

Latest news ...

THE YEAR 2023

Soggy spring gave way to scorchio summer and now it's wet autumn ! I continue to do worthwhile tasks like chatting to lonely people locally and helping to feed Oxford's homeless. I volunteer every Thursday at the Gatehouse Project up St. Giles where the Woodstock and Banbury Roads bifurcate. My time as Trustee on the committee of Being Alongside/APCMH ends now but I continue to be involved on its magazine.

Wonderful news concerns my burgeoning relationship with Clare Turner a fellow congregant at Swinbrook church. Oh joy, oh rapture, oh bliss. Things have progressed ever so well and we are getting married in December. She is 62 (I am over 69) widowed tragically 4 plus years ago but ready to move on. In June we had a week's holiday driving round France and recently we motored oop north, staying in Kelso to visit Holy Island and other places. She lives locally in Witney and has 4 children and 8 grandchildren !

Further latest news concerns my property movements. I sold my little (too little for me in fact) cottage in Field Assarts and moved over a year ago into a brand new 3 bedroom ex show home on the edge of Carterton's Kilkenny Country Park. All very exciting and at last a permanent home for all my books and furniture, much of which were languishing in storage in Witney. I then headed off to Aqaba again for more sunbathing with a modicum of writing thrown in ! Once again travel remains difficult and it didn't help when EasyJet cancelled my

outbound flight. Wouldyabelieve it after a two week holiday on St. Vincent in the West Indies in early February 2022 I set off again to Aqaba at the end of March to my favourite hotel, the Movenpick for ten days. Since then I have stayed in England, until late November 2022 which found me back in Aqaba enjoying the heat and sunshine. And then I was off again off again, this time to Sri Lanka for a two week break starting at Mount Lavinia just south of Colombo and then moving back to the capital and the astonishingly good value Movenpick Hotel. This I followed up with yetanother trip to Sri Lanka, Trincomalee and Colombo again.

Some of my earlier 'latest news' concerned a last minute holiday I took to southwest Turkey from the 18th May to 1st June 2021- two weeks in 32 degree heat in a nice hotel in Izmir visiting all seven Churches of Revelation, numerous Roman ruins and many sites associated with St. Paul, St .John the Evangelist, St. Philip the Martyr and Mary, Jesus' mother. Cancelled flights made the return difficult in the extreme and expensive to boot but for my sins (going to a 'red list' country contrary to our government's advice) I was holed up in an airport hotel undergoing 10 days of quarantine. It was my first trip to Turkey for 40 years and much has improved. If you click on 'Diaries' up come my words on the trip ... bear with me before more photos are added to the text.

Back in September 2021 I snuck away for a week in Vienna staying out at Hietzing close to the Schoenbrunn Tiergarten in the excellent Parkhotel Trend. Vienna is a wonderful city for a short break. In England the weather improved after unseasonably cold weather in May and lockdown began to ease. If one is optimistic, the clouds did lift a bit on the 21st June with the draconian restrictions on assembly easing. Are we through with this pandemic ? ... possibly.

However, if your glass is half empty (and mine has been) the news of new spikes in many European countries bodes ill. It seems this may never end – okay, so many people are worse off than me but boy, have I been lonely and depressed, functioning at about 20% during the darkest days earlier last year. Now I have had both doses of the AZ Oxford vaccine and the Pfizer booster I am unlikely to get very ill should I contract this virus, one thousandth of the width of a full stop. I am unwilling to go for the 4th shot of vaccine – everyone who does appears to go down with Covid soon after and I understand testing of it was rudimentary.

Goodness me, these are strange times are they not? Engln and the rest of our island nations were in 'lock-down' for months with one day of respite last Christmas. We were encouraged wear our masks and wash our hands in the hope that fewer souls will succumb to this coronavirus. Let us pray this Orwellian situation does not last much longer because we are liable all to go stir crazy. Roll out those vaccines. The numbers of severely depressed people are soaring; I read that an extra 1.3 million people were in trouble.

