

**As with gladness, we grow older - with gratitude and grace**  
**Christmas update from Ann and Maggie December 2023**



High Sheriff Cycling Santa The Rose MK



Rudolf by Jo McGowan  
 (when aged 5)



Julie & Ann at Dumfries House

Dear Friends,

Welcome to the 27<sup>th</sup> edition of my annual alliterative newsletter – and it's all the 'g's this year - gladness, growing older, gratitude and grace.

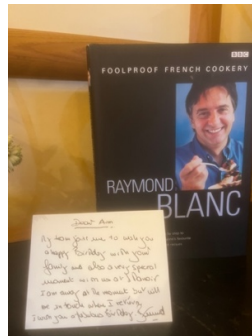
**'As with Gladness'** was the theme of our Quaker winter retreat this year. Reflecting on the last 12 months and, despite the disturbing state of the world, Maggie and I have personally experienced many joyful moments in 2023 - in our friendship and partnership of 37 years, through our Quaker meeting, which continues to be a huge blessing, and with our loving families and friends with whom, amongst other experiences, we have this year celebrated our 70<sup>th</sup> and 80<sup>th</sup> birthdays, two weddings (between the same people!), and one investiture. We grow older - with gladness, with gratitude and (hopefully) with grace.



Ann's 70<sup>th</sup> in February and a celebratory champagne lunch with friends at home



Lunch on the day at Le Manoir, personal card from 'le patron' M. Blanc plus flowers in our kitchen!





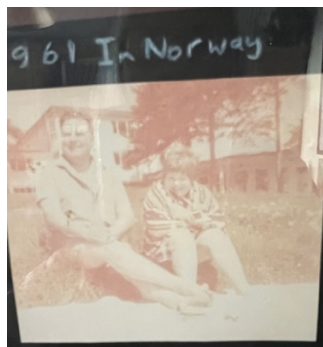
Maggie's 80<sup>th</sup> at Highgrove with Quakers and Claridge's later in the year – and more flowers!



Maggie's 80<sup>th</sup> with brother David, sister Cathy & niece Jo, & with Jo on holiday in Cornwall in summer

**Gratitude** is the overwhelming emotion I feel - each morning I wake and every night I go to sleep. I am thankful I have energy (abundant), good health (generally), and sleep well (mostly). All the above I have been given in bucket loads whilst Maggie struggles on all fronts – and we know it will not now get any better. Despite being a physical wreck, outwardly, she looks amazing for her age, as everyone tells her, and she grows daily in spiritual strength and serene surrender to the inevitable. The Guardian which she reads avidly every day, BBC News and many books seeking and exploring the meaning of life, plus our Quaker community, keep her brain active and engaged, where her legs wobble and her balance falters.

I am thankful too that I have a sister – and an enduring relationship with her of almost 67 years that has expanded to encompass her growing family and personal achievements like her wild swimming. We laugh together – a lot! We have a shared reservoir of childhood memories which we tapped into this summer when we travelled back to Norway where we'd been on holiday aged 8 and 4 respectively, with our parents. Remarkably, the Strand Hotel in Fevik (beloved by Roald Dahl) in which we stayed in 1961, remains much the same as then. The same perfect beachside location with pine trees and rotunda sea view restaurant.



Laughing with Julie on my 70<sup>th</sup> and two pictures taken over 60 years apart from same spot in Fevik. First with my father and second with Julie - unmistakably sturdy legs of yours truly!

**Gratitude** too that I continue to share in Jo and Jonty's lives - and that Rob and Natalie have embraced their partners' eccentric and embarrassing aunt, aka 'Panjo'. Highlights of the year were skiing in January in Courchevel with Jonty and Natalie and my wonderful friends Kirstie, Shane, and Charlotte. This included the most amazing pre 70<sup>th</sup> birthday lunch on the slopes in one of Courchevel's most upmarket restaurants. A brilliant week's skiing, great snow, wall to wall sunshine and endless laughter and intergenerational debate & discussion.



Skiing with Jonty



Birthday lunch on the slopes



Natalie can ski!!

