to the local hospital (an hour away) and the doctor there passed her as fit. She rode again on the Saturday as we took the horses over the mountains to their winter pasture and seemed just fine.

We then had a long return drive to Denver, but we took in the Little Bighorn battle memorial (Custer's last stand), Mount Rushmore (president's heads carved into the mountain), and the Crazy Horse monument (museum and mountain carving dedicated to the plight of the



Plains Indians under early US governments).

Unfortunately, the long drive, followed by a 9 hour flight in cattle class, put Wendy in severe pain, probably a result of the fall. This persisted and she had

to have a few weeks off work, but the good news is that she does seem to be recovering.

Probably enough horse riding to last all of us the rest of our lives, but a fantastic two weeks.

## A Driving Experience 2.



I have always had a hankering to drive a train. Not, like many, a steam train, but a diesel railcar. One of those ubiquitous ones you see all over the country, often just two carriages, sometimes even one, serving the less frequented stations. Like the one I used to travel on from Shifnal to Wolverhampton many, many years ago.

As it happens, the Ecclesbourne Valley Railway (which runs alongside my fields) offers just such a drive, so this year I, along with my neighbour, Linda who also expressed an interest, sent them a cheque and turned up on the day.

The first surprise on arriving was to see a face that I knew, but

couldn't place. When I did finally place it, it turned out to belong to someone who brings his caravan to the farm, and on being asked if he was also on the day, he said that, no, he wasn't - he was our instructor. I thought this boded well for a good (or at least long) day.

We had a great time with three of us learning to drive the train (and sounding the "bee-bah" horn at the frequent unguarded crossings), but rural routes are not without their problems - see photos - and the others were very grateful to have one-and-a-half farmers on board (I only count as a half when Linda is around) at intervals during the day.

## A Driving Experience 1.



As you will have read, Mike and I drove from Salt Lake City to Bozeman - a distance of 500 miles - and at the end of it we put a grand total of \$20 in fuel in the tank. As if that weren't insult enough, at one point in

southern Montana, we drove for fully 30 minutes without seeing a single vehicle on our side of the road. The photo is a US motorway at 14:00 on a Friday afternoon. Unbelievable.



# Skiing

Last January the usual trio - me, Mike and Sally - went skiing. All three of us have maintained for some years now that Big Sky in Montana is just about the best resort in the world - loads of snow, great runs through all sorts of terrain, and (most important) no people. ( I think this is mainly because there is no everyday accommodation. There is really high end stuff at \$2,000 a night, but the sort that ordinary people might use is quite poor.) Anyway, we go there most years if we can and stay down in the valley where the accommodation is good, but not too expensive.

We do, however, try to do two centre holidays and we have skied in other local resorts but this year decided to try Park City - just outside Salt Lake City in Utah. WOW. The skiing was just amazing—vast ski areas, big open slopes, lovely little trails through the trees, just about everything, and after a few days we were beginning to wonder if Park City had knocked Big Sky off it's throne. By the time we put Sally on the plane to come home (she had to be back early)

we had decided that it probably had.

Anyway, having said goodbye to Sally, Mike and I drove north back to Big Sky where, after a day or two of fantastically good skiing, we decided that, as good as it was, Park City was still in second place. The snow was just perfect for downhill skiing, and although Mike and I are not really competitive (yeah, right!), we both had ski apps on our phones. We compared notes frequently and we skied a fraction under 300 miles in the two weeks. And on one run we both hit just over 50mph. On skis. Not bad for a pair of geriatrics, that.

One of the things I have wanted ever since we found Big Sky is a helmet cam. The skiing is just so beautiful - down runs 20-30ft wide, through tall pine trees, with the snow curling out from beneath a pair of parallel skis - that I have always wanted to use it to make a film called "Why I Love Skiing". The snag is the cost of a helmet cam, usually the wrong side of £300.

Mike had an answer to this. He had found a Groupon scheme that got him a head cam (note, head



The view at Bozeman airport



cam, not helmet cam) for £17.50. Clearly, we were not expecting much, but in the event even then we were optimistic. Firstly it was a head cam. It came with a head band and had to be worn on the forehead. However, with a ski helmet on, a camera on the forehead points mostly towards the sky. So he had to pull it down over his eyes to the point where he could hardly see.

If you are starting to think that this is sounding silly, you would be right - he looked ridiculous. I will spare him the blushes, however, and not publish the photo. But we called him Myclops.

The final insult came when we tried to look at what he had recorded - basically, nothing. So, although he was £17.50 down, we had at least that much entertainment out of it, so not that bad a deal after all.

The story had a happy ending however, because it prompted me to head into Wal-Mart and buy a proper one. The good news was that, as is quite common, it was the same price in dollars as in pounds - I.e. at a 33% discount.

