



Another quirky Christmas Letter from Barry and Vanessa Chant. December 2015.

There is sometimes a lighter side to ministry. Here are a few examples of things that happened to us this year. But *be warned* -- one of the following stories is *totally fictional*. It didn't happen. The question is, which one? (If you can't decide, look for the clue.)
Meanwhile, have a grace-flavoured Christmas and a power-injected new year.



9.30

Some years ago, at Wesley International Congregation, we had a major problem with punctuality. Although the 900-seat theatre was regularly packed (see the photo above), up to half the people would arrive late. So one Sunday I told them how important it was to there before 9.30 a.m.

- The holy Trinity is encapsulated in the numbers 9 and 3. Three is the number of the Trinity. Nine is 3×3 .
- Nine and 3 together make twelve which contains four threes.
- Four is also the number of the gospels.
- Twelve comprises the numbers 1 and 2 which add up to 3.
- Twelve is the number of both the tribes of Israel and the disciples of Jesus.
- Reverse the 9 and the 3 and you have 39, the number of books in the Old Testament
- Multiply 9 by 3 and you have 27, the number of books in the New Testament.
- Add 2 and 7 together and you have 9 i.e. 3×3 .
- $39 \text{ plus } 27 = 66$ which breaks down into four threes.
- And 0 is zero – exactly what you contribute to the service every minute you are late.

‘So,’ I said, ‘9.30 is a very important number and you should not miss it for anything!’ The people laughed and next week still turned up late. But this year I came across a blogger who wrote: ‘I once visited a church in Sydney where the pastor had an amazing revelation about the number 930. It was incredible: I had never heard anything like it. It was awesome. I couldn’t believe the truths he got out of that number.’ Sigh.

A kick in the teeth

Well, not quite. The incident occurred at a youth meeting in a country CRC church in Victoria. During supper, a young woman approached me and asked, ‘Do you trust me?’

‘I don’t know,’ I answered cautiously. ‘Should I?’

‘Well, can you please put on this cap?’ she replied. It was a normal enough cap and there seemed no serious risk. So I did it.

‘Now,’ she said, ‘I am going to kick it off your head.’

I thought she was joking. But being anxious to establish my credentials to the YP, and wanting to ‘identify’ with them, I agreed.

‘Don’t let her do it!’ said some other girls. ‘She’s uncoordinated!’ I chose to ignore them.

The lass lined up her target, gave a great kick and missed everything. ‘I’ll try again,’ she reassured me. ‘I can do it.’ She kicked a second time and missed again. ‘One more try!’ she cried and let fly. This time she connected and the cap zipped away. I didn’t see it. Her foot had also collided with my nose and everything went black. There was a burst of shocking pain, my eyes flooded with tears and I nearly collapsed.

She didn’t seem to realise what she had done. I stood there dazed. ‘Are you OK?’ someone asked. ‘Of course,’ I responded, acting as if I had just been gently tickled with a feather.

I’m used to being kicked in the teeth, as it were, but in the nose? There’s always a first time.

Exercise is good for you—wheely, truly



At the January CRC conference in Narranderra, I decided to take a cycle ride to unwind. I rode several kilometres out of town along a straight, well-paved road and then came to a turnoff down to a scenic spot by the river (pictured). The track was unpaved and steep. I gathered speed, tried to apply the brakes but found myself skidding. I knew that if I didn’t slow down I would crash into the bush. So I braked anyway. The effect was uneven. The front wheel stopped while the rear wheel kept going. And so did I! Over the handlebars and on to the unforgiving, rough gravel surface. It was a new bike when I began the journey. It was now damaged goods. I wasn’t too hot either. Fortunately I did not have to speak that night.

Broken glass



In September, Vanessa and I attended our third Redeemer Baptist Conference with 200+ thoughtful, caring, fun-loving and open-hearted people. (Photo L-R: With leaders Russell Bailey, John Cannon, Lenore Cannon, Kate Bailey).

My topic was *Heroes, Heroines and Heretics*. Stories of the sacrifices made by our Christian forbears challenged us all, especially of some of the lesser known champions of faith like Anne Askew and Michael and Margaretha Sattler. I was firing up to my subject one night when I swung my arms wide and sent a glass of water flying off the table next to me. It landed on a microphone stand and smashed into a thousand pieces. The next night they had a much lower table with a plastic cup. The following night there was a beautiful crystal glass with a card next to it bearing my name. Inside the card it read, ‘This is just to prove we do trust you after all.’ On the final morning they presented us with a lovely parting gift: four crystal glasses.

