

Christmas letter 2015 from Ken and Elizabeth Joyce

We have now lived in Bellingen almost 18 months and are finding we don't miss the house we lived in at Berry but it has been wonderful to keep in touch, and welcome as visitors, friends we made during the previous 40 years. With those friends almost 700 km away it has been fun getting to know new friends from our neighbourhood and church.

We have loved the advantage of being more central to our family. Peter, Virginia, Ethan and Elliot are an hour south at Scotts Head, Anna, Andrew, Elisha (just completed the HSC and waiting to find out what happens next), Jacob and Zac are only 20 minutes away at Valla Beach – their eldest, Josh is studying performance music at Monash University in Melbourne. It's only a day's drive (or train trip) of 500 km to Chris, Brooke, Laura and Lily at Bribie Island, Brisbane, or to Simeon, Kelly, Charlotte, Oliver and Thomas in Annandale, Sydney. Sam, Ben and Eliza (Christopher's older children, now all in their 20s) also live in Brisbane.

Moving here to be more central we expected to travel less to catch up with family and that's what's happened – somewhat! We have been north and south several times, including visits to the Shoalhaven, even to Melbourne via Elizabeth's cousin's birthday party in Bethanga, Victoria. Trips to Valla Beach or Scotts Head hardly count nowadays.

Elisha, Jacob and Zachary are frequent visitors, often staying overnight. Her boyfriend, Sam, usually accompanies Elisha. Zac brings his double bass that we transport to and from schools for lessons, the primary school string group and, recently, the Bellingen High School and Youth Orchestra in which Elisha has played clarinet. They practice for two hours a week with an afternoon tea break to which we have contributed. Concert performances are just wonderful!

We are likely to see Lily, Charlotte and Oliver during school holiday visits and love having them stay for a week or two, especially when it's hot enough to use the swimming pool.

Trips north have included seeing our first great grandchild, Oliver, in Brisbane. He was born in January this year. Eliza and Josh have been handling all the challenges a baby brings with reflux, teething and other sleep-sapping problems. Also we could see Elizabeth's sister, Prue's family and other friends.

Our house is 112 years old and has required some tender loving care and maintenance, much as we do. Fortunately none of this has required major works; both the house and us are generally well. Some renovations have included installing a solar hot water system, extending the linen cupboard and changing some door latches and handles. The filigrees/brackets on our veranda posts had disintegrated but thanks to an amazing job by old friend Bill Gray they have been replaced with new ones. We are in the process of getting the pool fence meeting new regulations. There will be more painting and repairs to do.

We are learning about gardening in the semi-tropics, cutting back, hedging, trimming, mulching, spraying, fertilising and planting new plants. The result is first that we can see and enjoy the difference and second, it's a never-ending pleasure.

We love our veranda around three sides of the house. We often enjoy a drink or meals there, watch the rain come across the valley, see floods rise and fall and simply enjoy the expanse of the view – the best in Bellingen – up the Bellinger river valley.

It was wonderful to have so many friends and relatives help to celebrate Elizabeth's 70th birthday, including five of her close friends from Shoalhaven Heads who spent a few days in Bellingen with us. Our guest rooms have been well used and it has been a joy to have visitors and to show them what we have found locally.

Almost daily we walk down town for some light shopping via one of the 14 or so coffee shops, meet friends and neighbours, spend almost all of Sunday at church and with friends we have got to know there. It is so convenient to walk down to a concert in town. We have had neighbours here for a Cancer Council Biggest Morning Tea. Elizabeth volunteers fortnightly at the primary school canteen and teaches Scripture there on Fridays.

Our days are satisfying and full!

Each year we become more assured of the love of God for us and it is a joy to celebrate Jesus, Emmanuel, God With Us. We pray that you and your loved ones are also enjoying the blessing of knowing Jesus the Lord as your saviour and friend.

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With our love...

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