



BARRY AND VANESSA'S 2018 QUIRKY CHRISTMAS LETTER

Barry: At last, our quirky Christmas letter is done.

Vanessa: It's not as quirky as usual.

Barry: That depends on what you mean by 'quirky'.

Vanessa: 'Quirky' means... sort of, well, 'quirky'.

Barry: Very helpful. Here—check the *Macquarie Dictionary*.

Vanessa: If you say so. Mm, here it is: 'Quirky: like a cute angel separating a convex part of a moulding from a fillet; unusual, different.'

Barry: I think you mean 'an acute angle'.

Vanessa: Oh, so I do. But I like 'a cute angel' better.

Barry: Hang on. You can't just change a dictionary definition like that.

Vanessa: Why not? What does it matter?

Barry: Well, of course it... Oh, forget it. As long as people don't miss your extraordinary container story.

Vanessa: Or the cute poem at the end.

Barry: There you go again.

Vanessa: Well, I think you're cute, too.

Barry: Cute? Me? Fair go!

Vanessa: All right, Cutie. Now let's just wish our readers a blessed Christmas and a wonderful new year and leave them to it.

A Christmas Easter story

Barry: Early this year, Vanessa and I, with the help of some generous friends, took a Holland America cruise on the *Noordam* around New Zealand.

Vanessa: It was supposed to be a vacation but, as usual, Barry couldn't resist offering to conduct a couple of Sunday Services.

Barry: On previous cruises (with other shipping lines) I had found some stiff opposition to this idea from the ship's management (although we still managed to do it) but on the *Noordam* they readily agreed.

As Easter was coming up, I decided to speak about Hot Cross Buns and what they symbolised. A month or so previously, I had written a verse-choir poem on this topic that I thought I might use. (See

<http://www.barrychant.com/barrywritings/scripts-skits/hot-cross-buns-verse-choir-version/>)



Vanessa: Over the next few days we met another couple from Sydney—retired CRC pastor John Porter and his wife Gwenda—and then some American Evangelical believers. We deliberately sat at different tables each evening and talked about it to anyone might be interested. The office staff on the ship happily printed out program sheets for us. The Americans agreed to read the poem as a verse-speaking choir. Only one minor problem—to our surprise, they didn't seem to know what a Hot Cross Bun was. Apparently, they are not common in the US—well, in their part of it, at least. So we had to explain it to them first.

Barry: Then I had a bold idea. Why not ask the ship's kitchen to supply some buns for us to share at the meeting? Ten minutes before we were due to start, to my great delight, a woman wearing a white cotton cap and a white apron, appeared with a large tray in her hands, loaded with 25 freshly-baked Hot Cross Buns. Every one of them had a very clear white cross baked into it.

Vanessa: Around 50 people turned up. I led in prayer. The congregation sang with enthusiasm 'Amazing Grace' and 'How Great Thou Art'. A few folks who were obviously used to more sedate congregational worship looked slightly nonplussed when we started clapping to 'This is the Day'. The Americans' genial and sincere verse-reading was well received.

Barry: I preached a short message on the symbolism of the buns. That the cross represented the Cross of Jesus who died for our sins so that we might be

forgiven and assured of eternal life. And just as there is little value in merely looking at a bun—even in handling or analysing or talking about it—and we have to eat it to benefit from it, so it is essential by faith to 'taste' Christ, who said he was the Bread of Life. We concluded by sharing the Buns. Two of our friends began breaking them into pieces and passing them around. While this was happening, we prayed together in small groups of two or three. Afterwards a number of people reported how much this was a special blessing.

Vanessa: Three days later, in a packed lift, a woman stood facing us who was clearly upset. Just as we were about to alight, her eyes lit up and she said to Barry, 'You're the pastor, aren't you! I've just had news that my grandson in the States is seriously ill, will you please pray for him?' As we were stepping out, we said, 'Can you join us and we will pray right here.' But the lift door closed before she and her husband could press through the small crowd.

Barry: Vanessa and I waited on the landing and then to our relief, the couple came puffing up the steps from the deck below and we prayed right there while people milled around. She told us two days later that her grandson had experienced a remarkable turn for the better.