All was not plain sailing even then though. The best shots to look at are ones taken from the side of the skier. Unfortunately this involves the cameraman (me) skiing at high speed, down hill, in wooded country, looking sideways at Mike rather than where I am going. You will understand that these clips do not last very long.

The bad news is that with it stuck to my helmet my shadow (which appears frequently in the subsequent film) makes me look like tinky winky.

For all that, it was a great holiday, and we hope to repeat it.



## How did it happen?

Not the greatest start to the journey. We went to Birmingham airport only to discover, when we tried to check in, that the plane left from East Midlands. Panic. The car was valet parked and we had just over an hour to get it back, drive 30 odd miles up the rush hour M42, find somewhere to park, and get to the check in desk. We made it and actually had time to grab a cup of tea-to-go before boarding, but it wasn't the most relaxing start the day. How did I get that so wrong? No idea., but I have a feeling that I will never be allowed to forget it. (In fact, Mike texted me on the return journey to say "Don't worry, I've checked, and Lanzarote only has one airport".)

## My Year.

(Continued from page 1)

that day. We decided that I really know how to show a girl a good time.

Our third day out was even more interesting. Henrietta is obviously pretty fit, so, completely unbeknown to her, I booked us to do Go Ape—see photo (if you don't know what it is - Google it). It involves climbing up a tree and then going from one tree to another in various ways - along steel cables, across wobbly bridges, swinging on a rope - all very exciting. But - the only way down at the end is a zip wire. She looked a little uncertain when faced with this, but we went through the training session - how to ensure that you are ALWAYS attached to the safety cable and so on - and she decided that she could do it. Well, to cut a long story shorter, she really enjoyed it, particularly the zip wires - and we were still seeing each other.

Since then we have got closer and closer, and it all looks very promising. She lives in Ashby de la Zouch, which is a lovely little town, and her house is within easy walking distance of the

## Dad's Army (or Air Force).

One story that amused me no end this year was that of the plane owned by an African airline that was hijacked by the co-pilot over Switzerland. They had to call the French air force jets to force it down because - the Swiss air force only operate Monday to Friday 9 to 5.

## Wisdom for the new year 1.

When life hands you lemons - make a gin and tonic.

town centre where there are shops, restaurants, and pubs. I live in the country where there are none of these things, so we divide our time between our  *pied-a-terre*  in Ashby and our country pile in Hazelwood.

Then along came November, and the second anniversary of Liz's death. I have been seeing a bereavement counsellor regularly this year, and she has been a great help. In particular she said that most people find the first two years the most difficult, and so it seems to be proving. On November 1<sup>st</sup> I was in France with Henrietta, and I sat for an hour and remembered Liz. It was difficult for Henrietta, but she was a comfort, and helped me through the ensuing tears. But for all that, I find that the bad memories are fading and I have made a start with clearing out some bits and pieces - not an easy job, but easier now that I have help. Now, whenever I remember Liz, I see her as she was in her early fifties - full of life, ready for anything, and always that glorious smile.

So while 2013 went badly downhill, 2014 was more level, and I think 2015 will prove to have started upwards again.

## Toilet Humour.

Notice seen in a modern train toilet " *Please do not flush:- nappies, sanitary towels, paper towels, gum, old phones, unpaid bills, junk mail, your ex's sweater, hopes, dreams or goldfish down this toilet.*" Who knew railway companies could have a sense of humour?

## Wisdom for the new year 2.

Something all newly-weds should know - "Happiness is the gap between expectations and reality."

So, make your expectations realistic.

## Comings and Goings.

(Continued from page 1)

makes looking after the hens difficult. I can only ask Tim to do the job now and then, and to add insult to injury, they have all packed up laying so I'm getting no eggs at all (I had to buy some and I'd forgotten how insipid they are). So, much though I love to see the hens walking around the place and scratching, and similarly, how much people on the camp site like them, I decided it was time for them to go. I couldn't possibly neck them, so I asked my neighbour Linda, who has chickens of her own, if I

## Caring for Aging Parents.

Henrietta and I went to France in late October to house sit while Liz's brother John and his partner went away for a couple of weeks. They have about 40 acres of mostly woodland, so there is much logging to be done if you wish to. Naturally, I wish to, so I usually take my chainsaw along with me. (I don't like to think about how I would explain it's presence to a customs officer if I were asked).

Just before we set off, Henrietta's daughter was asking about the trip and it turned that Henrietta had little idea about where we were going. Her daughter summed it up this way "So mum, you're going off to France, with a man you've known for two and a half months, you don't know where you're sailing from or to, you have no idea where this house is, and he's got a chainsaw in the car".

It was a pretty accurate summary of the situation.

could pension them off at her place and she agreed. So that is the end of another era - no chickens at Knowle Farm (but a significant reduction in stress for the owner of said farm).

The ducks continue to be fine, and I am hoping that they will survive living on the pond when I am away, and the cats will be perfectly happy with the automatic feeder. They care about being fed, not who does it.

