

A letter from Africa-December 2010

Hello everyone,

`Tis the season of goodwill, of joy and happiness to all.

It is the time when we should all behave like Scrooge after his wonderful reawakening to find that he can start anew. Of course it is snowing outside as well.

SO....I guess that means that I cannot talk to you about South African politics and all that goes with it by way of service delivery to the people who employ and pay their salaries.

No, I will stick to happy things.

So this is a few lines about good and positive events that have happened or I have thought about since the last note in August.

There will be some pictures and it might just go over the 2 page limit that I set on your behalf. After all I do not think you could take more without a deep sense of envy and jealousy rising up in your throat resulting in this letter being scrunched up and hurled across the room in despair.

Having said that we have had communication from some about cruises around Pacific Islands, long journeys through India, the USA, Crete and generally living a rather enjoyable life style. So I think you will be able to handle our news with ease.

Ok, so get on with it and stop waffling. Right.

It is the life time objective of some to actually work in a Chocolate company and be able to taste the produce at will. My days of carefree chocolate eating will come to an end on Dec 17 and I will be returned to the ranks of the retired brigade. It has been a good 8 month stint both from a bank account point of view as well as all those intangible things associated with mind and soul.

You will note the absence of "body". Well Bev`s knees and my right hip preclude this as being good news but we are positively seeking out a surgeon we can afford to undertake the necessary repair work in 2011.

Some good news is only so because there is a darker downside or alternative. I was thinking this, perhaps, as Doctor Ives scooped out bits of my temple with his sharp instruments. The good part was that he had used a local anaesthetic first. The shock was the sight in the mirror of two big cauterised holes in my head and the suggestion that I return to Cadbury (a food company) without any plaster, as

it would heal best if left weeping and open. I took the plaster route and slowly prepared Cadbury for the unveiling in a day or so.

More good news. Well yes...if you are going to contract cancer then skin cancer is the mildest form. Just keep going to the doc and make sure he cuts out or burns off anything that looks a bit dodgy.

A change now to a story with a picture. Every page needs a picture or two to break up the monotony of actually reading. So I will tell you about our own Ride A Cup competition.

We had booked 5 days at the Championship golf course resort of The Fish River Sun that sits gracefully along the coast some 175 kms from PE.



The competition was between me in PE and Barry and Brian.

The latter being Bev`s brothers from Jhb and CT respectively.

A warm up session of Mashie in PE led to 9 holes on a wet Alexandria before we were let loose on the super course at Fish River where we did battle over 3 rounds of 18 holes.

The pics are self explanatory but do not tell the full story of joy and anguish, but throughout we were able to take in all the pleasures associated with being housed at The Fish River Sun.

A week of memorable stories including our own wedding anniversary dinner on the 22nd.

The result? Did I hear you ask?



Let me put it this way. None of us will win an Open but Brian and Barry have a better chance than me.

Andrea continues to grow in her new sales position and Courtney to blossom, as I guess all small children do, and slowly yet with miraculous speed turn into small people with a personality and deep thoughts about life.

We all went to the local semi pro production of Annie with this good cheer story appropriate to the good news style of this letter.

I again note with concern that not one black face was on stage nor in attendance. The future of the performing arts in Africa must surely rely on participation of all. But it would seem that this form of theatre does not appeal to everyone.

We had expected to have completed my contract with Cadbury at the end of Oct and hence we had organised another week away in Dec.

This was to try and find the end of the Universe by spending time at the gateway to the stars.
Drum roll.....

We refer, of course, to Sutherland and the Southern African Large Telescope (SALT).

This 11 metre wide mirror makes it the largest in the world although the same size as the one in the USA. Our tour took us into the heart of this gigantic window to the stars and at night we returned to look through two smaller telescopes under the guidance of a staff member.



What did we see?... well difficult to remember them all but that night was the time for Jupiter and its` moons that we were even able to capture on camera. The brightest star on display was Sirius but we looked into the Magellanic clouds of yet to be stars, Andromeda, The false cross, Achernar and many others up to 120000 light years away. A

shooting star and satellites helped frame the experience as the deep darkness of this Karoo spot showed the sky ten times more detailed than if seen from Jhb. The chill of the night from this semi desert region led us back to our accommodation aptly named Jupiter, and into a cosy electric blanket prepared soft bed and coffee with Bells that warmed but did not ring.

The observatory has many telescopes and is funded by a few countries around the world who buy time to use the equipment.

At the moment Sutherland is one of two locations for the km square radio telescope that will be funded internationally and cost billions and be built over a period of years. A test site is being built and the results will be compared to the other in Australia with the best being the place for the whole km square project.

We returned the next day to our base in Oudtshoorn some 250 kms away. We had booked a week of timeshare in this delightful Small Karoo town.

Our journey back took us over gravel road passes through the mountains with the essential stop on the way at a favourite water hole of Majiesfontein.

The Lord Milner Hotel dates from around 1884 and a Scot named Jimmy Logan, born in Reston, set up base on the route of ox wagons and then train to the diamond fields of Kimberly.

The whole village has been preserved and as you can see has retained a number 12 London bus. It was also the home of Olive Schreiner for some time. During the Boer War the area housed some 10000 English troops and 20000 horses.



By now Oudtshoorn was a sunny 35°C and no bed cover was needed.

Xmas is coming and the tree and decorations are up as our 9 year old granddaughter keeps the story alive. But do we not all believe in the spirit of Father Xmas? Of course we do.

Sorry it is 3 pages long. Remember you can reach us by email or Skype.
Love to you all and enjoy this time of year and all that 2011 will bring you.

Bev and Alan
PS Talk to you again next year.