Now for some highlights of the year.

- Vanessa travelled to Papua New Guinea to visit her daughter Rebekah who was this year appointed as Principal of the Sunrise Bethel School in Port Moresby. While she was there, she preached, and conducted seminars for pastors, Bible School students and women.
- In July Barry managed to break his right arm, which did slow his tennis down a bit. However, it is gradually improving (his arm, not his tennis) and he has been able to fulfil an ambition of many years to still be playing in his eighties.
- Vanessa scored a hole-in-one at the local golf course. A trophy containing the bright pink golf-ball that she used now stands proudly at home.
- Barry has been writing more stories, poems and song-lyrics many of which can be viewed on his website.
- Vanessa continued to work as a counsellor, mainly in supervision work.
- Barry continued to preach in various places—Sydney, Adelaide, Geelong, Western Victoria, country NSW and in various denominations—including Baptist, CRC, UCA, New Life, Crosslink, CCA, C3 and Southern Cross—and spoke for the sixth time at the Redeemer Baptist annual conference.



- Barry's books continued to sell steadily.
- And now the big news: in November, after a great deal of prayer, reflection, careful consideration and consultation, Vanessa and Barry sold their house in Miranda and decided to move back to South Australia in February 2019. 'We know it is right,' said Vanessa, 'but we will miss so many wonderful friends in Sydney.'

Finally...

Barry: In 1994, I received a bunch of letters from school kids in Ghana, One of them was Osei Boadu, a fourteen-year-old boy who signed himself, *Osei the Great*. Out of all the letter-writers, he took my fancy. We were able to help him over the years with his education and spiritual growth, He is now a teacher. Recently he told us that only one in ten of his students has a desk and a chair. Could we help in any way?

Vanessa: I don't know what came over me, but I said to Barry, 'We can do this.'

Barry: And so she did. She phoned around and lined up donations of furniture. She organised both a container and the freight, at cost price, courtesy of a



Christian friend in the business. She secured support from Rotary and spoke about the project at some Rotary meetings. She recruited a team of people to help stack the container. She personally underwrote the freight costs. By God's grace she was able to find the right people to handle the delivery in Ghana. By the time you read this, it will have arrived there.

Vanessa: I have been asked if we can do something for another school. Probably not. Sadly, we are a bit broke and nearly over the hill, the pair of us. But I certainly could advise anyone with the process, we have learnt so much.

Barry: Yeah, sure. Vanessa is already working on sending a quantity of school furniture to Sunrise Bethel School in PNG.



Tabor Publications

Minds to understand; hearts to believe

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**Something for
the Kids.**

Don't miss the
'cute' quirky poem
below





THE HONoured GUEST

The following few lines could be performed by children around the Christmas dinner table or perhaps at a Sunday School party or Christmas celebration. Each couplet could be recited by a different child, with appropriate costume and actions. Plenty of scope for imagination.

A Grandma:

Christmas is for family meeting,
Sitting round the table, eating.

A trader:

I enjoy the profiteering,
While your cash is disappearing.

Aussie mates:

Feasting, laughing, joking, drinking,
Not the time for sober thinking.

A factory hand:

Holidays from daily working,
All my duties gladly shirking.

A celebrity:

I am set for fun and pleasure,
Self-indulgence without measure.

A social worker:

No roast beef or wine or fruit cake,
Just despair and lonely heartbreak.

A politician:

Time to plan my pre-selection,
How to win the next election.

A space traveller:

Why the tree, the songs, the
lighting?

Why is Christmas so inviting?

Angel #1:

Christmas is a joyful season—
Jesus' birthday is the reason.

Angel #2:

Lest our sin and sorrow worsen,
God became a human person.

Angel #3:

Lived and loved and died for sinners,
Turning losers into winners.

Angel #4:

Peace on earth (to God the glory)
Is the heartbeat of the story.

All angels:

So...

When you have your Christmas
function

Honour Christ without compunction;

Everything should be the best—

When Jesus is your honoured Guest!

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