

The Lairds at Large in 2016

What a year for the Laird clan! Full of so many exciting new things as you will see in the following (rough) chronology.

Rod had his usual trip to Aspen to ski in February, while I (happily) held the fort at home and worked – designing a garden and doing some teaching of horticulture and giving lectures.

In May Rod and I went to Italy to celebrate Rod's sixtieth in a farmhouse in Piedmont with some of his friends from the US and the UK. Su's brother David came too and the plan was to go bike riding during the day, but the weather wasn't the best, so they only got a few rides in. But we were all kept well-occupied with visits to a winery, watching mozzarella being made by a master cheese-maker (and a bit of a ham) and of course gelati shops to find, so everyone had a good time. Rod and I went on to do a garden tour of the Italian Lakes with an English tour company, which was a lot of fun, particularly as there were some wonderful English stereotypes, including a well-heeled (and clearly well-connected) once handsome gentleman who was an incorrigible flirt – I don't know how his wife put up with him. She seemed to wear a resigned look much of the time, while he tried it on with almost every female.

Then back home for a few months, with Su spending a lot of time painting Kat's "new" Victorian workman's cottage on the other side of the city from us. Kat is now working in a graphic design business, which also includes a lot of design and construction work. She is enjoying it all very much, although her slightly loony boss is sometimes a bit of a challenge. When the going gets tough, he runs away to Noosa in Queensland and leaves Kat to deal with everything! As she says, she's learnt a lot, but she could do without the stress.

Then in September we went back to Italy for a tour along the Amalfi Coast, followed by another week in Italy, including a memorable night at La Scala and several weeks in Germany where we found ourselves in the midst of Oktoberfest. We have never seen so many dirndl and lederhosen ... (and a surprising number of shapely legs!). The trip culminated in a quilting reunion in Bavaria for the group Su belonged to when we lived in Düsseldorf, which was also a lot of fun, and reminded us how lucky we are.

Then back home to do more work on Kat's house and start work on James and Estee's new house, also conveniently on the other side of the city. Sigh!

In November, we went to Sydney for James' PhD graduation – he is continuing to work for the company developing a revolutionary form of implantable pain management systems where he did his research, and is doing very well there. His PhD was in building an electrical model of the spine. Estee, James' wife, has decided she would like to study medicine (at the ripe old age of 36) and has been offered a place at the Australian National University in Canberra. She has wisely decided to defer because she is



expecting a baby in early February. Naturally we have all been very excited about the imminent arrival of the next generation, although we have been having trouble getting our heads around the idea that we are going to be grandparents.



Then back to Tokyo for a quick trip to spend some time with one of Su's quilting friends and have a bit of a rest. Naturally we availed ourselves of the opportunity to do a spot of shopping, too. And then back to Sydney for a Baby Shower for James and Estee ...

Since then Kat has announced her engagement to Travis, with a low-key wedding planned for some time next year. Su had to laugh – she picked her moment to tell her. They were re-doing her tiny front: garden, when she

casually told Su she was getting married. After she had picked her jaw up off the ground and dusted it off, she was still speechless – this was someone who had said she was *never* getting married. And ... she said they had decided to get engaged after only knowing each other for a month. Su couldn't really say anything critical – after all, she and Rod got engaged after only two weeks together (although we had both been members of the German Club at university and had at least eyeballed each other over a year or two). But, knowing Kat, anything could happen. Travis is very quiet, an artist and musician and cooks full-time to make ends meet. We are looking forward to getting to know him a little better over Christmas.



Rod has continued his work with the University of Melbourne's engineering leadership group throughout the year and is at last beginning to see some progress. Hopefully it will lead to less hair-tearing next year – he's running out of hair! The Early Music Group has also occupied much of his time, with both rehearsals and performances as well as producing the latest CD that he has recorded for the group. And, of course, there are the thousands of photos from the year's activities still to be processed ...

Su's horticultural workload has been relatively light, with a reduced number of continuing clients, classes and lectures. Her food intolerances have been a real problem, but the root cause has been identified (hooray!), and it is now a matter of surviving the rather drastic treatment. But having to take it quietly has had its silver lining – several half-finished quilts and many sewing projects have been removed from the 'to-do' pile.

And so, as we careen at high speed towards the end of the year, we have found time to count our blessings – to have a family that has blossomed, the ability to do many of the things we like doing, often with our wonderful friends, and most importantly, to have our health. We're still working on travel plans for 2017, with Iceland, Lapland and Japan on the menu. We'll let you know if we are going to be in your neck of the woods And, as we write, our little monkey, Nicola Xiao En Laird-Wah has made an early arrival on Australia Day

