

Latest news ...

THE YEAR 2024

Soggy spring has given way to a less than scintillating summer. 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 were married in December last year She is 62 (I am now 70) widowed tragically 5 years ago but happily was ready to move on. Last 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 9 grandchildren !

Further latest news concerns our 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 which is now rented out. I now have a home for all my books and furniture in Clare's garage, which before were languishing in storage in Witney. We enjoyed a two week late honeymoon in Barbados and then headed off to Aqaba for more sunbathing, staying in my favourite hotel, the Movenpick for ten days.

Since then we have stayed in England awaiting an exchange date on a property we have found in the nearby village of Standlake.

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.

The future bodes well. Do please visit www.beingalongside.org.uk for more of my recent news posted on its excellent website.

My health has been ropy 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, 2022 and 2023. All footpaths were still mud baths and the roads awash with puddles and potholes large and small.

As many of you will know second marriages are not always easy and Ella and I struggled. We were 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.

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 2020 putting the finishing chapters together of my second book ('Slightly Bonkers Jamie') in the library of La Ferme where I was again recently for a Faith & Light retreat. 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 500 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 for 5 years 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 was no newsletter / magazine issued by www.beingalongside.org.uk for two years at this time- this was 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 helped organize six meetings of a fledgling Oxford group. Our national committee sorted out insurance arrangements so gatherings 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 used to 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 persevered.

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 a teenager and living with parents Adam and Beth and siblings Hannah and Benjamin in Ruffec, France.

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 my now rehomed lurcher 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