

The Liwicki Family HOLIDAY NEWSLETTER

2020

It would not be an understatement to say that this has been an extraordinary year – for us, for all of mankind, and the planet. To add to the mounting levels of extraordinariness, the Liwickis have put pen to paper and produced our infrequent, but undoubtedly missed, end of year newsletter.

We failed to write to most last Christmas. So here is a 2019 summary – Richard retired in May at the peak of his glory, Sian's father passed away (gently, at home in Singapore) whilst the girls kept growing. We hope the fast pace of life that has made us such poor correspondents, will gradually recede – as this will become clear.

This year started off ordinary enough. Sasha went back to Edinburgh University where she is reading Geography (now in year 3 of 4). Zoe went back to school. Then at half term Sian went back to Singapore to see her family and Richard took the girls on an adventure, driving to St Anton in his new Tesla 3. It was a brilliant trip. The car performed beautifully. We had great snow and the excellent company of one of Zoe's friends, her mum and brother. But that was the last piece of normality.

Almost immediately after getting back storms and Covid struck the UK. Our polytunnel blew away and a huge pine snapped in half landing on an outbuilding. Shortly afterwards lock down started.

The C Word

Another massive Chestnut crashed down the back of the land, as if to emphasise it being an extraordinary circumstance.

Richard busied himself rebuilding the outbuilding and building a new polytunnel. Then, unexpectedly he was asked by the University of Oxford to help out with the transfer of the Oxford Covid vaccine to AstraZeneca. It was exciting to dip into the world of the brilliant scientists involved in this effort. It was fascinating to see first-hand the issues around the man-



From the left,
Sian, Sasha, Zoe and Richard

ufacturing and clinical trial activity and to be able to contribute in a small way to the 24-7 effort of the academic and AZ teams. Alongside this, sales of our wine soared as people looked for solace in the little pleasures in life. "Local" and "green" were both popular trends. Classified as "essential workers" we were again fortunate to be able to make home deliveries.

Oh yes, our beloved dog Poppy died suddenly in June. In one day, all her grumpiness, dim-wittedness (for a border collie, that is), wrapped up in absolute loyalty and affection – was gone.

The Vineyard

Do you remember the very mild spring during Lockdown? As a consequence our vines were shooting ahead. Then, almost predictably, frost struck in the middle of May. A predicted -1°C on 11^{th} May actually brought on a -5°C which killed most of the flowering shoots in spite of Richard's best efforts at lighting fires. Another -5°C on the 13^{th} May finished off any remaining shoots. Very despondent, we now had to confront issues around the future of the vineyard.

Over the last 10 years only one has been free of any frost damage. Climate change seems to be giving us milder winters encouraging earlier bud burst but we are not losing the late frosts on our flat site: and the vineyard needed more investment in replacing vines which were losing productivity due, in part, to trunk diseases. By the autumn reluctantly we decided to grub up the vineyard which we have now done, retaining just two rows of vines. We are going to plant over 800 trees in

their place, mainly oaks and hazel, and increase the size of our wildflower meadows. In this way we hope to increase the local biodiversity and make a small contribution to fighting climate change.

Incidentally Bothy Vineyard ran a wildflower Facebook blog (about 150 different plants noted) through the Spring and Summer which was well received and provided something of a distraction to everything else.

Sian retired as Chairman of Wild Oxfordshire but continued to serve as a trustee of this wildlife charity. The interest in nature has soared across the UK, and we have seen how much comfort is afforded by green spaces in times of Covid. There must be some way of holding onto these values, when we emerge into a post Covid world.

The Summer Respite

On the 18th May Richard had his 60th birthday. He spent the whole day 8am – 11pm on Zoom calls to do with the vaccine! However, Sian felt that this milestone could not be left unmarked so in July organised a Covid secure, outdoor party in the vineyard. Covid meant that numbers were limited but we had excellent caterers, lovely wines and perfect weather and it was a won-

derful event. Another of Richard's projects enabled him to arrange access to a novel, quick Covid test which was being trialled, so all guests were asked to test themselves before attending. That was complicated! An updated version of the test is now being used at Heathrow airport to screen travellers.

Sasha returned to Scotland at the earliest opportunity. Sian and Richard eventually drove North to join her in August, spending a wonderful week based in a cottage (called the Bothy!) in Achnasheloch (no, we hadn't heard of it either) on the NW coast. We went on some spectacular walks, picked chanterelles, enjoyed lovely meals. Sasha found herself and Ali a job for the rest of the summer waitressing at the Walled Garden restaurant in Applecross – a little bit

End of the Summer

of paradise, away from it all. Except for the inevitable ninja midges.

In September Richard had a short, boys trip walking in the Lake District with his former scout leaders.

In October Sian and Richard joined some friends in Herefordshire for another walking weekend, this one combined with a ridiculously large quantity of fine sherries (we had been hoping to go the Jerez until Covid came along).

Zoe preferred to stay at home but, between lockdowns has been busy waitressing at the Dog House pub next door to us, learning how to drive and making a roaring trade on Depop. The latter is an app to buy, sell and discover fashion, which is all very woke because a lot of the clothes are not new.



The Second Lockdown

The second lockdown was easier than the first. Zoe has still been going to school and is doing very well, Sasha has been very busy with her university work (at last) and has discovered the joys of climbing Munroes and wild camping (thank you Ali). Zoe is trying to choose which university she wants to go to read Fashion Design, which is difficult without being able to visit, but Richard did take her to look around Manchester and Leeds before second lockdown.

This pandemic has been a force for innovation on the business front – we have moved to deliveries, online tastings, live streaming walks and talks, and all the business of making our premises COVID safe. This December, for the first time, two very successful, small, local mini markets have been held on our drive – to give everyone an opportunity to shop in the open.



All in all, we count ourselves as having got off lightly this year. As we look forward to a less challenging 2021, we wish a very healthy, Happy New Year.

Richard, Sian, Sasha and Zoe