One other evening I asked all the under-25s to move around the hall and pray for the older persons. Next morning people reported on how moving an experience this was, especially for one woman where a boy from the class she taught at the school knelt before her as he prayed for her.

Losing my seat

I guess I should mention November’s meeting in Thailand with the newly-formed Sunshine Foundation under the leadership of Pastor J T Young. A small group of adults and bonzer children from poor homes and broken families had gathered together with the staff for a feast. I was sitting waiting to speak when suddenly my chair just collapsed from under me and was I left sprawled on the floor. The kids loved it!

And then in September in Tahlee, I decided to do the holy thing before speaking at the Sunday morning service at the CRC camp there, and went for a walk along the bayside to pray. I was almost back to the cottage when I stepped on a large flat muddy rock that also proved to be a slippery large flat muddy rock. I was OK but a quick change was needed before I could go to the service to preach.

Marriage on show

On a holiday cruise in the South Pacific early in the year, there was a Marriage Show in which they called for volunteers, including a couple who had been married the longest – which proved to be us. (We had just celebrated our 55th wedding anniversary). Each couple had to sit back-to-back on stage in the 1000-seat theatre and write down answers to questions that were then compared. Some were simple like, ‘Where did you first meet?’ Others were more challenging e.g. ‘Which habit does your partner like least?’ There were a couple of risqué questions that touched on sexual issues. We both answered frankly—Vanessa in particular—and earned enthusiastic audience response. I think the fact that we were Christians (‘We met at church’) and could speak without embarrassment about sexual issues impressed a lot of people. There were some surprised faces next morning when people showed up to a Sunday service to see that we were conducting it.

70 years ago



In early November, Vanessa and I were guests at Adelaide Christian Centre, the founding church of CRC Churches International. My brother Ken and I (now regarded as two of the really old original members) were both asked to speak. The photo shows some of the crowd (Pastor Mike Groom and his wife Kelly in the front row.) I began my talk by noting some of the differences between 1945 and 2015.

- A hard drive was going in an Austin 7 from Adelaide to Melbourne
- Windows were what you shut when it was cold
- A microchip was what was left at the bottom of the newspaper wrapping
- A mouse nibbled cheese
- You had a blue tooth after eating berries
- A handheld was your sweetheart's
- A modem was what you did to the lawns
- Software was a cuddly dressing gown
- A mainframe held your shed up
- Log on meant building up the fire
- A power point was where you plugged in your toaster
- A file was used to shape finger nails and a folder contained loose papers
- Cookie was the American name for a biscuit
- An operating system was devised by surgeons
- A program told you what concert item to expect next
- A desktop was made of mahogany
- A PC was an English policeman
- A microwave was the surf at Semaphore Beach
- A windows explorer was a burglar
- A web was made by a spider
- The world wide web was made by a very big spider
- An MP3 was a member of parliament
- Old McDonalds had a farm
- Satellite meant starting a fire
- Blackberries and apples were sold by greengrocers
- A Macintosh was a raincoat
- An Apple Macintosh was a shiny green raincoat
- A megabyte was a very large mouthful
- You could get a kilobyte from a funnel web spider
- Your laptop was where you held your baby nephew until...
- A notebook actually had pages
- A blog was a block described by someone with a head cold
- Podcasts were discarded pea shells.
- Google was the sound you made when drowning
- A text message was a sermon based on a verse from the Bible

Maybe cats do have nine lives?

In suburban Kuala Lumpur in June, we were asked to pray for a dying cat. Being the compassionate one, Vanessa prayed as sincerely and earnestly as she could. The next day the owner said, ‘After you pray, was hoping cat would be better, but when got home last night, cat was dead. So disappointed.’

‘I’m so sorry—,’ Vanessa began. But he cut her off. ‘Please, no problem. We live in apartment, and nowhere to dig grave, isn’t it. So wrapped body in sealed plastic bag and put in freezer, lah. Two hours later, open freezer, to check OK, and nearly jumped out of skin. Cat had torn hole in plastic bag and trying to sit up. She stiff and cold, but we took out and wrapped in rug and she purr and move around like nothing wrong. So want to thank you for pray yesterday. Meant much to us.’ How about that, eh?