Other big news is the arrival four years ago of Benny the lurcher from the Dogs Trust rescue kennels near Evesham who is great fun and takes me for two long walks per day. His earlier penchant for escaping seems to be over. Although he did have a relapse back in November distressed by fireworks. He turned out to be a wonderful therapy dog with my friends at the Royal Hospital for Neuro-disability and also with learning disabilities people around Oxford and for me too. Aren't dogs brilliant as Paul Whitehouse might say?! But the poor fellow injured himself a while ago, rupturing ligaments in his back right leg and underwent surgery at the Swindon animal hospital ... at enormous cost but he's worth it. His recuperation was slow, however, even when aided by hydrotherapy treadmill sessions but I am pleased to say he is running off the lead again and has fully recovered. His keeper also developed

sciatic leg pains after a chain-sawing back injury but relief, also at great expense, has come with a spinal cortisone jab. I have had to go private because the NHS wouldn't be able to assist probably for another year. I had the procedure done in mid-January 2021 and things are easing daily and continue to ameliorate. My health has been roppy for quite a few years now – complaints include a detached retina, consequent cataract surgery, diabetes 2, severe back pain diagnosed as diverticulitis and worst of all, a TIA mini stroke on my 68th birthday necessitating statin pills and blood thinners to be taken for the rest of my life. Small wonder that somewhat morbidly I have planned my funeral service for Swinbrook church where I have secured a burial plot. Nice old-fashioned hymns, readings from Nouwen, Vanier and Wesley, music videos from Peter Gabriel and hopefully one or two eulogies !

I hope life is going well for you. Here in the Cotswolds, I don't think there has ever been such soggy years as 2020, 2021 and 2022. All footpaths were still mud baths and the roads awash with puddles and potholes large and small.

I have decided to do a complete rewrite of this 'latest news' page as merely tweaking it occasionally ain't good enough!

As many of you will know second marriages are not always easy and Ella and I struggled. We are both Christians (purportedly) and both divorced for over 25 years, so there was plenty of 'baggage'. Help from a local vicar then a Christian counsellor in our local town of Witney continued for some six months but ultimately failed to resolve our difficulties. Sadly I have to report that matters worsened in the hands of our respective Witney solicitors and we ultimately headed to Oxford Crown Court where the judge conducted a very strange poor quality telephone interview with QCs and solicitors only virtually present. Our Decree Nisi appeared in mid-March 2020, the Decree Absolute a few months later, and the financial settlement was sorted after 10 hours negotiation between our legal teams after the judge's edicts.

Divorce lawyers are not my favourite people. The settlement was reached in early December, funnily enough pretty much the same as one we reached over a year ago, (indeed shaking hands upon it at a mediation session in Burford) before enriching lawyers by over £60,000! What an utter waste of money. A very bruising experience thankfully now ended but with rancour enduring.

However, because of the huge sum I had to give to Ella not to mention those divorce lawyers, at Easter I decided on a decision (delicious phrase from the Glasgow band Frightened Rabbit). My income was so denuded that life became difficult. What to do? I decided to put my house on the market with Chancellors of Witney and wouldyabelieveit it sold within a week to a young London couple. Quickly I found and bought a much smaller property nearby and became busy 'downsizing' my possessions into a storage container as the new home cannot cope with 3,000+ books, numerous pictures and large bits of brown furniture. There was enough surplus money to bring in good income and my friend (Bertie) in Salisbury got another chunk to invest. A wise move methinks and others thought so too but it took a while to get used to the reduced space and ultimately I moved again in late October 2021.

Despite the recent revelations my respect for Jean Vanier will forever be undimmed. The great man suffered a heart attack towards the end of 2017 and had subsequent health problems. It is with great sadness that I have to tell you he died in the early hours of 7th May 2019 in a Paris hospital, surrounded by family and friends. I am so happy to have been Jean's friend and will continue to live by his precepts. The report into his sexual conduct with 6 women who came to him for spiritual guidance has clouded his reputation big time. However, we must love the sinner while hating the sin.

I was at his base in Trosly-Breuil near Compiègne in early spring over two years ago putting the finishing chapters together of my second book ('Slightly Bonkers Jamie') in the

library of La Ferme. I then headed out to my default Movenpick Hotel in Aqaba, Jordan to complete its typing in a week of alternating sunbathing with laptop time. In November that year I spent another week in Aqaba tidying up the book, getting it ready for its imminent self-publication with Tandem Publishing. My editor, Sam Carter was superb at his job and we have made 'a good book even better', he says. It went to the printers in Croydon and 1,000 hardback copies arrived in early May 2020. The stock is now down to about 650 which people say is good going. If you want a copy, send an email to me at ajpsummers@gmail.com and I will guide you through the process. More than 98% of readers are complimentary of my effort, some super enthusiastic.

