

A Mars a day helps you ...

Work: Judy has taken (probably) the last exams of her career, to become an examiner for the RCGP. She has already done several examining sessions down at the RCGP headquarters near Euston, and she continues to lead GP training in Cambridge – not helped by resignations and shortages Ben is doing his placement year at GKN Aerospace at Filton. He had to send off dozens of applications, and only heard he had got this placement in June, so it was an anxious few months. Not many of the others on his course got any offers, so he has been lucky – he is renting a house with two other lads from the course, but he doesn't tell us much about it. His work is at some level confidential, so when we ask him if the people there are nice he just says, 'I can't tell you that.' Anyway, they have Christmas parties, because we posted Ben's snowman sweater to him. Stefan took his A levels this summer, and did well enough to get into one of the conservatoires (he was offered a place at all five that he applied to) – in the end, he picked RNCM. The move to living in student accommodation in a big city has been hard to adjust to, but he seems to be settling. Even though Chris is not being paid to work, he still gets invited to conferences and enjoys going to some. This year there were meetings in Paris, Austria, and Jerusalem, as well as a retirement event for his old friend Paul Embrechts in Zurich, and an 80th birthday event in Swansea for a former colleague, Alan Hawkes. At the end of 2018, he steps down from his main editorial role.

Rest: Judy, Chris & Stefan had a week in Sorrento at the end of June – the views of the Bay of Naples were spectacular, almost as good as Swansea Bay, but the weather was better. Pompei was hot and crowded, but still well worth visiting. The Amalfi coast was amazingly beautiful, but stuffed with traffic. Chris took Ben to Lisbon at the end of January for his inter-semester break; it was a really good trip, lots to see and an excellent visitor pass for the city and surrounding areas which covered the public transport and a wide range of attractions. The Portuguese empire was quite a big deal, but because Portugal focused on that and interacted less with the rest of Europe, it's easy to overlook the fact. Judy's parents John & Diane celebrated their diamond wedding in January – Jem and his family got back from Australia for the event, so it was a great occasion.

And Play: In August, Stefan organized a string quartet recital at Enys with three of his friends. He drove everyone down and back, and they got to do some holiday as well as a lot of rehearsing. The performance in the main living room at Enys was outstanding – there were about 60 people in the audience, many of whom were probably there because they knew Wendy and turned out because she was a friend, but if so they were stunned at the quality of the performance, which would not have been out of place on a London stage. Next year the quartet plans to do a repeat, and try to fit in some other venues in Cornwall when they are down there – one of the organizers of Prussia Cove suggested they get in touch to plan something for summer 2019. On a more modest note, the choir Judy & Chris sing with has appointed a new conductor, who is a very talented musician and a really nice person, so we look forward to the coming year. Chris has done a couple of cathedral weekends, St Davids, and Lichfield – coming back from St Davids provided an opportunity to drop in on David & Sheila near Swansea and catch up a bit.

We have had a bit of changeover in the guinea pig establishment – our white long-haired guinea pig Cobbles died at Easter, which was very sad for all of us. We got a new Abyssinian guinea pig Marbles to keep the black long-haired guinea pig Paul company, but after 3 months Paul also died (he was the same age as Cobbles, about 6 years), so we then had to get another Abyssinian guinea pig, which Ben decided to call Popcorn. He was less than a month old when we got him, and less than half the size of Marbles, but very fast, so not easy to catch. Now he is bigger and slower!

Merry Christmas from Judy, Chris, Ben & Stefan – hopefully 2019 will prove to be less chaotic than 2018!

