

Life for us in 2013

A lot has happened since our 'Life for us in 2012' newsletter, some things you may be aware of and some you may not, so please forgive me if it is old news for you.

Mid December 2012 we celebrated one of my 'big' birthdays. It was held at the Sporting Car Club with an amazing collection of our family and friends. Nigel surprised everyone by taking off his shirt during his speech to reveal a T-shirt on which he had sewn the mystery birthday numbers. Lauren and Mel served the food and decorated the birthday cake. I had prepared a digital slide show. Daniel organized the sound and visuals and gave a very thoughtful speech with the support of Ruby at his leg. A very happy time and enjoyed by all.



In February Nigel started to 'complain' of back ache – *'well, he had lifted a cement column by himself!'* and then nausea – *'well, there is a gastric wog going around!'* and then a small lump in his neck – *'well, there is a tooth problem on that side!'*. As all three symptoms persisted so Nigel decided that eating was causing pain, so he stopped eating and drinking which resulted in over 20kg weight loss. On 22nd February we visited our GP who organized a scan and then a biopsy of the gland which showed malignancy in a lymph node. After more tests Nigel was diagnosed in March as having Metastatic Colon Cancer. By this stage Nigel was very weak, not driving and often needing a wheelchair to get him to places. On April 3rd a PICC line was inserted (see picture) and chemo commenced. He was also ordered a 3 pronged mouth treatment for a 'quilted' tongue.



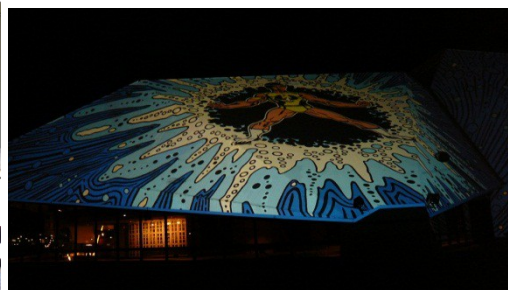
Nigel had had a phone call earlier in the year from the Black Mountain Rowing Club in Canberra to ask his permission to name a Rowing 8 after him at a ceremony on 13th April. Of course, he said yes and we planned to drive over and afterwards do some fly fishing with Tim, a son living near Orange in New South Wales, on the way home. It soon became apparent that driving was not a possibility, and thus I booked flights and wheel chairs at the airports. The Monday before the 'naming', I rang the oncology nurses to see if he could be given some IV fluid to hydrate him for the trip. The 9th was consequently spent in hospital with Nigel on a drip. We flew out to Canberra on 12th. The Black Mountain Rowing Club is in a beautiful setting on the side of Lake Burley Griffin. Nigel was made to feel so special (rightly so!) and coped well with the ceremony with a little help

from his 'rowing boys' (now in their 60s). The event had an amazingly positive effect on Nigel and he was delighted in showing photos of the event through the TV to anyone who called in to see him subsequently.



Chemo continued every 2 weeks. Nigel gradually improved, started to eat, with encouragement, got tired easily, slept a lot and enjoyed short visits from family and friends. Ali, his daughter came over from the UK in May for 3 weeks and took over the care of Nigel on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays while I was at work.

In June one of Nigel's talent was honoured again, this time relating to a painting he had done of a former South Australian Premier, Don Dunstan as Captain Adelaide. The original painting, owned by Flinders University, now hangs over the entrance to the Dunstan Playhouse, which is part of Adelaide's Festival Centre in the CBD. For the Festival Centre's 40 year celebrations there was a light show on the roof of the Festival Centre and one of the slides was of Nigel's painting – it looked amazing.



The next scan in June showed mainly static 'spots' and even a little improvement but it also showed some pulmonary embolisms (blood clots in lungs). This resulted in daily injections of a blood thinner as well as all the usual medications, chemo and so on. My nursing background came in handy. He seem to fancy jelly with his tablets and when refusing food would succumb to a drink of 'Horlicks'. There were occasional bursts of

energy (tiny though they may be) during the next few months and Nigel was able to cope with a few small trips locally and to our Central Market (one of Nigel's loves).