Hitting this blog a while ago is the category 'Thoughts and Feelings', which is probably my favourite zone. If the words are in blue I would like to claim their authorship otherwise it might be a well-known proverb or I have given credit where credit is due. One of my favourite quotes from Henri Nouwen appears at the top of the opening page of this blog.

I neglected this blog a bit while I concentrated on the charity I chaired until May 2017, Being Alongside / The Association for Pastoral Care in Mental Health. With Mary Wright, another member, we worked many hours for BA/APCMH on a leaflet for churches aimed at encouraging them to do a little more for the mentally afflicted in their parishes and this should be distributed soon in 'pdf' and 'hard copy' formats. I say soon but it's now well over five years since Mary and I started this work and still the leaflet remains 'on the shelf', which is not good. There has been no newsletter / magazine issued by www.beingalongside.org.uk for some two years now – this is not good either, but wouldyabelieveit a Spring 2020 edition arrived. I used to chivvy along the people involved but frankly to little avail. This is a charity dear to my heart and I joined the committee once again at the summer AGM. I currently am joint commissioning editor of the

magazine and we managed to get a bulkier version out in April. I put my name forward to be chair again from the 2021 AGM and am pleased to report this was successful. We have enthusiastic new committee members and a new Administrator, Lucy Roose. All is set fair for a renaissance with Ben Wilson becoming chair at the 2022 AGM.

At Jean Vanier's request I became involved with Faith & Light UK and have helped organize six meetings thus far of a fledgling Oxford group. Our national committee have now sorted out insurance arrangements so gatherings have resumed. Our last one was on Sunday 16th February 2020 in Eynsham before the virus kyboshed any further meetings. This wonderful charity supports those with learning difficulties and their families. Oh deary me, we have had to shelve F&L Oxford because of over-onerous provincial charity regulations but hoped to meet as ordinary people over the summer, which indeed we did.

I started writing up my first book on the beach at Aqaba and completed the task in the library of the Royal Hospital for Neuro-disability in Putney where I volunteer. It was provisionally entitled 'The Least of Mine – Pastoral Care in Mental Health'. SPCK, who encouraged me to write this, have sadly lost interest and another publisher who I approached said it didn't work for them either.

I then, for my second book, enlisted the help of Ali Hull (ex Lion Hudson) in order to take matters forward and subsequently tried the Caroline Sheldon Literary Agency up in London. None of these approaches bore fruit – my last chance of a mainstream publisher rested with Quiller up in Shropshire. Sadly no joy there either, so I signed up with Sam and Alice Carter of Tandem Publishing. This is a professional self-publishing outfit and Sam helped me hone the tome into 320 pages with 80 photographs embedded into the text.

Goodness, one has to get used to rejection in the publishing

arena but I am persevering!

Book 1 is currently on the back-burner and I have been occupied with completing and marketing Book 2, a sort of memoir, this one entitled 'Slightly Bonkers Jamie' ... this nickname came from Joseph Boulter when aged 6. He's now 13 and was living with parents Adam and Beth and siblings Hannah and Benjamin in Toliara, Madagascar. Poor Adam caught the virus over there and then his father died so the family have migrated back to Europe, temporarily one hopes.

The idea is to get my name a little bit known and then to revisit the first more important book. Before that happens I worked on an 'Akenfield-light' booklet on Swinbrook village, church and congregants which was printed locally in Witney and is now available to buy for just £2, either in Swinbrook church or in Warwick Hall adjacent to Burford Church. Do visit www.swinbrookat11.org where you can watch the beautifully crafted virtual services put together by our talented Martin Hawkins, cameraman and producer for the BBC. Double click on the Thought for the Week tab then past services come up on the right hand side. The 24th January 2021 one features Benny and I being interviewed in vicar Andrew Wingfield Digby's garden. Praise the Lord we are now able to gather again inside and outside the delightful Swinbrook church.

Jamie