The lame shall walk—or ride

Three times this year, Vanessa has had the misfortune to damage her knee. The first time was in Cairns. We were staying with David and Billi Wright who have a lovely house on a hill side. There were numerous steps and somehow Vanessa’s knee gave way under the strain. It was very painful and she could not put any weight on it. When it came time to leave we had to arrange for a wheelchair at the airport to get her to the plane. Meanwhile, our bedroom and the bathroom were at different ends of the house. If she needed the bathroom during the night, I had to wheel her the full length of the residence in an office chair that rumbled and squeaked its way across an echoing, polished wooden floor. So much for discretion and privacy.



The Garden of Eden

Speaking of Cairns, early one morning I climbed up the steep hill behind the Wrights’ house. It was exhilarating—wonderful, wild Aussie bushland. I thought I was in the Garden of Eden. Then I knew I was. Lying just one step before me on the narrow track was a very large carpet snake! I cried out in surprise. I glared at it, cajoled it, talked to it (‘Get thee behind me, Satan’) and threw a small stick at it to make it move. But it made no effort to lure me, tempt me or harm me. It just lay there unblinking as if I did not exist. Finally I had to detour around it. It was only much later that I realised I should have taken a photo to prove I actually did see it. You’ll just have to take my word for it.

Spiritual highlights

- Our trip to Singapore and Malaysia where once again we were received with open hearts and open hands wherever we went.
- Several meetings with young adults where without us even laying hands on them, many were baptised in the Holy Spirit, spontaneously fell on their faces to lie prostrate before God, wept and laughed for joy, repented, confessed their sins. These were moving moments and hints, perhaps, of a visitation to come when the Spirit will be poured out upon us from on high (Isaiah 32:15).
- My decision to donate much of my collection of documents and Pentecostal papers to the Australian Pentecostal Studies Centre at Alpha Crucis College where storage is temperature-controlled, fire-proofed etc—23 cartons consigned so far! They want to call it the Barry Chant collection. I’m not fussed about that but it is nice to have one’s work recognised.
- The National CRC conference with its powerful emphasis on world mission and the many reports from both home and overseas of innovative and effective church programs or strategies



- A visit to the Georgetown Baptist Church in Penang where Ng Kok Aun, a Sydney Tabor graduate is the pastor (front row at right). KA has been on my prayer list since 2001 and I had lost touch with him until this year. GBC is an exciting church, with hundreds of enthusiastic people whose love is fervent, both for God and people.
- A seminar in Chiang Rai, Thailand, where people were so ready to receive a touch from God that often they were in tears even before we prayed.

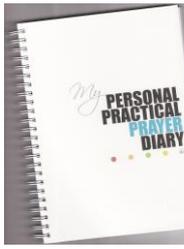


- A morning walk in a lovely park in Singapore where a young man nodded to greet me. ‘Should I know you?’ I asked. ‘Probably not,’ he replied. ‘But I just felt the Holy Spirit prompting me to speak with you.’
- Our 17-year-old grandson Wyatt being contracted as a goalkeeper by Melbourne Victory Football team and also showing leadership in his church youth group; his sister Tia (15) leading some teenage girls to Christ.

Important clue The fictional story in this letter is the one that contains the word ‘compassionate’.

More...

Prayer Diaries



This year, Vanessa and I reprinted the *Personal Practical Prayer Diary* that we put together some years ago for the Wesley International Congregation. This has been a wonderful success. Around 2500 copies have been distributed so far. It has been exciting to see people thronging the book table after church to get their copy. On the other hand, it has been disappointing in some churches that people have shown little interest – especially young people who desperately need to cultivate a disciplined prayer pattern that will stand them in good stead for the rest of their lives. Is reading becoming out of fashion or have young people always been sluggish readers?

THIS YEAR'S AUSSIE CHRISTMAS PRAYER

*With Islam at our doors and Middle Eastern wars,
and ancient values coming under fire;
With churches on the wane and profit on the gain
The Christmas message shines amidst the mire.
The story still survives and still inspires our lives
(The star shines brightest when the night is black);
We pray for you today that Christ will light your way
And walk with you along life's Outback track.*

Please forgive us for yet another Quirky Christmas Letter. We hope it wasn't too disappointing. Have a flourishing Christmas! Go to church; sing some carols; pray some prayers, have some fun. In Christ, Barry and Vanessa.

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