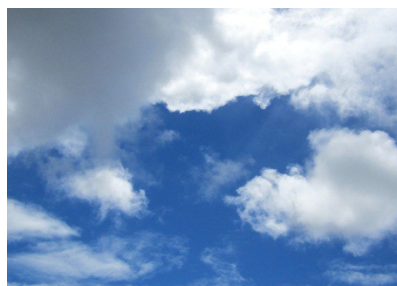
On 25th September I accepted redundancy from my job as a Senior Lecturer in TAFE after nearly 30 years, with the uncertainty of what our future was going to 'look like', but glad to be available to care for Nigel full time. The Celebrations of my leaving 'work' was a much needed positivity in our life. One of the celebrations was at the Grand Hotel at Glenelg where my current staff team organized a High Tea. In the middle of my

speech a guy turned up with an enormous arrangement of flowers - they turned out to be for me. There was a second, larger affair which included staff past and present and some students past and present. Both occasions were enjoyed and appreciated.

By October Nigel was experiencing lots of breakthrough pain. Another scan was ordered which showed that the disease had progressed considerably. Nigel was shocked with the results ('*I thought I was going so well*'). He decided not to continue with chemo, just have medication to make his pain go and life comfortable. Unfortunately it became increasingly difficult to control the pain and on 30th October he was admitted to Daw House Hospice for a couple of days to try to get it managed. Blood test results on 1st November showed that Nigel was going downhill rapidly, much faster than anticipated. As I left him that night Nigel said "It's OK, it's OK, it's OK". Sadly for us he died 6 days later on November 7th in the afternoon. Ali arrived from the UK at 10pm. She was still able to see him and say her goodbyes.



Following Nigel's wishes to be buried feet first, he was buried by Upright Burials (*check their website*) in rural Western Victoria, some 7 hours drive from Brighton SA. Just the immediate family and one couple attended his very personal, emotional, eco-friendly burial in this beautiful part of Victoria. (*see 9 photos that follow*)



After Nigel had been lowered into the grave (preceded by his green crocs) the sun peeked through and the sky turned from grey to blue!! One of the women present, at our request, played a hauntingly beautiful tune on her penny whistle (Nigel had taught himself to play the penny whistle).



A week later about 150 family and friends met at the Brighton Sailing Club to celebrate Nigel's life. We were able to share stories of Nigel, hear emails from the UK and other parts of Oz. As the sun was setting over the horizon we gather outside to think of Nigel and the part he had played in our lives. Rob Morrison played on trumpet "Amazing Grace" and then as the sun disappeared he played "When the saints go marching home". Nigel might not have always been a saint but we loved him..



As for our children this year – Tim is still working for a landscaping supply company in New South Wales. Lauren has had constant back pain and is still on the waiting list to see a neuro-surgeon at Flinders Hospital. She finds that standing is her most comfortable position and has been doing work experience for a catering company 2 days a week as a test to find out if she could cope with part time work of this type. Nigel and I were delighted to learn that Daniel and Mel were expecting a baby due March next year. I was invited to attend one of the 'baby scans' and was not as good as Mel at identifying exactly what the baby was doing in-utero but it was good to be in on a positive scan for a change. Ali has been over from the UK twice this year. She lives in Manchester and has just got a job in corporate travel. Our grandchildren - Cameron is currently living in country South Australia and Lauren visits him regularly and Ruby-Mae, who now a very active 3 years old, has been an excellent diversion 'to life for us' this year.

Our children have all found it difficult emotionally to cope with Nigel's illness but were amazingly supportive to us both in lots of different ways, as have so many of our extended family and friends for which we are/were very appreciative, grateful and indebted.

We wish you all the best for 2014 and look forward to hearing your news. Email - jenfent@hotmail.com or snail mail to 9 Bindarra Road, Brighton 5048 South Australia (phone: 08 8296 0722)

Jennie (and Nigel



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