

The Lairds at Large in 2017

Our 2016 update was crammed with amazing things for our family – and it would be hard to imagine things could get even better in 2017; but they did! The last missive closed with the arrival on Australia Day of Nicola Laird-Wah. We're now coming up on her 1st birthday (and her Dad's 30th). Much has happened between now and then as the following recounts in roughly chronological order...

Just after Nicola arrived (and there was a quick parental visit to Sydney to greet her), Rod headed to New York to catch up with friends he had been promising to visit "next time he was in town" – since the late 90's. He was greeted by both wonderful friends and snow; much improving the view and experience of Central Park which his accommodation overlooked. He headed home via Aspen, where he spent a couple of weeks with family (sister and brother-in-law) and friends.



February found Su exploring some creative new Japan-inspired ceramic forms. Sadly, she was (again) let down by changes in the quality of the clay she was using, which prevented the delivery of exhibition quality works. (But Rod still thinks they are beautiful!) Su also began working with a local neighbourhood learning centre, creating and piloting a hands-on horticulture programme to teach basic gardening skills to young learning-disabled adults. This is a marvellous programme that provides training in really practical skills, with the young trainees working in gardens of institutions that are in need of improvement. For much of the year, despite initial consternation, they worked in the large nearby cemetery, improving the gardens within.

March found us all in Sydney – including Katja and Travis – on another trip to Sydney to visit the newest family member... Travis and Rod also consumed all the major contemporary art exhibitions that were on show at the time. Returning to Melbourne Su accepted a commission for a very large garden at a friend's beach home; a project that was to consume a great deal of time through the year. April saw Rod performing a programme of medieval and renaissance dance in a beautiful gallery setting in the gold-rush provincial town of Ballarat.





June found us first in Oslo visiting friends, then overnighing in Flåm and Bergen in our version of “Norway in a (foggy, soggy) nutshell”. From there it was off to Reykjavik to meet and travel around Iceland with an old friend. Certainly spectacular (in a shrubby / lava ash kind of way), although I think we have consumed all the “bouncing around traversing lava field” hours allotted to our lives... #1 surprise was the excellence of the lamb; hardy stock that arrived with the first settlers in 800AD; yum yum! We headed home south through London and Munich; great weather, some friends – lots of shopping.

July flew past with Su busy with her landscape commissions and teaching. Rod continued in his Sisyphean multi-year task of “encouraging” the Melbourne University Engineering School in developing more relevant skills and outcomes for both its researchers and teaching activities. (There is visible progress) Of course there were also visits to the Laird-Wahs to admire the grandchild and also a frenzy of activity getting the Laird-Wah Melbourne house finally ready for rental, tidying up Kat’s property – and last but certainly not least, preparing for the coming big event...



...in August; Katja & Travis’ wedding! A wonderful family and friends event, which somehow grew from a handful to a hundred people. Held in an old convent site and with avante-garde decoration by Katja and her friends, the evening could not have been bettered in any way. One of life’s memorable milestones and an occasion of matchless family happiness. Through the month Su also managed to fit in the supervision of the start of works for her major beachside landscaping project, and Rod yet more renaissance dance performances.

After the epic events of the previous month, you might think that September might provide the opportunity to slow down a bit; but no – after popping Katja & Travis on the plane to Italy for their honeymoon, Su headed off to Helsinki while Rod oversaw some major external maintenance; replacement of the century old roof, and installation of 12kW of solar cells being the main items. Su joined her quilting friends in Kuusamo (in Lapland) to go hiking in the national parks and get “up close and personal” with reindeer – which are surprisingly small; only hip-height.



As may be expected, maintenance works continued through October; with a great deal of clean up required on Su’s part due to damage done to the garden by the tilers. (Su was not best pleased!) Rod flitted to California for a week, the “surprise” guest for a friend’s 60th birthday – and also an opportunity to catch up with a godson

(works for SpaceX; genuine “rocket scientist”). With Su’s assistance, the Laird-Wahs moved from Sydney to Canberra, ready for Estee to start medicine next year...

November found the Laird-Wahs joining us for that most Australian of holiday traditions; the Melbourne Cup day BBQ. The following day we all flew to Tokyo, to be joined by Katja and Travis flying in from Berlin – for yet another milestone family event; the celebration of Su’s 60th! We spent an absolutely unforgettable two weeks travelling through Hiroshima/Miyajima, Kyoto (for the “big party”), Kanazawa and finally Tokyo again. We caught up with old friends and made some new ones; enjoyed Travis enjoying his first snow; delighted in art, autumnal colours, colourful kimonos – and of course lots of shopping! And there were many surprises such as being invited to a spontaneous tea ceremony with a potter family, where each person was served tea in a bowl made by a different generation of the family... Best of all, Su, after eight months of really brutal treatment for her food intolerances (carpet-bombing your guts with extreme antibiotics is no fun), was finally able to enjoy most of the many Japanese delights on offer! (Sadly Italian food remains off limits...)

Which brings us to December and more of the things that had been keeping us busy through the year (when at home, at least). Su’s major landscaping project was finally completed – with very happy clients. Rod participated in the last performance of the renaissance dance group as its illustrious octogenarian Artistic Director (with whom he first danced 40 years ago!) finally hung up her dancing shoes. (The group leadership is reforming from its current members, so music and theatrical performance will continue in coming years...). Katja and Travis finally returned to Oz after some weeks touring Japan as Travis performed (on the guitar) with a number of bands. And then Xmas arrived as another happy occasion for the whole family to spend time together; the Laird-Wahs staying with us through to the New Year.

2016 seemed to be a stupendous year in terms of milestone events – but it has been eclipsed by this year’s wonderful family events. The expansion of our family with grand-daughter Nicola and son-in-



law Travis – and the new interplay of all family members - brings us joy beyond measure; as have our various visitors during the year. We look forward to new adventures in 2018 as the Laird-Wahs settle themselves in Canberra and Katja and Travis find their feet together in Melbourne at last. We have significant renovations still to come (ugh), gardens to enjoy together in Europe – and we look forward to welcoming friends to stay from Japan, Europe – and hopefully elsewhere as well!

The Pictures in order:

- Su's Japan-inspired creations
- Nicola comes to visit Oma in May
- Brilliant autumnal colours in our front yard
- Borgund Stave Church in an unusual non-raining moment, Norway
- Sigöldugljufur falls near Landmannalaugar, Iceland; formed as water "leaks" through the lava field from the nearby hydro dam
- Katja and Travis in their newly married condition
- Observing diminutive reindeer
- Celebrating Su's "resetting the clock" birthday in Kyoto
- After 40 years, the last performance of the renaissance dance group under the direction of Helga Hill AO...
- The Laird-Wahs share the yule tide in Melbourne

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