Jo and Rob's two weddings were naturally a significant highlight of the year and both 23<sup>rd</sup> April (the small family and a few friends one) and 12<sup>th</sup> August (the big wider family and lots of friends one) went perfectly. Jim made a touching and funny speech at wedding 1 equalled in brilliance and humour by Julie in wedding 2. I was asked to say a few words too and, never knowingly declining an opportunity to pontificate, I duly obliged, raising a toast to family and friends no longer with us. My speech incorporated words specifically requested by Jo, written to her by my mother, her Oma. The next day, I took Jo's flowers to place on my Mum's grave in the Olney Green Burial Ground. I think Oma and Opa would have loved both occasions and would be proud of Julie and Jim's parenting and Jo and Jonty's partners, lifestyles, and life choices.



Wedding 1 at Clissold Hall  
legal formalities official registrar



Wedding 2 at Museum of the Home with laughter instigated by friend and celebrant Tom



Natalie Jonty Julie & Jim



Flowers & Room décor by Julie.



McGowan & Limb family

**Gratitude** that I have loving and long-suffering friends – too many to mention or feature here – but special thanks to Kirstie and Nat and for our trips to Scotland and to Anne for our visit to Chelsea Flower Show



Lochnagar Kirstie & Nat



Royal Braemar Highland Games



Anne at Chelsea

**Grace** can be interpreted in many ways. In Hebrew Ann stands for ‘grace’. It is certainly a quality to which I aspire and which I wished was more prevalent in what I experience as an increasingly coarsened and discourteous world. My Damehood investiture therefore provided a good opportunity for me to practice the state of grace as I chatted to HM The King at my investiture in October and Jo, Jonty Maggie and I had fun at Buckingham Palace.



‘Not you again! I’ve seen quite enough of you for one year’



‘Yes the King really did say that!’



Damehood party in the North Library at The Athenaeum with friends and family after my investiture

**Grace** that team Liverpool didn’t mind losing in Christmas University Challenge which was broadcast on BBC 2 on 22 December. Imperial College London beat us by 30 points, but they didn’t go through to the semi-finals either and with a score of 80, Liverpool was not the entirely lowest scoring team. I was immensely pleased to get one ‘starter for 10’ correct and to contribute correctly to the music and picture questions. When I received the email asking me to go on this popular TV Quiz show (which I have watched since I was 16), I absolutely thought it would be a bad idea and was going to decline. Maggie however was completely for it – which is highly unusual because she is not one for pushing me into the limelight. So, I went along in a spirit of adventure and had a great time. I have been utterly converted to Amol Rajan who was an excellent host and fascinating person.



1975 graduation University of Liverpool 2023 University of Liverpool Alumni University Challenge

**Gladness** that I have so many opportunities to do what I love – and that I love what I do – and that I meet so many people through my work – as well as a few well-known faces! I have in fact seen quite a bit of HM The King this year in my role as Deputy Chair of the Trustees of The King’s Foundation. In February, I received a call to say The King wished to make a private visit to Hogsty End, a 17<sup>th</sup> century Quaker burial ground which Milton Keynes Friends have been restoring over the last 4 years. Without a whisper to anyone (you can trust Quakers) the Sovereign came to Woburn Sands unaccompanied and unannounced.



Private visit by HM The King to Quaker Burial Ground presentation to him of Quaker Faith & Practice

**As with gladness, we grow older - with gratitude and grace** and get to hang around with great friends Kirstie and Matt, the two Nicks in my life, and famous people too – can’t be bad!



Shadow Chancellor Rachel Reeves Kirstie and Matt Deputy Labour Leader Angela Rayner Kier Starmer & Nick Holden



Two Quaker Dames



Dame Joanna Lumley Jay Blades (NB clan tartan) with Nick Mann



Whilst featuring the positive in this annual newsletter, I'm not unmindful of the atrocities and horror being experienced by so many in the world and wanted to end with a well-known Christmas verse epitomising the current situation and which came to Maggie in one of her daily morning meditations.

*O little town of Bethlehem  
how desperate you lie,  
amid the roar of endless war  
where those you love may die.  
And in thy dark streets shineth  
the gleam of hatred's blight  
the hopes and fears  
of all the years  
are lost in thee tonight.*

*While not denying such bleakness, we send our love to you for a peaceful and happy Christmas. May 2024 bring you all you wish.*

*Ann & Maggie*